A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE INQUIRY
INTO YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGING IN
DEMOCRACY

AUGUST 2006

REPORT NO 55
LCARC Membership - 51st Parliament

CHAIR: Dr Lesley Clark MP, Member for Barron River
DEPUTY CHAIR: Miss Fiona Simpson MP, Member for Maroochydore
MEMBERS:
Mr Andrew Fraser MP, Member for Mount Coot-tha
(to 12 August 2005)
Mr Paul Hoolihan, Member for Keppel (from 12 August 2005)
Mr Ray Hopper MP, Member for Darling Downs (from 8 August 2006)
Mr Ronan Lee MP, Member for Indooroopilly
Mr Mark McArdle MP, Member for Caloundra
Mr Andrew McNamara MP, Member for Hervey Bay
Mr Ian Rickuss MP, Member for Lockyer (to 11 July 2006)

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CHAIR’S FOREWORD

This report provides to the Parliament of Queensland a report on the inquiry by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee of the 51st Parliament into **Voices & Votes - young people engaging in democracy in Queensland**. It contains the committee’s recommendations to the Parliament on issues relevant to the inquiry.

The **Voices & Votes** inquiry has provided the members of the committee with rewarding opportunities to listen to young people, to hear and discuss their experiences of democracy and their views and concerns about their roles in our system of representative democracy in Queensland.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the many young people who gave their time to meet with the committee. Thank you for your openness in sharing your thoughts which you will see represented in this report. The committee believes that our recommendations to Parliament reflect your voices. The Ministers and statutory office holders to whom the committee’s recommendations are directed will be required to table in the Parliament a final response to those recommendations early in 2007. This will be a powerful demonstration that your voices are important to our system of representative democracy.

I urge the Government, Parliament and Electoral Commission to consider and act upon the views of young people contained in this **Voices & Votes** report, and to implement its recommendations. For the Government and Parliament, it will provide an opportunity to demonstrate respect for the role of young people in our democratic processes. For young people it will demonstrate that your voices have been heard and that you can make a difference which is the key to fostering the formal engagement of young people in our representative democracy.

The committee’s recommendations are directed towards strengthening young people’s ability and desire to engage in democratic processes and improving the response of democratic institutions towards young people. The recommendations fall into three broad areas:

- active learning for democratic engagement;
- electoral reform; and
- engagement of representative government with young people.

Key recommendations within these broad areas include:

- that all Queensland students be entitled to learn about and experience democracy by way of an Active Democracy program which is proposed to be mandatory for the middle and senior phases of learning;
- the creation of a Democracy Centre and the launch of a Democracy Bus to tour communities in rural, regional and remote Queensland to support school based education programs;
- the introduction of ‘mock elections’ to be conducted in schools for senior students at the same time as the general state election due in 2010;
- that the voting age should remain at 18;
- introduction of direct, or automatic, enrolment;
- that unconditional pre-poll voting be available to all voters;
- use of innovative engagement methods by Queensland parliamentary committees;
- strengthening the observance of the Queensland Youth Charter and ensuring that young people have resources and opportunities to take action in their communities;
- an annual assessment of democratic engagement in Queensland, and a longitudinal study of the effect of the introduction of the Active Democracy program.

I thank the many people who have so generously assisted the committee’s **Voices & Votes** inquiry. The belief in and respect for the young people of Queensland demonstrated by each of you affirmed the importance of the inquiry.

I am indebted to my fellow committee members for their dedication to the **Voices & Votes** inquiry, and to the various staff in the committee’s secretariat for their assistance throughout the inquiry.

I commend this report to the people of Queensland and in particular to young Queenslanders.

Dr Lesley Clark MP
Chair
PART A

Young people engaging in democracy in Queensland: the views of young Queenslanders
The committee

The Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee (‘LCARC’) is a committee of the Queensland Parliament. Parliamentary committees help the Parliament operate more effectively by looking at issues in greater detail and reporting on those issues to the Parliament. Some committees also monitor and review public sector bodies, review areas of the law or monitor activities of the executive or independent ‘watchdog’ agencies. Each parliamentary committee comprises seven politicians, four of whom are members of the political party that forms government in Queensland. Members of Parliament who have been members of LCARC during the Voices & Votes inquiry are:

Dr Lesley Clark MP  
Chair  
Member for Barron River

Miss Fiona Simpson MP  
Deputy Chair  
Member for Maroochydore

Mr Andrew Fraser MP  
Member for Mooloolaba  
(to 12 August 2005)

Mr Paul Hoolihan MP  
Member for Keppel  
(from 12 August 2005)

Mr Ronan Lee MP  
Member for Indooroopilly

Mr Mark McArdle MP  
Member for Caloundra

Mr Andrew McNamara MP  
Member for Hervey Bay

Mr Ian Rickuss MP  
Member for Lockyer

Also, at the time this report was tabled, Mr Ray Hopper MP, Member for Darling Downs, had been a member of the committee for a short time.

For more information on committees of the Queensland Parliament, see: www.parliament.qld.gov.au/committees.

LCARC generally meets once during each sitting week of Parliament. The issues we look at relate to: administrative review reform (e.g. laws relating to freedom of information and review of government decisions and actions), constitutional reform (e.g. a recent inquiry into whether Queensland’s Constitution should have a preamble), electoral reform (e.g. the law of elections) and legal reform (which is very broad and includes recognition of Aboriginal tradition and Island custom under Queensland law).

For more information on LCARC see: www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC.
Part A

Introduction

This is the report of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee to the Queensland Parliament at the conclusion of the committee’s inquiry, *Voices & Votes - An Inquiry into young people engaging in democracy in Queensland*.

Decisions made by government and the laws governing our society affect the lives of all young people. In this report to Parliament, the committee makes complementary recommendations to ensure that young people’s voices will influence those in Queensland who make government decisions and develop and pass laws, and that young people will feel confident their votes will count at election time. Implementation of the recommendations will:

- empower young people to take responsibility for decisions about social and moral issues, to be involved in their communities, and to be ‘literate’ about democracy
- empower young people to:
  - be informed citizens
  - enquire and communicate
  - engage and take responsible action
- ensure our system of representative democracy values the diversity of young Queenslanders and values their engagement in decisions and action.

The recommendations in this report are based on what committee members heard when they listened to what young people:

- at workshops held around Queensland
- by way of an on-line poll and polling at the regional sitting of Parliament in Rockhampton in October 2005
- in written submissions
- by way of exit polls conducted at state and local by-elections
- at a youth jury held at Parliament House in February 2006.

While it is not possible to include in this report every valuable and thoughtful idea and concern the committee heard from young people around Queensland during the thirteen months of the inquiry, many of those views are set out below. They provide a representative sample of what the committee was told by young people.

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**The Voices & Votes inquiry**

*Voices & Votes* is an inquiry into young people’s engagement in democracy in Queensland that the committee commenced in July 2005. By ‘young people’, the committee means all Queenslanders aged 12 to 25.

The aim of the inquiry was to recommend practical ways to increase young people’s interest and meaningful engagement in our system of representative democracy. The committee stated at the start of the inquiry that recommendations from the inquiry might relate to electoral and constitutional reform.
# Workshops

Between September 2005 and November 2005, the committee held ten workshops around Queensland. At those workshops, young people discussed with committee members issues relevant to the Voices & Votes inquiry. The responses of participants are set out below.

## Question 1 - What are your experiences of community and democratic activity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What issues do you feel passionately about?</th>
<th>What, in your experience, was the most effective in achieving outcomes and/or getting a discussion going?</th>
<th>What have you done?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>War-terrorism</strong> - effect on schoolies, anti-terrorism laws - could these lead to increasing police powers, or locking up people they don’t like under the pretence of terrorism?</td>
<td>Sending a complaint Advertising Youth talking to youth (word of mouth) - generates youth interest and motivation Community consultation Electronic forums Meeting people with similar issues from different backgrounds and with different experiences to share information and ideas National youth groups / forums Workshops like this involving young people in discussions and feeling confident that this information will go somewhere School initiatives, including breakfasts, compulsory discussions regarding society, public policy, government, discussions with teachers, public notices, school council, student body, ideas box Conferences on youth issues</td>
<td>Fundraising Petitions Attended protests Friends of the Earth Learned about government and democracy in Year 12 Experienced a government visitor Witnessed Parliament in action School-related community groups School captain election process Union representation Raising awareness of justice issues Member of a university group Youth Parliament Student / Youth Councils Clean Up Australia Day Planting a tree to help the environment Youth camps Newsletters Chats on the internet SMS Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human rights</strong> - refugees, discrimination, racism, tolerance, maintaining religious freedom, future democratic rights, equality, poverty, homelessness, young people (aged 17) in adult prisons (a direct violation of UN Rights of the Child)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong> - VSU, cost of university, HECS fees</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial relations and Economy</strong> - job security, part-time work, unfair wages and unfair work hours, work and study balance, national economy, living expenses, subsidising youth housing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong> - eco-system, cruelty to animals, saving trees versus development, Greenpeace, uranium</td>
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<td><strong>Transport</strong> - fuel prices, licences and teenage driving, public transport</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Local issues</strong> - more indoor sports areas, better grounds, bigger shopping malls, more bike ways, cost of sporting fees, community welfare, shaded car parks</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Media</strong> - fewer ads on TV, media portrayal gives teenagers a bad name</td>
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<td><strong>School</strong> - additional and improved sporting facilities, air-conditioning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Health, medical and safety</strong> - free, subsidising medical research, greater</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
access to specialist services in regional areas eg. youth health care, mental health, sexual health services, genetic engineering and cloning, obesity, giving blood, self esteem for females, sexual violence, reclaim the night, sex education, teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol

**Having a say** - increasing youth involvement in volunteer organisations, promoting volunteering so not always the same people involved, lack of young representatives in government, having our own voice, should be youth representation at all levels

**Indigenous issues**

**Youth issues** - age divisions for social events (17 year olds don’t want to mix with 14 year olds), gangs give teenagers a bad name, having nothing to do leads to vandalism, getting young people off the streets and into houses / refuges / rehab, selfishness of the generation

**Accountability** - ensuring government is committed to Millennium goals, Only 1/3 of ‘Black deaths in custody’ recommendations have been implemented

Oak Tree Foundation – building huts for communities who can’t afford it
Red Cross youth group
Festivals
Organising community groups
Lead on
Rotary
Relay 4 life
40-hour famine
ABC Haywire competition trip to Canberra
Question 2 - What practical assistance / resources do young people need to become more active in democracy?

Make it fun - incentives, excursions with activities and BBQ's, videos, computer games, an annual festival for Parliament, political board game

Media - youth-oriented news and media, election coverage, newspaper for youth, motivational style of presentation, non-patronising, program like Behind the News, live broadcasts like Big Brother, diversified media, other broadsheets besides Courier Mail, more publicity / advertising - sponsor TV programs, eg. a local version of ‘West Wing’

Promotion - more and better promotion of postal votes, different ways of marketing voting, don’t focus on the compulsory aspect, use young role models, use general promotions, eg. collectable political beer caps

Consultation and feedback mechanisms - seek our opinions more actively and with greater enthusiasm, use SMS, the radio, the Internet, provide a quick view of all the major issues, MSN Messenger promotions, eg. download skins, icons, display pictures (like Pepsi and Reebok promotions), Spam, political youth website that outlines current and possible future policies, surveys, visits from politicians, personal approach, workshops, large forums / conventions, capture regional areas, well-advertised, teacher / politician conferences, a youth council where we can talk and be heard, mail outs, explain how political stuff affects us, put it in our language, present youth views to the appropriate authorities

Education and knowledge - Schools should teach about government policies, not only legal studies, so that when the time comes, we will understand about voting, basic, factual, varied approaches, practical rather than theory-based, start learning about democracy at a young age, eg. 12+, education about how and where to vote, basic overviews of parties (unbiased), understanding different parties’ policies, visiting Parliament, consistency across schools, visits from government members, all schools (state and private), offer a government traineeship

Advocacy - relevant spokesperson, influential people, youth-friendly politicians young people can relate to (eg. Peter Garrett), youth organisations granted opportunities to be a part of community committees

Websites - voting on-line or via a mobile phone, government website for young people, interactive, email questions, on-line forums

Accessible information and resources - MPs’ offices should be youth friendly, provide contacts, pamphlets and information booklets

Right to vote - voting at a younger age gives youth more of an opportunity to be active and involved

Local community resources - youth groups, community billboard, focus on local issues, experience making a difference in your community, smaller local actions

Visible outcomes - do more for youth, make them want to be involved, when we raise issues, actually listen and that will ensure a greater respect

Funding - support youth agencies to allow disengaged and disadvantaged young people to have a voice

Incentives - educational credits or benefits for being active in youth committees / political activities, financial incentives
**Question 3 - How can voting be made easier?**

**Voting days** - should be on weekdays, Saturdays are good, public holidays, preferably on school days

**Time limit** - should be longer, eg. 2 or 3 days, a week, this could be for people with jobs

**Enrolment and voting methods** - using electronic enrolment and voting (internet, email, SMS, however this has security and identity issues), postal voting, ability to update personal details on-line

**Polling booths** - more locations, eg. shopping centres, university campuses, make ballot papers easier, put the voting card on display, stop people from handing out brochures, Senate voting card should be simplified

**Compulsory voting** - both non-compulsory and compulsory voting were supported by different people

**Knowing who to vote for** - political parties need to show youth what they stand for, websites clearly outlining the policies of candidates, Year 12 information session or a subject at school, presentations by organisations / government (as with schoolies)

**Knowing how to vote** - give examples, need information on how to vote away from home and interstate

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**Should enrolment be automatic (i.e. done by the government) once you reach the relevant age?**

| **Yes** | many young people are unsure of how to enrol, less hassle for the individual, everyone will be enrolled, compulsory voting should require automatic enrolment |
| **No** | goes against freedom of choice and speech |

**Suggested ways to achieve automatic enrolment** - being contacted by the government to alert upcoming 18 year olds saves time and worry, when you apply for your learners licence, through schools in grade 11

**Other comments** - Voting for one person doesn’t give us the chance to give our view on policies, eg. anti terror laws, should be able to vote directly for who you want to be Prime Minister, voting should be issues based

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**Should the voting age be lowered, and to what age?**

| **Yes** | to 16 because by that age young people have responsibility (cars, jobs etc), to 15½ years, to Year 12 so they can be targeted through school, if lowered young people might take more interest, they’re not interested until 18 because they don’t have to vote until then, young people do have political minds |
| **No** | young people will refuse to vote, lack knowledge, are immature, tend to not be motivated, have enough people telling them what to do, are influenced by parents and cannot make independent decisions, 16 is too young, 18 is a reasonable age because at that age you receive all other adult privileges |

**About raising the voting age** - to 20, or 21 and over, more mature, have a better understanding about the world and politics, more aware and informed in decision-making

**About non-compulsory / voluntary voting** - voluntary from the age of 16 - 20, 16 - 18, or 18 - 20, or even 13, enrol to vote at 18 but have a choice whether to vote until 25 then compulsory

**Other suggestions** - must have a licence to vote, if you’re responsible enough to drive you should be able to vote, school leaving age should be raised and there should be compulsory citizenship education including enrolment and voting, voting age shouldn’t be lowered but something else should be put in place to involve youth and hear their ideas, eg youth should be able to vote on things that affect them directly, eg. school, working age, etc, could have a ‘youth vote’ as a poll or survey even if it’s not counted
**Question 4 - How should politicians:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Talk to you in language that you understand?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Talk to you directly, regularly, in your own environments?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Listen and respond to your concerns?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Respect your diversity?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Increase interaction* - without media presence, regular visits to schools, youth groups and social environments where youth congregate, opportunities for work experience with politicians, Parliament, local Members and council, young people and politicians need to work together, be informed before talking to us

*Make it interesting* - activities, competitions, games, videos, a party to share ideas, events for youth to get together and share their opinions / get to know other youth in the community, non-partisan fun, use a variety of mediums, eg. famous bands to travel with politicians

*Improve personal manner* - need to appear interested and listen, be more genuine, accountable and honest and be approachable to locals, inclusive

*Follow-up* - acknowledge letters with responses, respond quickly and respectfully

*Communicate at our level* - consider, understand and respect audience, don’t use big words, jargon or be patronising, speak slower, answer the question, dress more casually (intimidating), explain issues fully, positive body language, don’t try to impress with teen slang

*Use a young representative* - a youth officer / spokesperson to cross barriers and translate, mediate and help young people understand, younger politicians need to have a greater role in politics as they have a better understanding of young people’s interests and what they want, employ youth representatives to visit schools to explain laws and government issues in a simple way

*Increase consultation* - workshops need to be held more often and smaller open forums where young people can express their ideas, go to regional areas, surveys asking youth about their concerns

*Use technology* - have a website, communicate through emails, telephone calls and face-to-face, give live feedback, broadcast at times of peak teenage consumption

*Respect diversity* - Parliament should reflect community makeup and party system should be open to people of different backgrounds, respect our diversity by funding and supporting youth community groups/projects

*Provide information* - give young people access to the policy outline, use mailing list for issue updates

*Assist with accessing resources* - provide links to finding politician’s electorate offices, a central information point to direct us to resources

*Show empathy* - don't disregard issues raised by teens as purely teenage angst, actually listen and try to make a difference, show appropriate concern and respect for teenage issues, donate some personal earnings to youth services, live off what young people get on Centrelink for a month to learn what it’s like to have no money
### Question 5 - Should education about democracy be made a priority?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If so - how?</th>
<th>How can schools as institutions better model democracy?</th>
<th>What support and resources do schools need to teach effectively about democracy?</th>
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</thead>
</table>

- **Yes, schools should be more democratic and model democracy in the classroom, students should be able to help make decisions on school issues, eg. vote on some topics like curriculum, uniforms, tuckshop menu, school playground equipment, learning different positions in Parliament (eg. class PM).**
- **There should be opportunities for all students to get involved, not just academic, sporty or popular students.**
- **Democracy studies should start in Year 8 and 9 (others said upper primary school grades 5, 6 and 7), introduce discussion and debate then work up to politics.**
- **By Year 12, classes should teach school leavers about voting and how to vote.**
- **Schools should have a mock Parliament and/or a mock vote similar to real elections - the students should elect the student council to represent the student body so students can have a voice, the Electoral Commission could be involved to help with the process and provide information and let the kids run it (could be compulsory, some people are lazy about voting at school).**
- **Education on democracy should include debating, workshops, practical work, eg. filling in forms.**
- **The subject should be compulsory.**
- **A balanced view should be taught, not just conservative views.**
- **Schools should keep students updated on what’s actually happening in the media.**
- **To engage young people, special guests such as Parliamentary Liaison Officers, Members of Parliament, inspirational people, or role models could visit schools to teach about democracy and schools should hold excursions to Parliament House.**
- **Have the politicians teach the subject because they know about democracy, or else someone who appeals to young people.**
- **There should be support for country schools.**
- **There should be a local amalgamated Parliamentary Youth Party with representatives from all over the state, student councils, the community and young people interested in politics.**
- **Provide a free pamphlet that informs young people about state, federal and local Parliament in a way we understand.**
- **We should learn about the fight for democracy to increase interest, including ANZACS, women’s right to vote, different cultures, and study different forms of governance, eg. dictatorship, socialism, representative, also learn about what’s relevant in Australia at the current time.**
- **Class resources should include videos and books.**
- **Maybe through the internet, MSN / pop-ups, internet voting.**
- **Teachers should be better educated in it.**
- **Keep it simple and interactive - role plays, real issues, current issues.**
### Question 6 - How should government / the Parliament / political parties / candidates / the media:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Give you accurate and up-to-date information about current affairs, decision-making and policy-making?</th>
<th>Involve you in decision-making and policy-making?</th>
<th>Ask you for your views?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advertising and promotions</strong> - involve celebrities, Australian Idol concept (no singing), publicity about the different political parties, advertise policies on TV, ads similar to 'work choices', community news board for local community, skywriting, relevant, 'layman’s terms', market through youth media (Cleo, Dirt Magazine, Cosmo, etc), advertise at school, advertising in youth timeslots</td>
<td><strong>Involve young people in decision-making</strong> - via schools and the internet, face-to-face forums, phone, and see result of involvement, question in census that would allow us to be involved in decision and policy making</td>
<td><strong>Provide youth spaces</strong> - places for young people to go and talk about the issues that affect them and get information, disadvantaged youth camps</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Media</strong> - non-biased, radio, politically-based TV programs, youth-directed news, exciting attention-grabbing headlines, newspaper section about politics for young people to understand, political debates on a nightly basis</td>
<td><strong>Consultation</strong> - listen to young people and give feedback, opportunities to tell the Parliament what you think, a special address for queries, a letter to the editor, a questions register at school that gets passed on to Parliament, workshops, meetings, big conferences with different aged people, also for regional Queensland, politicians tour Queensland, surveys, letterbox drop, letters to young people to hear their views, variety of options, government members should attend all schools to give direct information</td>
<td><strong>Increase interaction</strong> - become more actively involved with youth projects, feature on youth shows, attend rallies, greater links and flow of information to local-region-state-national levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide information</strong> - accurate, unbiased, brochures, magazines with youth friendly information about relevant issues, questions and answers, student notices, information on how and where to vote and the relevant resources available</td>
<td><strong>Incentives</strong> - free download from i-tunes for first time voters, arm band similar to breast cancer, trading cards, games where you play different sides of political parties, Rock the Vote, competitions, prizes for being involved people, eg. ipods, concert tickets, movie tickets</td>
<td><strong>Use more youth-friendly representatives</strong> - report to schools, knowledgeable people should explain the issues, celebrity role models to encourage people to take an interest, youth presenting the information (drug strategy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicate at their level</strong> - make themselves understood, appropriate language, no jargon / political speak, appearance, image, be more personal</td>
<td><strong>Use technology</strong> - MSN Messenger, SMS, Internet, websites for candidates, youth culture websites mixed with politics, on-line forums, a computer hotline for schools to tell politicians what students want</td>
<td><strong>Offer encouragement</strong> - encourage young people to join parties, Youth Council, leadership training</td>
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<td><strong>Show acceptance</strong> - stop the stereotyping of youth by authority figures (police etc)</td>
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Polling

From July 2005 to March 2006, the committee ran an on-line poll on its website (www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC). People aged 12 to 25 were invited to respond to five questions, and 120 did so. Their responses are set out below.

Also, 1972 students who attended the regional Parliament in Rockhampton in October 2005 responded to the same poll questions in paper form. Their responses are also set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>On-line Poll</th>
<th>Paper Poll</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At school, did you (or do you) learn about how to be involved in</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>democratic processes in Queensland?</td>
<td>YES 33%</td>
<td>YES 52%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NO 67%</td>
<td>NO 48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Should the voting age be lowered from 18 to 16?</td>
<td>YES 32%</td>
<td>YES 31%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NO 68%</td>
<td>NO 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If next Saturday was a state election day, would you have difficulty</td>
<td>YES 16%</td>
<td>YES 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting to a polling station on that day?</td>
<td>NO 84%</td>
<td>NO 60%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do you feel shut out of the activities of political parties in Queensland?

**On-line Poll**

- **YES**: 75%
- **NO**: 25%

**Paper Poll**

- **YES**: 45%
- **NO**: 55%

Would you like to have a greater say in the policies and/or laws developed by state and local governments in Queensland?

**On-line Poll**

- **YES**: 93%
- **NO**: 7%

**Paper Poll**

- **YES**: 61%
- **NO**: 39%
State and local government by-election exit polling

In mid-2005, a fourth-year university student working as an intern with the Parliamentary Service conducted a research project for use by the committee in its Voices & Votes inquiry. The research project was to find out from young voters in the state by-election for the Chatsworth electorate and the local government by-election for the Brisbane City Council ward of Chandler what issues were important to them when they were deciding how to vote in that by-election. The issues identified by young people were contrasted with the issues on which the candidates campaigned.

The research project incorporated exit polling of voters aged 25 and under and a study of published policy statements of candidates.

The parliamentary intern described the aims of his research project in the following way:

- assess the extent of difference between issues of importance to young people and those portrayed by political parties as being important
- establish the extent of involvement by young people in the political process
- determine young people’s attitudes towards voting and politicians
- establish the extent to which the above factors differ between politics at the State and local levels
- determine the extent to which the above factors correlated with findings of other research into young people’s engagement in democracy
- make recommendations to increase young people’s engagement in democracy.

Young people aged 18 to 25 voting in the by-elections provided the parliamentary intern with the following information.

Which issues (identified by candidates) were most important to you when it came to deciding which candidate to vote for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Congestion &amp; Road Quality (30%)</td>
<td>Health (42%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Transport (25%)</td>
<td>Education (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Development &amp; Infrastructure (12%)</td>
<td>C’wth IR Reforms (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment (7%)</td>
<td>Traffic &amp; Transport (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Council Rates &amp; Charges (5%)</td>
<td>Electricity (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation Facilities (1%)</td>
<td>Emergency Services (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (20%)</td>
<td>Other (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments included:

- I vote for the same party each time.
- I vote on environmental issues.
- I vote for the candidate’s ability to lead when in power.
- I vote on who has the better local policies.
- Whichever candidate was here and shook my hand.
- Who mum told me to vote for.
- Whoever relates more policies to youth.
When deciding which candidate you would vote for, which sources did you draw information from?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Literature</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECQ Letters</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Other’ sources included:

- Face to face personal contact with candidates;
- dissected information from all the above sources; and
- handouts at voting booth.

What are the top three issues you would like to see your local MP address?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Number of Respondents who cited the issue (Chatsworth)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Issues</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transport</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University fees</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve infrastructure</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't think of any (even with prompts)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSU</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for the Environment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Relations Reform</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection and support for local small business</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Unemployment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abolish 3am lockout</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth pay levels</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Conservation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More local issues rather than QLD wide policies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation Facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police bias towards youth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lower tax | 1
---|---
Asbestos in schools | 1
Research funding | 1
Supporting the Tourism industry | 1
Local schools | 1
Town Planning | 1

Did you feel the political parties incorporated enough youth issues into their policy platforms?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the last election, have you taken advantage of any opportunities to voice your opinions to the government or any political parties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons given for not being politically active included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too busy</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Comment</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opportunity</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't have a strong opinion</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments listed under ‘Other’ included:

- No one’s shown interest in me
- Don’t think it will make a difference
- Wrote to a federal member, but I’m not interested in a local level
- Just hasn’t happened
- Never came up
- Political groups are a bit full on
- Been overseas
- No one came to me
- This is my first time voting
Do you feel you received enough information about each party’s policies to make an informed decision?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Studies have shown youth don’t enrol to vote. Is voting important to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons given as to why voting is important:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to have my say</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of civic duty</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s the right thing to do</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in a particular candidate succeeding</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in a particular candidate failing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would you vote if it was not compulsory?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you have faith in your politicians to represent your interests effectively?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Submissions

Sixty-six written/electronic submissions were sent to the committee. Forty-eight of those were from people aged 12 to 25. These submissions are referred to in detail in Part C of this report.

In Part A, a representative selection of the concerns and ideas for change from young people’s submissions appear. These views from submissions describe how young people are engaged in democracy in Queensland and provide suggestions for reform.

Learning about democracy in school

I enjoyed hearing of how democracy has developed in Australia over 200+ years, the key events like the Federation conventions and shearsers’ strikes and the women’s movement for voting - Reece Pianta, 18.

I enjoyed being a part of the ‘mock’ senate and visiting parliament house. Not everyone in the schools are given the opportunity to go and participate. Our school introduces civics education in the SOSE lessons but it isn’t sufficient. Our ‘gifted and talented’ students are given the opportunity to be a part of ‘democracy’ excursions organised by a number of neighbouring schools but students are only from year 8 – 10 in the ‘gifted and talented’ program - so next year we won’t be involved any longer - Eryn Fox, 15.

In my experience, this system is not working. At school, not many people care about student elections and/or councils. If anything there is a general ‘tall poppy’ contempt for the system and its inherent favouritism and buddy systems. This is certainly not the image of Australian electoral policies that one would want to promote. Visits to parliament, for students who have no interest in law or politics, can be about as interesting as watching paint dry and certainly do nothing to inspire the students to get involved. I would suggest that a touring programme be initiated in Queensland schools that ensures quality information control and is designed to meet students where they are at. It could possibly be staffed and/or designed by young people who know the culture and what will spark interest and passion in the students. After all, voting is an amazing privilege that is more often than not taken for granted - Darren Kruck, 24.

I think schools should be open about the power-play that goes on, so that it looks realistic and they are not just trying to pull the wool over students’ eyes. Otherwise schools lose their credibility along with politics. Civics education that involves students’ in the process of how democracy REALLY works, and how to get your say REALLY heard will increase confidence and participation - Brett Mansfield.

Learnt nothing about government at school.
A civic ed subject would be good - Rebecca Leeks, 22.

An exciting and fun internet site could be created for educational use and more ‘debating’; ‘mock senates’ with government representatives involved to show how students can enjoy, learn and be a part of the parliamentary process and help achieve goals for their areas - Eryn Fox, 15.

It is good having an official election run by the electoral commission for our school captains. This teaches us about the process - Sarah, 16.
Activities undertaken to voice opinions

Signed a petition against 3am lock out in the Valley. There were other ways to address this problem than locking people out of nightclubs - Rebecca Leeks, 22.

Personally, I wrote to Peter Wellington MP at about August about the healthier school tuckshops. According to him, I was the first person under 18 to write so I feel my point was successfully made and understood - Anna Wells, 14.

When asked, Which of the following activities have you carried out, or would you like to carry out?, this is what young people told the committee:

Many students have no income or little income between 15 - 17 and find it hard to attend activities that they are interested in if they live in rural areas - Emily Fox, 15.

Young people or 'youth' are seen as very negative (generally) by the media and governments. Many young people are disempowered by this and therefore have stopped trying to be heard - Rachel Plant, 21.

The role of politicians and political parties

A system needs to put in place whereby young people are able to have their hopes and concerns raised on a political level with the knowledge that what is raised will be given as much precedence as anything else that is raised in parliament. Of course, there would need to be processes in place to ensure the necessity of issues raised. But young peoples’ democratic rights need to be recognised and acted upon - Darren Kruck, 24.

Young people want it to be fair and they want their vote to count. Many young people want to vote for minority parties, but that is a waste of time. Change the way the counting is done. Remove the media from the equation. The media manipulates anything to its own advantage (similar to a politician I suppose). Also, being credible, accountable and true to the campaign. Don’t manipulate the numbers for their own purpose - Brett Mansfield.

Each party has something they stand for. It’s a matter of becoming familiar with their policy to source which party’s ideas they agree most with. This information in a non-biased, easy-to-understand format would be useful - Anna Wells, 14.
Younger representation discussing issues of interest to the younger voters would encourage more interest from young voters - Emily Fox, age 15.

Politicians could interact with young people more, try to be less intimidating by showing an interest in local issues and perhaps lose the suit and the image while working with students - Eryn Fox, 15.

Politicians say they want to hear our opinion and that they care about what we have to say but they never really take any notice - Penny Laws, 17.

Interaction on a similar level as young people, physically being a part of the school’s discussions on policies and issues, and just being able to walk up to a young person and ask if they had any major concerns or issues that needs to be discussed - Emily Fox, 15.

It is a misconception to think that young people today are not political. Of course they are. But they are a generation that has been taught to be questioning. They are inherently sceptical about governments and institutions. They don’t take well to not being heard. And the to-and-fro nature of political mud slinging that is the most visible manifestation of party politics does not appeal to them - Vibewire Youth Services.

Role of the Media in fostering democracy

No one can trust what the media say as they nearly always twist things around - Anna Wells, 14.

Put ads on TV asking young people to get involved with youth groups - Jessika Vitnell, 14.

Political parties should explain their policies and campaigns in simple terms, so as the average or younger person could understand, without the ridicule of other parties - Emily Stokes.

Role of community and family

[They can explain] the ways in which young people can have a valid voice - Darren Kruck, 24.

Show the evidence of what has been changed by showing the outcomes of where their efforts have paid off. Advocate on behalf of young people. Have websites that inform young people how to get involved, forums with politicians, spaces to have a say on pending issues. Hope that these are not just lip service - Brett Mansfield.

If [the family] set a good example and are proactive in democracy then of course youth are going to follow - Anna Wells, 14.

Engaging in government decision making

Face-to-face, web-based and community forum style I feel are all equally effective however young people tend to be highly computer literate and so utilising the ‘new’ technologies is a fantastic way to engage youth - Reece Pianta, 18.

Give us reasons for voting for things we believe in - Michael Greer.

There is so much red tape that it is difficult to find out where and how to put your opinions forward - Darren Kruck, 24.

Either face to face or web based. But clear web based. It’s no good if the issues are hidden away in the depths of some random web page. The need to be clear, concise and advertised - Darren Kruck, 24.
Young people are never asked their opinion personally, we are only told what to do by people more senior to us. If they included us in public discussion, it would be a good start - Anna Wells, 14.

Young people have no representation in policy formulation. Even institutions like the Young Parliament are effectively powerless in this regard. This is also crucial when considering that people under the age of 18 do use a wide variety of state government services; I put the case that they should be allowed to provide their critique of those services. For example, there is current debate about removing asbestos in schools. This debate has been wholly taken up by bureaucrats, politicians and parents’ groups; input from students - and even teachers - has been conspicuous in its absence - Gordon Douglas.

Changing the enrolment and voting system

Yes! I know for a fact that the reason a lot of young people don’t vote is because, in their experience, it seems as though their voice is not heard. It’s the whole ‘If it doesn’t help, what’s the use?’ mentality. If the young people were assured of a chance at having their concerns and hopes voiced, it would definitely help - Darren Kruck, 24.

I believe that the voting hours should be extended. E.g. 6am - 9pm - Charlie, 16.

When we turn 18 we should automatically go on the electoral roll - Richard, 17.

Election Day should be a holiday - Sam Watson.

Make it fun - get a group of friends together to vote - Ronelle Douen, 17.

The voting age must be lowered to 16 for reasons that people under 18 are expected to file tax statements and so effectively pay for governments they cannot elect - Reece Pianta, 18.
No! I think the voting age shouldn’t be lowered because most people at the age of 18 hardly vote now, if anything I think it should be increased - Emily Stokes.

[The Electoral Commission should] get schools involved and make it more appealing to youth. Send out packs telling youths information - Juanita Heenan.

Change the message that voting sends for people so they want to enrol - instead of gimmicky advertising. People follow by example and the message of politics, not shallow awareness programs that have no weight - Brett Mansfield.

**Lowering the voting age**

16 and 17 year olds have a lot on their plate. Many are trying to finish school and deciding on the rest of their lives. Involving them in the process is good but voting at that age might be too much pressure - Rachel Plant, 21.

By lowering the voting age to 16, youth affairs would take a more prominent role as candidates try to capture the ‘younger’ vote - Reece Pianta, 18.

I believe that the age of 18 is a good age because that is when you ‘officially’ become an adult - Charlie, 16.

Well I think they should set one adult age throughout the country, instead of being 16 to get learners, 18 to vote, 12 to pay full price at Dreamworld. I think an adult age should be 16 in this day and age. So yes, people should (under these provisions) be able to vote at 16. Until one age becomes precedent, I think people of age 16 and 17 should have the choice to vote. Make it optional - Brett Mansfield.

I think the age should be lowered because it gives the people interested a chance, but shouldn’t be compulsory. If we can drive (which is actually dangerous) at 17, why can’t we vote at 16? - Anna Wells, 14.

Yes, it should be lowered. There are many mature and politically aware 16 and 17 year olds. But no. I don’t think it should be compulsory until 18 - Darren Kruck, 24.

Lowering the voting age will make youth policies more pressing concerns at elections - Reece Pianta, 18.
Youth Jury

In February 2006, the committee invited a representative group of young Queenslanders to participate in a youth jury at Parliament House. Over four days, twelve young people examined the charge: How can democracy better serve young people in Queensland? with advice from experts in relevant fields. Following their cross-examination of the experts, the youth jury formulated recommendations. These recommendations helped to inform the committee’s recommendations to the Queensland Parliament.

Front (L to R): Paul O’Donovan, Jack Andrews, Virgilia Nielsen, Brianna Auty, Megan Kenny, Aliyah Booth, Claire Ogden, Chloé Jessica Hatcher, Casandra Boyle, Paul Spearim, Roberta Coleman
Back (L to R): Ronan Lee MP, Dr Cath Fisher (facilitator), Paul Hoolihan MP, Dr Lesley Clark MP (Chair), Fiona Simpson MP (Deputy Chair), Ian Rickuss MP

Recommendations made by the youth jurors were for:

1. Regular youth juries to inform Members of Parliament about issues important to young people.
2. Distribution to first-time voters at election time of an A4 sheet outlining the beliefs and policies of all political parties, in language accessible to young people.
3. Formation of an umbrella youth organisation, ‘Get Young People Involved’ - *GYPI*, to educate and engage young people on democracy. The organisation should ensure:
   - young people in rural and remote areas benefit from its activities;
   - Members of Parliament are involved in its activities; and
   - issues important to Indigenous young people are taken into account.
A compulsory unit, taught in Years 10 and 12 English, on the basics of democracy and politics in Australia.

A campaign to raise the awareness of adults who influence/have contact with young people about the value of young people engaging in democracy.

Enrolment, via ticking a box, on forms such as those for a drivers’ licence, 18+ card, Australian citizenship, tax file number or Centrelink benefit.

An information pack for young people on enrolment.

The creation of more opportunities for young people to have a say, such as a time to ‘Have Your Say’ in the Queen Street Mall.

An enrolment and democracy van to visit schools and other places where young people are, including Schoolies’ Week, possibly with incentives to enrol.

Non-partisan advertising campaigns targeted at young people to encourage them to vote.

Indigenous Youth Ambassadors to assist the engagement of Indigenous young people in democracy.

In addition, the youth jury advised that they had been unable to reach consensus on a recommendation regarding the lowering of the voting age from 18 years.

Some comments from the youth jurors about their experiences were:

Participating in the Youth Jury has shown me that there is so much opportunity to get involved in democracy. I am now excited about having a say and I want to help get other young people excited too about voting and just getting involved. I am interested in joining future youth juries and possibly becoming involved in the Youth Council.

It was very inspirational meeting female MPs. Maybe one day I would like to be one myself.

I think primarily it has given me the knowledge and experience I needed to boost my confidence and fuel my desire to make a positive change in my community. It has also given me a stack load of information and experience that I can hopefully use to inspire and inform people I know.

Jurors believed they would inspire their family and friends to become involved in democracy.

They said they would advise other young people to participate in the youth jury process because it was:

- A chance to make a positive and real difference;
- Useful, informative and inspiring;
- An opportunity to learn about an issue, meet like-minded people and participate in the political system;
- Learn a lot and to feel the power to change things for the better;
- An opportunity for leadership to be developed and to realise the difference young Australians can make;
- A fantastic experience which provided so much knowledge;
- Informative and fun;
- An informative time to become more involved; and
- A beneficial process for any young person to see how their voice does actually get listened to. They learned so much about democracy and how the Parliamentary system works.
Conclusions

During the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee was told by young people aged 12 to 25 that they are diverse and wish to have their diversity acknowledged and respected.

However, within that diversity, young Queenslanders have some experiences shared with others. Based on what the committee has heard we have found some views and concerns about engaging in democracy are held by many young Queenslanders.

Young people in Queensland:

- are actively interested, often passionate, and engaged in action about a diversity of issues - not just ‘young people’s issues’
- mostly want to have a say, but not through formal channels - they want to ‘just do it’
- feel excluded, patronised and/or turned off by formal democracy
- feel powerless within the processes of formal democracy, including the electoral process - that they do not know enough about democracy, how to take action, and do not believe that taking action will make a difference
- can feel they have even less power because of family, social or physical circumstances, where they live, or a lack of resources including lack of access to the internet
- would welcome more opportunities to be actively engaged in democracy
- feel that their elected representatives do not listen to them and, often, cannot be trusted
- want to meet with MPs face to face, in their spaces, and want to be listened to
- need factual, non-partisan information to help them understand our democracy and what action they can take
- suggest that use should be made of technology to improve communication of information
- want effective education about democracy to be given much more importance
- want enrolment and voting to be made easier and more accessible to them
- generally, do not feel they would know enough to cast an informed vote at 16
- would like to be able to ‘practice’ voting before they turn 18
- have mostly negative views towards political parties, and are cynical about the activities of political parties.
Our system of representative democracy derives its legitimacy from all Queenslanders, including those aged 12 to 25, having a say. Young people want to take responsibility for decisions about issues affecting them and their communities. They want to be involved in their communities, and to be ‘literate’ about democracy.

Effective representative democracy in Queensland needs young people:

- to be informed citizens
- with skills of enquiry and communication
- to be provided with opportunities for exercising skills of participation and responsible action.

Effective representative democracy in Queensland also needs the voices and votes of young people to:

- result in change
- be valued by our institutions of representative democracy, i.e., our Parliament, Executive Government, local government, political parties, media and the community.
Recommendations

In this report, the committee recommends practical responses to the views and concerns we have heard from young people. Our recommendations aim to:

- empower young people to participate in government decision-making and policy-making processes, to be involved in their communities, and to be ‘literate’ about democracy
- empower young people to:
  - be informed citizens
  - enquire and communicate
  - engage and take responsible action
- ensure our system of representative democracy values the diversity of young Queenslanders and values their engagement in decisions and action.

The recommendations relate to:

- Active learning for democracy
- Electoral reform
- Representative government engaging with young people
- Future evaluation of engagement in democracy

The committee’s recommendations propose that:

**The Premier**

- create and run a Democracy Centre in Brisbane
- launch a ‘democracy bus’ to tour rural and regional Queensland
- start a program of Young Democracy Ambassadors who reflect the diversity of young Queenslanders and promote the importance of young people’s engagement in democracy in Queensland
- conduct an annual audit of democratic engagement in Queensland

**The Minister for Communities**

- re-launch the Queensland Youth Charter and make sure it is implemented by all Queensland Government departments and agencies
- evaluate the success of Youth Participation Grants and explore ways young people can be resourced to take action in their communities
- employ young people to listen to/consult with young people in their own spaces
- ensure State Youth Council members engage with young people in their communities to make sure young people feel that their voices are contributing to deliberations and outcomes of the SYC
- ask the SYC to advise on a strategy to engage young people who are active in their communities to create an umbrella organisation which would assist young people to create change
- undertake an advertising campaign about the importance of young people’s engagement with democracy
- make sure that the ‘Generate’ website, and all Queensland Government websites, help young people to actively engage in democracy in Queensland
- fund existing young people’s organisations and networks, including those online and those which provide information, to inform young people about democracy and opportunities to take action
- make sure young people’s organisations and networks have links to government information and consultation networks

**The Minister for Local Government**

- join with the Local Government Association of Queensland to evaluate youth councils
- develop for local governments a best practice manual about engaging with young people
The Minister for Education

- provide all students in Queensland (P-12, and equivalent) with an entitlement to learn about democracy, including their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how to take action on local community issues – an Active Democracy program – and in middle and senior phases of learning (6-12) schools would be required to provide the Active Democracy program for students
- require schools to practice greater democracy
- consider subsidising students from rural and regional parts of Queensland to visit Brisbane - to visit the Queensland Parliament and other places relevant to learning about democracy in Queensland
- (prior to implementation of ‘direct’ enrolment, as an interim measure) require provisional enrolment as a prerequisite to a Senior Certificate, QTAC and TAFE results
- evaluate the effects of the introduction of the Active Democracy program

The Minister for Transport and Main Roads

- (prior to implementation of ‘direct’ enrolment, as an interim measure) include on drivers’ licence application forms a ‘tick-a-box’ so that personal information may be forwarded to the Electoral Commission Queensland for an enrolment form to be sent

The Attorney-General

- retain 18 as the voting age
- introduce, when possible, ‘direct’ or automatic provisional enrolment at 17
- (prior to implementation of ‘direct’ enrolment, as an interim measure) request of the federal Special Minister of State that enrolment be a prerequisite to a TFN and Centrelink payments
- write to the Federal Special Minister of State about young people’s difficulties in providing proof of identity
- allow everyone unconditional access to pre-poll voting

Queensland Parliament

- provide ‘Active Democracy in a Box’ kits to schools
- create more opportunities for young people to learn about democracy at Parliament House
- provide resources to assist Members of Parliament to listen, consult and inform young people

Members of Parliament

- play an active role in the proposed Active Democracy program in schools
- create opportunities for young people to engage in work experience in electorate offices, attend functions, and advise on issues
- use youth media opportunities, especially those created by young people

Committees of the Queensland Parliament

- use innovative engagement methods, including interactive technologies, to maximise engagement by a diversity of Queensland people in committee activities

Electoral Commission Queensland

- provide grants to schools for innovative electoral education programs
- introduce mock elections for young people not yet old enough to vote in general state elections
- trial new locations for polling stations
- evaluate awareness and information activities, with thought given to -
  - upgrading the ECQ website to provide more accessible, interactive information for young people about enrolment and voting
  - using young people to liaise with schools, universities and TAFEs, workplaces and young people in Indigenous communities about enrolment and voting
  - providing, with confirmation of enrolment, an information pack about representative democracy in Queensland
  - supporting non-partisan, informative coverage of state election campaigns and election nights, by and for young people
Political parties

- provide, for distribution, a short, accessible document setting out party history, philosophy and policies

Media

- make sure news and current affairs programs include issues of importance to young people
- produce and air programs regarding democracy made by and for young people
PART B

A Queensland parliamentary committee inquiry into young people engaging in democracy: consultation strategy
Background

In November 2004, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee of the 51st Parliament (the committee) resolved to examine the engagement of young people in democracy in Queensland, so as to recommend practical ways to increase young people’s interest and meaningful engagement in democracy in Queensland.

The Voices & Votes inquiry into young people engaging in democracy in Queensland commenced in July 2005. Between the resolution to conduct the inquiry and its commencement, the committee gave considerable attention to the design of an effective and appropriate engagement or consultation strategy. This part of the committee’s report provides an outline of the committee’s design of an appropriate and effective engagement strategy and its implementation.

Design of a Voices & Votes engagement strategy

Queensland parliamentary committee inquiries

Public engagement

In Queensland, the parliamentary committee system is established by the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 (Qld). Under that Act, the committee system has the stated purpose of enhancing the accountability of public administration in Queensland (section 78(1)).

During the course of a parliamentary committee inquiry, consultation with the people of Queensland commonly involves the release of an issues paper and call for public submissions, together with one further method of consultation, such as a conference or public hearing.

In recent Parliaments, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee has, because of the nature of its inquiries and the changing nature of the way in which members of the public engage with public consultation, become more innovative in the design and implementation of its consultation strategies. For example, the committee of the previous Parliament conducted the Hands on Parliament inquiry into the participation of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in democratic processes in Queensland. That committee held public meetings throughout Queensland, including in regional and rural communities, accepted public submissions in the form of audio tapes, and produced a postcard which was circulated to raise awareness of the inquiry.

The committee of this Parliament, too, has attempted to ensure that participation in committee inquiries is accessible to a diversity of Queensland people. One way in which the committee has sought to do this is by providing on-line response forms for response to issues relevant to committee inquiries.

Similarly, other Queensland parliamentary committees have used innovative consultation methods as part of their inquiry processes. The Queensland Parliament’s Travelsafe Committees have sought to improve their processes for engaging with the public, particularly how they involve special interest groups and young people. During its tandem inquiries into young driver education and licence restrictions, the Travelsafe Committee of the 50th Parliament held 11 public forums throughout Queensland. These forums were targeted primarily at young people approaching the minimum licensing age of 16 years six months, or who had recently acquired a driver’s licence. Where possible, the committee’s forums were held in settings familiar to young people such as TAFE classrooms and school auditoriums. One such forum in Brisbane involved delegates at the 2003 YMCA Youth Parliament. The committee combined these forums with an online submission facility and short questionnaires to canvas opinions and gather feedback. The committee wrote a short, two-page summary of the information they gathered at these forums and published this on their website. The committee has also used other consultation methods such as hosting a hypothetical conferences and symposiums.

In addition, at the time of publication of this report the Queensland Parliament’s Committee Office was undertaking a project regarding community consultation methods. The project group was preparing a consultation ‘toolkit’ for use by Queensland parliamentary committees.
Young people’s engagement

In the committee’s experience, young people have rarely engaged with Queensland parliamentary committee inquiries and, when young people have participated, they have not always spoken positively about that participation. To illustrate, both the Travelsafe committee and the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee were told by members of the former State Youth Advisory Council that young people find Parliament House an unwelcoming and daunting place.

Accordingly, to ensure effective engagement with the diversity of young Queenslanders during the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee conducted research into ways in which a parliamentary committee might best engage with young people.

In addition, the committee gave consideration to available publications, research and expertise regarding:

- consultation methods employed by parliamentary committees;
- consultation methods effective in accessing young people, particularly those young people who rarely or never participate in public consultation; and
- innovations in community consultation.

Other parliamentary committee inquiries

Public Engagement

New South Wales and Australian Parliaments

A report of the New South Wales Legislative Council (2003), Innovative committee methods: Case studies from two Parliaments (www.aspg.org.au/get_file.asp?id=3), gave consideration to committees of the New South Wales and Australian Parliaments and, in particular, innovative committee consultation methods and how committee practice might be enhanced.

The report stated that committees are increasingly being seen as one of the most effective ways for ordinary citizens to influence government decision-making, and that evidence to the committee was that submissions and hearings continued to be the primary tools in the inquiry process. While there had been some shift towards utilising new techniques, the committee observed that where innovation was occurring, such methods were generally ‘added extras’ to the traditional model rather than alternatives to it. It found that a flexible and selective approach was required by parliamentary committees and that what was appropriate for one inquiry might not work for another.

The committee report suggested that the committee inquiry process should not end, as it traditionally does, with the publication and tabling of a report. The committee identified a number of innovative techniques for ‘monitoring’ and ‘follow up’ to ensure that parliamentary committee recommendations are advanced and implemented.

Scottish Parliament

The Parliament of Scotland (2004) has developed a Participation Handbook which offers guidance and practical help for committees in reaching and engaging with a wider public, and in particular involving those groups and individuals who are not currently engaged in the democratic process. The Handbook was produced because, during the first session of the Scottish Parliament it was recognised that there was a need to reach a wide selection of people, particularly those who are not connected to more formal civic society organisations. The Handbook offers practical suggestions on how to reach people and organise events so that collective effort is appropriately directed and participation enhanced.

The benefits of increased public participation in parliamentary committee inquiries were described by the Scottish Parliament in the following way:

The huge support, and the pressure, for the creation of the Scottish Parliament was for a different form of legislature in which the Scottish people had more say. However, there is no blue-print to follow in developing more active participation, and in many ways Scotland is in the forefront of a challenge that faces democracy throughout the world. This is something to be proud of but there also needs to be the recognition that it is innovative and difficult.

There is a danger in becoming cynical or tokenistic about participation - in many ways active engagement is the only way to counter the disaffection with politics and politicians, and there
is an imperative to wrestle with it and constantly review and learn from our experience. What matters is that it is ‘sincerely sought and the goal towards which our face is set’.

It was said that the main benefits of increased public participation in committee inquiries were:

Members and parliamentary staff cannot be expected to know everything. Wider public participation increases the pool of knowledge to be drawn on and can provide detailed and specific evidence that experts often miss.

By hearing from the wider population, more appropriate and effective policies and legislation are developed that have the support of people.

It influences but does not dictate decision making. Increasing the contact between people and MSPs in new ways, strengthens the relationship between them.

It turns the rhetoric into reality, visibly demonstrating our principles.

It fundamentally promotes equal opportunities.

It provides opportunities that help people understand how the Parliament structures work through positive, concrete experiences. In the longer term, this can help to raise the level of people’s political literacy in Scotland and create a more mature dialogue between politicians and the people.

Lastly, by providing more and more people with a good experience of engaging in politics, we can begin to build a more positive image of the Scottish Parliament.

Young people’s engagement

Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons (UK Parliament)

In its report, Connecting Parliament with the Public, the United Kingdom Parliament’s Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons (2004) stated that Parliament was the apex of its democratic system. The report gave consideration to ways to reconcile the role and purpose of Parliament with the reasonable expectations of Britons that they have access to the processes through which they are governed.

Submissions to the UK committee and its own research had indicated that the internet had become the principal means by which Parliament as an institution communicates with voters. Therefore having the right website was probably the single most important thing the Parliament needed to do to communicate effectively with the public.

In respect of young people and the political and parliamentary process, the committee’s report principally examined the citizenship curriculum in the UK. It recognised that it is of fundamental importance to the young people of today and of the future that they understand the country’s key democratic institutions. The committee’s recommendations for educational reform included communication tools such as a Parliament roadshow, digital broadcasting of Parliament, greater use of on-line consultation, a new voter’s guide, weekly newsletters, and perhaps most importantly, an upgraded website.

Members of the UK Youth Parliament and Professor Stephen Coleman of the Oxford Internet Institute suggested to the UK committee that the House of Commons should provide a separate website for young people. The education website (www.explore.parliament.uk) ties in with the National Curriculum and is a good starting point to enable young people to learn about how Parliament works. To supplement this, one of the UK committee’s key recommendations was that the House, in consultation with young people, re-organise its main website (www.parliament.uk). This would allow attention to be drawn in a lively and accessible way to issues being considered by the Parliament likely to be of special interest to young people.

Engagement methods effective in accessing young people

A handbook for consulting young people produced by the Victorian Local Government Association (www.vlga.org.au) provides the advice that engagement with young people works when:

• Young people are involved in all stages of policy discussion
• Trust and respect underpin the process
• Issues are raised and taken into account
• Decision-making processes are democratic
- Consultation processes fit with young people's lifestyles (e.g., holding and timing consultations at venues where young people are likely to be)
- There is a bottom-up approach to consultation
- Resources are available to support young people to be informed and trained so they can take some control
- Young people are involved in all decisions, both small and large (i.e., budgetary and policy decisions)

However, the Victorian handbook warned that barriers to young people's participation could be caused by:

- People's perception that meaningful youth participation is not achievable
- Language and meeting process
- Lack of funding
- Perception by adults of young people (e.g., the media's negative images of young people)
- Lack of opportunity
- Lack of publicity in relevant and accessible formats
- Social issues (e.g., wealth, geography, nationality)
- Lack of motivation, apathy
- Image (e.g., some young people think it's not 'cool' to be involved)

Innovations in community engagement

The Queensland Government is regarded as being a world leader in community engagement, for example, due to its e-democracy initiatives. In August 2005, the Queensland Government hosted in conjunction with the United Nations an International Conference on Engaging Communities (www.engagingcommunities2005.org).

The Queensland Government has adopted the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (www.oecd.org) engagement model. That model uses the following ‘working definitions’:

- **Information** A one-way relationship in which government delivers information to citizens
- **Consultation** A two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government
- **Active participation** Collaboration in which citizens actively shape policy options, but where government retains the responsibility for final decisions.

The different ways in which public decision-makers and those responsible for policy formulation on law making in Queensland ‘engage’ with the public is represented by the ‘engagement continuum’ below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Consultation</th>
<th>Active participation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
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<td>To ensure citizens/stakeholders have access to information that is accurate, relevant, appropriate, easy to access and easy to understand. While information sharing alone does not constitute public involvement, stakeholders need information in order to contribute to consultation or active participation processes.</td>
<td>To seek and receive the views of citizens/stakeholders on issues that directly affect them or in which they may have a significant interest, and provide feedback on how citizen input contributed to the final outcome.</td>
<td>To develop relationships that enable government and citizens to share in agenda setting, policy dialogue and the development and evaluation of policy, program and service options.</td>
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<th>Critical factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Citizens must have easy, equitable and timely access to information and the method of delivery must be appropriate for the issue and the intended audience.</td>
<td>There must be clarity about the goals of consultation, the roles and responsibilities of government and citizens/stakeholders, and their level of influence. There should be stated mechanisms for feedback.</td>
<td>There must be clarity about the extent to which the views of citizens will be taken into account in decision making processes. There must be sufficient time and flexibility to allow for the emergence of new ideas by citizens.</td>
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<th>Desired outcomes</th>
<th>Desired outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Citizens are better informed about government policies, programs, and services and about how to access information and services.</td>
<td>Greater involvement of citizens and communities in the business of government, greater understanding of government policy and decision making processes, and better community outcomes. More effective policies, programs and services that represent the diverse needs of citizens and communities. Heightened trust and confidence in government.</td>
<td>Greater involvement of citizens and communities in the business of government, greater understanding of government policy and decision making processes. Civic capacity strengthened, roles and responsibilities clarified, resources mobilized, and more effective policies, programs and services that represent the diverse needs of citizens and communities. Heightened trust and confidence in government.</td>
</tr>
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### Relevant factors

The committee determined that its engagement strategy for the *Voices & Votes* inquiry should seek to:

- ensure a representative diversity of young people were engaged, particularly those young people whose voices are not often heard;
- involve young people in all stages, including design;
- use different media to provide information relevant to the inquiry, and present information in an accessible and appealing way;
- allow members to meet face-to-face with young people, in their own spaces, and listen to their thoughts and ideas;
- use existing formal and informal networks among young people;
- acknowledge that young people are very interested in local issues;
- provide relevant information;
- provide feedback to participants;
- communicate acceptance, trust and respect for all young Queenslanders and their views and experiences;
- acknowledge that not all young people are doing the same thing or are interested in the same activities;
- design engagement opportunities relevant to young people and their experiences;
• ensure a variety of ways of engaging as online interactions might be used by some but should not replace what happens when young people meet physically;
• show understanding that study, work and family and relationship responsibilities impact on the availability of young people;
• acknowledge the importance of involving young people for their views, not just for young people’s views; and
• be clear about what young people could expect to achieve by way of their engagement in the inquiry, by informing them about:
  - how their views would be considered by the committee in its report to the Queensland Parliament on the Voices & Votes inquiry; and
  - the requirement, under section 107 of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 (Qld), for relevant Ministers to respond to recommendations made in that report.

The committee engaged Dr Lyn Carson to assist it in designing an effective engagement strategy for the Voices & Votes inquiry. Dr Carson was a former elected representative in local government who had written widely on community consultation and been involved in the design, management and implementation of consensus conferences, citizens’ juries, televotes and deliberative polls. She was involved a youth jury, Parra Youth Matters, in 2003 (see: www.activedemocracy.net/parrayouth/index.html).

The Voices & Votes engagement strategy

When finalised, the committee’s engagement strategy for the Voices & Votes inquiry included:

• a general invitation for public submissions on relevant issues by 30 November 2005, extended by way of:
  - writing to approximately 800 people and organisations;
  - issuing of a media release and participation in subsequent media interviews;
• the launch of the inquiry at a secondary school in Cairns;
• distribution of a discussion paper, response form (available on-line as well as in paper form), multi-media CD-Rom and poster;
• posting a link to the inquiry on on-line communities and information sites frequented by young people, such as VisibleInk, VibeWire and Generate, and e-democracy sites such as GetInvolved and OnlineOpinion;
• writing to all Members of Parliament, advising them of the Voices & Votes inquiry and inviting them to encourage young people in their electorates to participate;
• on-line polling of 12 to 25 year olds;
• polling of upper-primary students and secondary school students attending the regional sitting of the Queensland Parliament in Rockhampton in 2005;
• ten Voices & Votes workshops held throughout Queensland;
• a four-day youth jury held at Parliament House which considered the charge, How can democracy better serve young people in Queensland?;
• exit polling of young people voting in one state by-election and one local government by-election, conducted by a university student undertaking a parliamentary internship; and
• discussions with a wide range of relevant people, organisations, and representatives of government department and agencies.

Specific matters relevant to different aspects of the engagement strategy are discussed in more detail below.

Concept design, graphic design and soundtrack

In order to develop publications accessible and appealing to Queenslanders aged 12 to 25, the committee engaged SpeakOut Limited, to develop an inquiry ‘slogan’ and to design a logo and other graphics.
SpeakOut Limited (see: www.speakout.com.au), is a not-for-profit social enterprise that assists disadvantaged young people to develop their creative design skills through employment and professional development opportunities. The committee paid SpeakOut $2,625 for its services.

The committee also approached a number of local groups for a soundtrack to feature on the Voices & Votes CD-Rom. ‘Pelusafunk’, a band of young people from Brisbane, suggested various tracks from their debut EP. The committee selected the track, Freedum, which was used on a multimedia CD-Rom (see below). The committee paid Pelusafunk $500 for the use of the track.

**Discussion paper, response form and poster**

In July 2005, the committee tabled in the Parliament and published a Voices & Votes discussion paper. It provided information on issues relevant to the committee’s inquiry with the aim of encouraging discussion, public debate and submissions to the inquiry.

The presentation of the discussion paper differed significantly from other committee publications and was available:

- in hard copy;
- from the committee’s website; and
- via a link on the Voices & Votes multi-media CD-Rom (see below).

The committee provided numbers of copies of the discussion paper, multimedia CD-Roms and posters to schools, community organisations that work with young people, youth group leaders, libraries, community advocacy groups, and local government youth development officers.

To facilitate written submissions to the inquiry, particularly from young people, the committee produced a Voices & Votes response form. The response form:

- provided factual information, ideas and innovative strategies implemented elsewhere for discussion and response, with links to relevant websites where available; and
- invited responses, of a few lines, to issues relevant to the inquiry.

The response form was available in hard copy, from the committee’s website and via a link on the Voices & Votes multi-media CD-Rom. It was available, also, in an on-line response format.

The committee received 66 written submissions, 40 of which were on the hard copy response form and three by way of the on-line response form.

**Voices & Votes multi-media CD-Rom**

A multi-media CD-Rom was produced by the committee as an innovative way of creating interest in the Voices & Votes inquiry. Production of the CD-Rom was via the in-house resources of the Parliamentary Service, with Speakout providing graphic design and product advice and the CD-Rom being ‘burnt’ and packaged by Mediatech.

Footage on the Voices & Votes CD-Rom included:

- scenes of young people at an outdoor café discussing their ideas on issues relevant to the Voices & Votes inquiry;
- committee members speaking about the inquiry and encouraging young people to participate in the inquiry; and
- images of a committee meeting, to provide a snapshot of the committee at work.

The CD-Rom provided links to:

- the Voices & Votes discussion paper and on-line response form;
- the Voices & Votes on-line poll; and
- the committee’s website.

In all, 2,500 CD-Roms were produced, at a total cost of $4,610.

The Voices & Votes CD-Roms were distributed to:
Members of the Queensland Parliament, who were invited to request additional copies of the CD-Roms to provide to schools and relevant community organisations and groups within their electorates;

participants in by-election surveys conducted by a parliamentary intern who undertook research for the committee;

upper-primary school students visiting the Queensland Parliament;

public servants and university students participating in information sessions about parliamentary committees;

young people who participated in the Voices & Votes workshops; and

young people whom the committee approached to participate in the Voices & Votes youth jury.

**Voices & Votes on-line poll**

The committee provided young people with an opportunity to engage in the inquiry on-line by posting a poll on the committee’s website ([www.parliament.qld.gov.au/larc](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/larc)).

The on-line poll asked:

| At school, did you (or do you) learn about how to be involved in democratic processes in Queensland? |
| Should the voting age be lowered from 18 to 16? |
| If next Saturday was a state election day, would you have difficulty getting to a polling station on that day? |
| Do you feel shut out of the activities of political parties in Queensland? |
| Would you like to have a greater say in the policies and/or laws developed by state and local governments in Queensland? |

120 people voted on these questions.

In addition, during the regional sitting of the Queensland Parliament in Rockhampton in October 2005, paper copies of the on-line poll were completed by school students attending the parliamentary sittings. Some further paper copies were completed by students from Springwood State High School.

Altogether, these ‘paper’ polls totalled 1,972.

Results from both polls may be viewed on the website, or in Part A.

**Voices & Votes workshops**

**Engagement with young people around Queensland**

To listen to young people and meet face-to-face in young people’s spaces, the committee convened ten Voices & Votes workshops, predominantly in regional and rural areas of Queensland.

Initially, the committee had given consideration to holding a number of youth juries throughout Queensland. However, it became apparent that this would be logistically and financially prohibitive. For example, significant transport and accommodation costs would have been incurred for a youth jury at Parliament House with jurors from around Queensland.

Accordingly, the committee held one youth jury at Parliament House, with participants drawn from south-east Queensland, in conjunction with ten workshops around Queensland. The workshops were held first so that the outcomes from these could inform the youth jury process.

Approximately 250 young people participated in the Voices & Votes workshops. The locations, venues and dates of each workshop are listed below.
Preparation

To arrange the workshops, the committee’s secretariat liaised with local people, such as local government youth development officers, who spread the word about the workshops and ensured contact was made with a diversity of young people aged 12 to 25. Groups and organisations contacted in each of the workshop locations included:

- primary (Year 7) and secondary schools, both government and non-government;
- universities and TAFEs;
- groups young people were involved in (e.g., sporting or recreational groups);
- organisations that work with young people, including young Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders; and
- organisations that assist disadvantaged young people (e.g., those who are unemployed, homeless, young parents or people with a disability).

Contact was also made with local media, including media in which young people were engaged.

Format

The workshops were generally facilitated by one or two members of the committee and staff of the committee’s secretariat. Each workshop took the form of a ‘speed-dialogue’, over two hours. The venues were set up ‘café style’, with large, round tables, and a different discussion topic relevant to the Voices & Votes inquiry allocated to each table. Sheets of brightly coloured cardboard were placed next to the discussion topics on each table, together with a number of marking pens, allowing participants to record their views and opinions. Numbers of pens were provided with the aim of overcoming the dynamics that can arise in group discussions when one member of the group acts as the ‘scribe’.

The young people taking part in the workshops were asked to divide into groups. People attending who were not aged 12 to 25 were invited to observe the workshops, but not participate. Each group then sat at a table and:

- read the comments and suggestions of previous groups;
- discussed the topic allocated to that table; and
- recorded their own views and ideas.

After the amount of time provided for the consideration of each topic had expired, the groups moved to another table. This process was repeated until all groups had discussed all topics. The views and opinions of participants for each of the discussion topics are set out in Part A.

Participants were also encouraged to move through a ‘food and drink station’, at which soft drink, fruit juice and pizza or muffins were available.

At the conclusion of the workshops, participants came together as a group for approximately 15 minutes and:

- followed up on ideas with committee members present;
- asked questions;
• raised issues not covered by the discussion topics; and
• provided feedback on the workshop format.

Certificates of participation were available to all young people who participated in the workshops.

Costs
The total cost of the workshops included:

• a number of flights by committee members and secretariat staff (for workshops in Rockhampton, Gladstone, Hervey Bay, Townsville/Charters Towers, Cairns and Mackay), and overnight accommodation and meals (for workshops in Townsville/Charters Towers and Cairns);
• car hire and fuel (for workshops in Townsville/Charters Towers and Hervey Bay);
• venue hire fees for certain workshop locations; and
• costs of refreshments for participants at each of the workshops.

The committee consciously sought to minimise the costs of the workshops wherever reasonably possible, for example by selecting low or no-cost venues.

Feedback and committee reflections
Young people involved in the first workshop in Toowoomba provided the committee with considerable feedback on the workshop format and the committee revised the format to take account of this feedback.

In addition, committee members themselves observed the barrier to meaningful participation by young people that some older people created in the workshops. Following the workshops in Toowoomba and Rockhampton, attendees not aged between 12 and 25 were invited to observe the workshop, but not participate. At these earlier workshops, the committee noticed the change in group dynamics that occurred when older people, even those directly interested in young people’s participation in the workshop (eg, teachers, youth workers), took part in the group discussions. The committee saw a tendency for some older people to try to speak on behalf of young people, rather than listen to the views of the young people themselves.

Reflection by the committee on the workshops lead to the conclusions that:

• the turnout at each workshop was influenced by the enthusiasm of the local people the committee contacted;
• despite efforts to involve a diversity of young people, many participants were young people who were already engaged in, or keen to increase their engagement in, democracy;
• many disadvantaged young people, even if interested in attending the workshops, had far more pressing concerns that prevented them from doing so;
• in many instances, despite making contact with organisations working with young people, it proved difficult for information on the workshops to reach young people themselves (eg, some schools acted as ‘gatekeepers’ to their students, who were not informed about the workshops);
• participants from some schools were limited to those who were already engaged in democracy (eg, school captains, prefects, legal studies students), despite schools being advised that the committee particularly wished to hear from some young people whose voices were not often heard; and
• attendance by young Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders was more likely when accompanied by an older person.

Participants in all the workshops told the committee that they valued the opportunity to meet with, and provide their views directly to, the committee. They expressed a willingness to be involved in similar consultations in the future.

Voices & Votes youth jury

Engagement with a representative group of young people
The committee conducted a ‘youth jury’ at Parliament House, Brisbane, over four days in February 2006.

A youth jury involves a small, representative group of young people coming together to:
- hear information from people with expert knowledge on a particular issue;
- ask questions of those experts;
- deliberate, as a group, on the information they have heard; and
- achieve consensus in formulating a series of recommendations on the topic under consideration.

The aim of a youth jury is to determine the views that young people might hold towards a certain issue if they are fully informed about that issue.

**Preparation**

In developing the *Voices & Votes* youth jury the committee utilised learning from the 2003 Parramatta youth jury and consulted the handbook for running youth juries prepared after that youth jury, *Consult your community - a guide to running a youth jury* (see: activedemocracy.net/parrayouth/docs/youth-juries-handbook.pdf).

In addition, the committee engaged a consultant, Dr Kath Fisher, to assist the planning for the youth jury and to facilitate the jury process. Dr Fisher, an experienced facilitator of citizens’ juries from the Southern Cross University, was engaged to ensure that the youth jury was conducted effectively and met the committee’s needs. In her role of facilitator, she was assisted by two Parliamentary Service staff, Ms Andrea Frost, a former member of the Toowoomba Youth Council with previous community engagement experience in local government, and Mr Frank Burke, also a former member of the Toowoomba Youth Council as well as the State Youth Advisory Council, with experience in advising various boards and organisations on youth and community matters.

The committee invited Emeritus Professor Colin Hughes to observe the youth jury proceedings.

Assisted by the facilitator, the committee formulated the ‘charge’, *How can democracy better serve young people in Queensland?*

The committee hoped to convene a jury of approximately 15 young people, aged between 16 and 21:

- in recognition of different levels of maturity and experience of young people aged between 12 and 25, with possible impact on the jurors’ interactions and deliberations; and
- to ensure a group which included young people who were old enough to vote, together with those old enough to provisionally enrol (regardless of whether these people were in fact enrolled or provisionally enrolled).

The committee considered a number of possible methodologies in randomly selecting a small but representative group of young people to participate in the youth jury:

- using the electoral roll;
- approaching secondary schools, or Education Queensland; or
- engaging a market research company to make contact with young people who met the location and age restrictions.

However, selection of a youth jury pool would not have been a permissible use of the electoral roll. In addition, only young people who were enrolled to vote could be selected for participation through use of the electoral roll, preventing participation in the jury by young people not enrolled to vote and those not old enough to be enrolled. Similarly, the committee wished participants to represent the diversity of Queenslanders aged 16 to 21 and did not wish the pool to be restricted to school students.

In addition, the costs of engaging a market research company prevented the committee from selecting participants in this manner. It was possible that these costs may have approached $10,000. The committee was concerned also about how random the selection would be (ie, the characteristics and demographics of the young people listed by such companies) and that they would have been self-selected for a different purpose.

After further consideration, the committee decided that an acceptably random and diverse sample of young people meeting the location and age restrictions could be obtained by handing out flyers to young people in the Queen Street Mall. The approval of the Speaker, Queensland Parliament, was granted for the youth jury and the process to identify a jury pool.
On 20 December 2005, over a period of approximately six hours, the committee’s secretariat staff handed out about 500 flyers to young people at the Queen Street Mall. Copies of the Voices & Votes multi-media CD-Rom were provided with the flyers.

The committee received 24 expressions of interest from the flyers handed out at the Queen Street Mall. In selecting the jurors, the committee endeavoured to ensure that they represented the characteristics of young Queenslanders represented in the 2001 Census.

The following observations can be made about the young people who expressed their interest in the youth jury:

- more young women than young men registered interest in participating;
- within the nominated age group for participants, greater interest was received from younger people; and
- no young person who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander registered interest.

![Figure 1: Ages of young people who registered their interest for the youth jury](image1)

Figure 2 shows the ages of the young people who ultimately participated in the youth jury:

![Figure 2: Ages of young people who participated in the youth jury](image2)

The committee's secretariat staff approached the Oodgeroo Unit at the Queensland University of Technology for assistance in contacting young Indigenous people interested in participating in the youth jury, and one further juror joined the panel by way of this process.
The committee provided the jurors with:

- a pre-youth jury information package (discussed below);
- $90 per day ‘jury fees’ for the three substantive days of the program;
- a certificate of participation; and
- a post-youth jury information package on further opportunities for engagement in representative democracy.

**Format**

The program for the *Voices & Votes* youth jury is shown in [appendix C](#). It centred on two broad themes, from which five key issues were drawn for consideration by the jurors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informed citizens - what is it that young people need to know and how can this information best be presented and acquired:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What is democracy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The information young people need to meaningfully participate in democracy (what are the best means of young people acquiring the information they need to meaningfully engage with government?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active citizens - those who influence decisions and outcomes in response to their own needs, aspirations and values; ways that young people can exert influence on government at all levels and the assistance they require to do this effectively:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Group action (joining a group that has a major role to play in influencing government).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Taking action as an individual either alone or with friends around a specific issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enrolling and voting at elections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four-day program was developed around the following key activities:

- introduction to youth jury process and skills development;
- a group building session - a capoeira lesson in the Botanic Gardens;
- provision of expert information, followed by opportunities for questions and answers; and
- deliberation on recommendations.

The experts selected by the jurors to present at each of the sessions are listed in the program for the youth jury ([appendix C](#)). For each of the five topics, the selected experts attended the youth jury as a panel and provided the jurors with information on the particular topic under consideration. After the jurors had listened to the experts’ information, they formulated, as a group in closed session, a number of questions to ask the experts. A panel question and answer session then ensued.

On the final day of the youth jury, participants deliberated on the information they had heard over the course of the youth jury and formulated and presented to the committee a series of recommendations on the charge.

The presentation of recommendations to the committee was held in the Red Chamber of the Queensland Parliament. Members of Parliament were invited to attend, as were relevant Queensland Government Ministers, who might ultimately have the responsibility to implement committee recommendations accepted by the Government. In addition, the committee had invited:

- media representatives;
- experts who presented information to the jurors, and those not selected by the jurors;
- young people who registered interested in participating in the youth jury but who were not selected by the committee as jurors; and
- other people and organisations interested in the outcomes of the youth jury.

The Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts attended the presentation, as did officers from the following state and federal government departments, agencies and independent offices:

- Department of Premier and Cabinet;
• Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors;
• Electoral Commission Queensland;
• Australian Electoral Commission;
• Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian;
• Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation; and
• Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland.

Evaluation, feedback and committee reflection

An evaluation of the youth jury was conducted by Ms Lyndel Bates, Senior Research Officer, Travelsafe Committee. A copy of the evaluator’s report is included in appendix E. The six recommendations made by the evaluator in that report are that future youth juries utilised by committees of the Queensland Parliament:

• consider using a quota sampling or snowball sampling technique to ensure a more equal representation of sub-groups such as males and multi-cultural participants;
• allow more time for the youth jury process in its entirety - consideration should be given to running the youth jury on consecutive days;
• allow more time for deliberations;
• use small group techniques as part of the facilitation process during the expert sessions;
• consider using a ‘foreperson’ and ‘bailiff’ instead of a facilitator at the end of the expert sessions to formulate questions for the experts; and
• consider providing their recommendations in written format to the audience when presenting them.

The young people who participated as jurors provided the committee with the following feedback on their perceptions of the benefits and disadvantages of the process.

> I think primarily it’s given me the knowledge and experience I needed to boost my confidence and feel my desire to make a positive change in my community. It’s also given me a stack load of information and experience that I can hopefully use to inspire and inform people I know.

> It has shown me more avenues which I can use to be involved in the Government…. It allows you to learn about an issue, meet like-minded people and participate in the political system…. It is a great opportunity for leadership to be developed and to realise the difference young Australians can make.

> It has given me faith that your voices can actually be heard.

> Inspirational and motivating. …[T]he youth jury has given me insight to see democracy in action.

> … I really want to get involved more in my community.

> Just such a fantastic experience which provided so much knowledge.

> It has made me even more excited about having an opinion and a voice. I can’t wait to vote. The jury informed me of many things I didn’t know I was able to do. I loved it.

> It was very inspirational meeting female MPs. Maybe one day I would like to be one myself.

Participating in the youth jury has shown me that there is so much opportunity to get involved in democracy. I am now excited about having a say and I want to help get other young people excited too about voting and just getting involved. I am interested in joining future youth juries and possibly becoming involved in the youth council. … One suggestion is to make the deliberation process longer. Also I think picking the expert speakers was not really necessary as we didn’t have enough info to choose. They all sounded interesting and relevant anyway. … It is a really beneficial process for any young person to see how their voice does actually get listened to. I think we all learned so much about democracy and how parliamentary systems work.
The committee was impressed by the interest and dedication shown by the young people who participated in the *Voices & Votes* youth jury. The jurors were engaged, motivated, punctual and keenly interested in all aspects of the program. The youth jury provided a valuable method for the committee to engage with young people on issues relating to the *Voices & Votes* inquiry.

The committee sees value in citizens’ juries being utilised more frequently as a method of engagement with various groups in the community, and the community as a whole.

**Committee Conclusions**

In the *Voices & Votes* inquiry, the committee sought to ‘engage’ with the people of Queensland, and in particular those aged 12 to 25, about issues relevant to the inquiry. In the committee’s view, recommendations arising out of the inquiry could not provide practical, workable solutions unless the committee had listened to young people’s needs and concerns, and discussed with them what should be done. That so many young Queenslanders welcomed the opportunity to tell Members of Parliament what they thought, and made so many valuable and insightful comments and suggestions for reform, was an overwhelming affirmation of this approach.

The engagement process adopted for the *Voices & Votes* inquiry has been a demonstration of what can be achieved when a parliamentary committee engages with the community around issues in order to become a conduit for people’s voices to be heard and considered in the deliberations of the Queensland Parliament and subsequent responses of the Government.

In addition, engagement activities by other committee inquiries are adding to the collective experiences in this developing area. The Travelsafe Committee’s inquiries, for example, confirm that people are willing and able to engage with Parliament to address road safety issues. And the community consultation project currently being undertaken by the Committee Office of the Queensland Parliament will provide significant assistance to the continued development of the capacity of parliamentary committees to effectively engage with the Queensland people so as to maximise the performance of their functions.

A concern of the committee is the impact on parliamentary committee budgets of effective engagement methods. Even when carried out with minimal cost and utilising the existing resources of the Queensland Parliament and Parliamentary Service staff, deliberative engagement methods have an impact on committee resources, in particular, financial resources. However, if parliamentary committee activities are to remain an effective and economical way for the Queensland Parliament to inquire into wider matters - such as administrative review reform, electoral reform, the integrity, economy and effectiveness of government financial management, and the application of fundamental legislative principles to particular draft legislation - parliamentary committee resources will need to meet these additional demands.

Over time, as the people of Queensland become confident that engagement in the activities of the multi-party committees of the Parliament provide them with an opportunity to have a real influence in our system of representative democracy, and as our society continues to change in the way it interacts with those who represent them, parliamentary committees will need to continue to change the way in which they carry out their responsibilities. At present, it is possible to identify some of those necessary changes - the innovative use of ICT, participatory methods of community engagement, and consultation beyond the usual stakeholders and lobbyists, are some examples. Further necessary changes will become apparent in the terms of future Parliaments.
PART C
Voices & Votes
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1 - Introduction

The committee

The Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee (‘the committee) is a statutory committee of the Queensland Parliament established under s 80 of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 (Qld). The committee’s responsibilities are set out in the Parliament of Queensland Act and other legislation.

The Parliament of Queensland Act provides that the committee has four areas of responsibility (sections 85 to 89).

Administrative review reform which includes considering legislation, or provisions of legislation, about:

(a) access to information;
(b) review of administrative decisions;
(c) anti-discrimination; or
(d) equal employment opportunity.

The committee’s jurisdiction does not extend to: investigating particular conduct; reviewing a decision to (or not to) investigate a particular complaint or decision; or reviewing reports, findings, recommendations or decisions in relation to a particular investigation, complaint or decision, or particular conduct the subject of a report by the Queensland Ombudsman.

Constitutional reform which includes any bill expressly or impliedly repealing any law relevant to Queensland’s Constitution.

Electoral reform which includes monitoring generally the conduct of elections under the Electoral Act 1992 (Qld) and the capacity of the Electoral Commission Queensland to conduct elections.

Legal reform which includes:

(a) recognition of Aboriginal tradition and Island custom under Queensland law; and
(b) proposed national scheme legislation referred to the committee by the Legislative Assembly.

Commencement of the Voices & Votes inquiry

In November 2004, the committee of the 51st Parliament resolved to examine young people’s participation in democracy in Queensland so as to recommend practical ways to increase young people’s interest and meaningful engagement. The committee resolved that particular issues to be considered included young people’s enrolment and voting patterns and whether the voting age should be lowered.

It was anticipated by the committee that recommendations made at the conclusion of the inquiry might relate to electoral and constitutional reform.

Prior to launching the Voices & Votes inquiry, and to inform its inquiry process, the committee examined issues relevant to young people’s engagement in democracy in Queensland, including:

- statistics regarding enrolment and voting by young people in Queensland and, in particular, information provided by the Electoral Commission Queensland (ECQ) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC);
- the legal age of ‘adulthood’ for various purposes in Queensland;
- the minimum voting age in Queensland, and the position in other Australian and overseas jurisdictions;
- consideration given in other Australian and overseas jurisdictions to a possible reduction in the voting age, including private members’ bills in the New South Wales and Commonwealth parliaments;
- initiatives by the Electoral Commission Queensland to encourage young people to enrol to vote and ‘turn out’ to vote;
- consultation processes that would allow the committee to effectively engage with young people during the course of an inquiry; and
- relevant recommendations of Legal Constitutional and Administrative Review Committees of previous Parliaments and other bodies.
In July 2005, the committee commenced the inquiry. In a media release, Dr Lesley Clark MP, the Chair of the committee, said:

*Although young people’s lives are affected by decisions made by government and by the laws which govern our society, some young people say they don’t know enough about politics or how to influence government. Others say they feel ignored and left out by politicians.*

Data provided to the Committee from the Electoral Commission of Queensland indicates that at the 2004 State election some 52,000 young people aged between 18 and 20 who were eligible to vote chose not to exercise their democratic right to do so.

That has to change. For a healthy democracy everyone needs to have a say at election time and we need governments to listen and act on the views of young people.

*Through its Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee aims to recommend practical ways to increase young people’s interest and meaningful engagement in democracy in Queensland.*

**Voices & Votes inquiry process**

The inquiry process adopted by the committee included a range of complementary elements:

- a general invitation for public submissions on relevant issues by 30 November 2005 extended by way of -
  - writing to approximately 800 people and organisations;
  - issuing of a media release and participation in subsequent media interviews;
- the launch of the inquiry at a secondary school in Cairns;
- distribution of a discussion paper, response form (available on-line as well as in paper form), multi-media CD rom and poster;
- posting a link to the inquiry on on-line communities and information sites frequented by young people, such as Visibleink, Vibewire and Generate, and e-democracy sites such as Getinvolved and Onlineopinion;
- writing to all Members of Parliament, advising them of the *Voices & Votes* inquiry and inviting them to encourage young people in their electorates to participate;
- on-line polling of 12 to 25 year olds;
- polling of upper-primary students and secondary school students attending the regional sitting of the Queensland Parliament in Rockhampton in 2005;
- ten *Voices & Votes* workshops held throughout Queensland;
- a four-day youth jury held at Parliament House and which considered the charge, *How can democracy better serve young people in Queensland?*;
- exit polling of young people voting in one state by-election and one local government by-election, conducted by a university student undertaking a parliamentary internship;
- discussions with a wide range of relevant people, organisations, and representatives of government department and agencies;
- consideration of relevant research studies, strategies and reforms from Australian and overseas jurisdictions.

The inquiry process adopted by the committee and, in particular, the engagement strategies implemented, was designed to ensure that committee members heard from a diversity of young people, in their own spaces whenever possible, about their concerns and suggestions for reform. The committee ensured that it heard also from individuals and organisations working with young people and those with practical experience and relevant research interests in young people’s participation in democracy.

Many of the engagement strategies adopted by the committee were innovative and provided opportunities for learning about the engagement methods in use by parliamentary committees in Queensland. In particular, careful consideration was given to ways in which parliamentary committees might effectively engage with young people. In order to document, evaluate and provide an opportunity to build upon these consultative
experiences, the committee’s Voices & Votes engagement process is discussed in detail in part B of this report.

**Issues considered by the committee**

At the commencement of the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee advised that the inquiry would include consideration of five issues:

- whether the voting age should be lowered to 17 or 16 years;
- how our voting system might better accommodate the reality of young people’s interests and lives;
- how civics education in Queensland might better ensure that young people are well-informed and confident about engaging in democracy;
- how political parties and politicians might restore young people’s faith in democracy and encourage their engagement in democracy;
- what assistance and encouragement young people require to have a say in decision-making and to take action about things they are passionate about.

Within the scope of these five issues, the Voices & Votes response form identified some specific matters on which the committee sought views. These are set out, where relevant, in the report.

**Evidence to committee inquiry**

**Submissions**

The committee received 66 submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry. The people, organisations and public sector bodies who/which made submissions are identified in appendix B.

Submissions authorised for publication by the committee were tabled in the Parliament and are available from the Queensland Parliament’s Table Office by telephoning (07) 3406 7525 or by emailing: TableOffice@parliament.qld.gov.au.

**Workshops**

From September 2005 to November 2005, the committee held ten workshops around Queensland. At those workshops, approximately 360 young people discussed with the committee some issues relevant to the Voices & Votes inquiry.

**Polling**

From July 2005 to March 2006, the committee ran an on-line poll on its website. People aged 12 to 25 were invited to respond to five questions, and 120 did so.

In addition, students who attended the regional Parliament in Rockhampton in October 2005 responded to the same poll questions in paper form, as did students attending two Zone Constitutional Conventions organised by Education Queensland. These ‘paper poll’ responses totalled 1972.

**Youth jury**

In February 2006, the committee invited a representative group of twelve young Queenslanders to participate in a youth jury at Parliament House.

Over four days, the jurors heard expert evidence regarding the topic, *How can democracy better serve young people in Queensland?* They cross-examined the experts and deliberated on the evidence they had heard prior to presenting their recommendations to the committee. The youth jurors made eleven recommendations. These are set out in Part A and in Appendix D.

**State and local government by-election polling**

In mid-2005, a university student working as an intern with the Parliamentary Service conducted a research project regarding the views of young voters in the state by-election for the Chatsworth electorate and the local government by-election for the Brisbane City Council ward of Chandler. The research project incorporated exit polling of voters aged 25 and under and a study of published policy statements of candidates.
Committee conclusions

The committee was told by young people aged 12 to 25 that they are diverse and they wish to have their diversity acknowledged and respected. Based on what the committee heard, however, we have concluded that some views and concerns about engaging in democracy are held by many young Queenslanders.

Young people:

- are actively interested, often passionate, and engaged in action about a diversity of issues - not just ‘young people’s issues’
- mostly want to have a say, but not through formal channels - they want to ‘just do it’
- feel excluded, patronised and/or turned off by formal democracy
- feel powerless within the processes of formal democracy, including the electoral process - that they do not know enough about democracy, how to take action, and do not believe that taking action will make a difference
- can feel they have even less power because of family, social or physical circumstances, where they live, or a lack of resources including lack of access to the internet
- would welcome more opportunities to be actively engaged in democracy
- feel that their elected representatives do not listen to them and, often, cannot be trusted
- want to meet with MPs face to face, in their own spaces, and want to be listened to
- need factual, non-partisan information to help them understand our democracy and what action they can take
- suggest that use should be made of technology to improve communication of information
- want effective education about democracy to be given much more importance
- want voting to be made easier and more accessible to them
- generally, do not feel they would know enough to cast an informed vote at 16
- would like to be able to ‘practice’ voting before they turn 18
- have mostly negative views towards political parties, and are cynical about the activities of political parties.

Our system of representative democracy derives its legitimacy from all Queenslanders, including those aged 12 to 25, having a say.

Effective democracy in Queensland needs young people:

- to be informed citizens;
- to have skills of enquiry and communication;
- to be provided with opportunities for participation and responsible action; and
- to believe that they can make a difference.

Effective engagement in democracy - voices and votes - by young Queenslanders must then be valued by those within our institutions of democracy and produce results.

These conclusions are set out in more detail below.

Recommendations

This report contains detailed recommendations for practical responses to the views and concerns the committee has heard from young people. The recommendations are summarised at the end of Part A and consolidated in Chapter 10.

Committee recommendations in this report aim to:

- empower young people to participate in government decision-making and policy-making processes, to be involved in their communities, and to be ‘literate’ about democracy
- empower young people to:
  - be informed citizens
• enquire and communicate
• engage and take responsible action
• ensure our system of representative democracy values the diversity of young Queenslanders and values their engagement in decisions and action.

This report

This report is comprised of three parts:

• Part A - Young people engaging in democracy in Queensland: the views of young Queenslanders
• Part B - A Queensland parliamentary committee inquiry into young people engaging in democracy: consultation strategy
• Part C - Report on a Queensland parliamentary committee inquiry into young people engaging in democracy
2 - Scope of inquiry

The scope of the Voices & Votes inquiry and the recommendations made by the committee in this report are related to the use made of the terms 'young people', 'engagement', and 'democracy'.

During the inquiry, the committee has been assisted by the views of young people and others regarding the meaning and scope of these terms.

Young people

At the commencement of the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee determined that, for the purposes of the inquiry, ‘young people’ were people aged between 12 and 25. This is the age of ‘youth’ adopted by the Queensland Government’s Office of Youth and in the Queensland Youth Charter.

In the Voices & Votes discussion paper, the committee stated that it is not possible to determine how many 12 to 25 year old Queenslanders there are or what proportion of the Queensland population is ‘young’:

Statistical data is not available about people in Queensland aged 12 to 25. The data collected through the five-yearly Census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2001 related to children and young people aged 0 to 24 years and indicated that, of the total Queensland population of 3.48 million people, 26.5% of the population was aged 0 to 17, and 9.78% was aged 18 to 24.

The committee observed that:

Young people in Queensland are all different. Although young people may share common experiences, their transition from a life of dependence to a life of independence differs. A growing number of young people, for example, stay at school longer and then spend some years balancing full/part-time study with full/part-time employment.

In addition to their age, young people aged 12 to 25 differ in their gender, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, health status and sexual preference, abilities and geographic location.

Evidence to the committee inquiry

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry provided the committee with additional information about the diversity of young Queenslanders and their experiences.

Commission for Children and Young People and the Child Guardian:

Young people in Queensland under the age of 18 make up 24.7% of the total population. Indigenous young people make up 5.7% of all 0 - 17 year olds in Queensland. By 2051, the population of young people aged 0 - 17 is projected to increase from 0.9 million in 2001 to 1.1 million. Over 15.7% of Brisbane’s young people were born in a non-English speaking country and 17.9% of Brisbane’s young people speak a language other than English at home. Young people aged up to 25 years currently make up 22% of the total population.

Legal Aid Queensland:

Young people are not a homogenous group; they have culturally diverse backgrounds, and have varying life experiences...

Of note in relation to the Inquiry is the large young population of Indigenous Queenslanders. Indigenous young people 0 - 14 years make up 40% of the Indigenous population compared to 20.5% for the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous young people under 24 years make up 58% of the Indigenous population compared to 34% of the non-Indigenous population.

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:

The Indigenous population is relatively young (27.2 per cent are in the 12-24 years age group, compared to 18.2 per cent in the non-Indigenous). Indigenous young people are also likely to be more profoundly affected by the factors identified in the inquiry’s discussion paper as contributing to low levels of engagement that their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Commission for Children and Young People and the Child Guardian:

Whilst the majority of young people in Queensland are supported by a parent, live at home and have access to education, health services and social activities, there are a number of young people across the state who are disadvantaged to some degree and have difficulty accessing appropriate support services. Some of the key issues facing these young people include:
• Access to secure, affordable and appropriate long term housing
• Meaningful work and a competency based wage system
• Access to education and training
• A clean and healthy environment
• Access to diverse cultural and recreational facilities
• Access to a living and working environment free from the threat of physical or emotional abuse or discrimination of any kind
• Access to appropriate mental health and health services, focused on the social, economic and environmental factors that impact on their lives
• Accessible and comprehensible information about services available to young people, and
• Inclusion of young people in public policy decision making, in particular with greater input from young people themselves.

Truong Thach:
Young people are part of society too.

Engagement

The committee did not, for the purposes of the Voices & Votes inquiry, provide a definition of ‘engagement’. However, included within the ambit of ‘engagement’ are the range of ways in which citizens interact with our system of representative democracy.

In the Voices & Votes discussion paper the committee made the following observations.

Young people’s lives are affected by decisions made by government, and the laws governing our society affect the lives of young people. Young people should have a say in these, so that better decisions and laws are made with, rather than for, young people. Young people’s opinions, and the contributions young people make to decisions, are equally as important as those of others in our community.

When young people engage in democracy, young people:
• take responsibility for shaping their own lives;
• benefit personally - research has shown that ‘people who are socially and politically active are healthier, happier and more prosperous; they find it easier to find a job and have a larger pool of friends and acquaintances to call on when things go wrong’ (Stanley 2004);
• are connected with government;
• can encourage government to act in response to issues of concern to young people;
• expect government to act accountably;
• are seen to be acting positively; and
• develop a greater sense of social responsibility.

Evidence to the committee inquiry

Vibewire Youth Services:

Because young people’s ways of participating in public life - the ways they communicate and the issues they become active around - do not always correspond with traditional notions of ‘political involvement’, their community engagement is not always as visual in the mainstream as more recognisable means of being heard politically. The result is that the media and politicians have branded young people as apathetic and uninterested.

But this does not mean they are not politically engaged. If anything, they are more engaged. They have acutely identified the failures of traditional processes of political engagement that young people in years gone by relied on or were relegated to. In their anxiety and frustration they have created their own means of being active, taking advantage of new technologies and age-old generational connectedness.
Inspire Foundation:
Young people make connections between the different areas of their lives, such as work, school, family, friends and popular culture. Linking awareness campaigns to other activities in which young people are involved can strengthen the message and legitimacy of enrolling to vote. In addition, research on youth participation shows that involving young people in decision-making is part of “a process of building relationships of mutual obligation and trust across community sectors” (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk & Mulford 2001, p. 20).

Youth Advocacy Centre:
Any debate about young people’s involvement in the democratic process should be prefaced by an assessment of young people’s rights to participate in society more generally. Article 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) recognises that children and young people who are capable of forming his or her own view has the right to express those views and the right to be heard in matters that directly impact upon their lives. CROC also recognises that children and young people have the right to freedom of expression including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through a variety of mediums. YAC supports any initiative that increases the forums in which young people’s issues and concerns can be raised. The formal electoral process is one mechanism by which young people can increase their participation in decisions affecting them.

Other relevant information and research
Significant research has been conducted around the world in recent years in relation to citizen engagement. In a recently published paper, Salmond (2006) describes ‘political engagement’ in the United States as follows:

The act of voting is certainly an act of political engagement, and so is writing to a member of congress or signing a petition. Less public acts like paying attention to political news, choosing a favourite political party, or discussing politics or public policy issues with friends are other ways in which citizens choose to engage themselves with the political process.

Salmond identifies three ways in which research approaches engagement:
• by asking what characteristics of an individual citizen are likely to make her/him engage more with the democratic process;
• by examining the role that the democratic process itself plays in inducing citizens to engage; and
• by focussing on the media environment and its role in inducing citizens to engage with democracy.

This emerging research is informing practical initiatives being implemented in many countries to increase citizen engagement. These initiatives were discussed in Queensland in August 2005, at an International Conference on Engaging Communities hosted by the Queensland Government in conjunction with the United Nations. Conference proceedings may be accessed at: [www.engagingcommunities2005.org](http://www.engagingcommunities2005.org).

Democracy
In the Voices & Votes discussion paper, the committee provided the following description of democracy:

Democracy is a form of political organisation that is designed to give ordinary citizens the greatest opportunity to influence public decisions. The objective of good democratic government is to serve the needs and interests of the whole population. This objective is enhanced if government seeks to ensure maximum opportunities for contribution from those who are affected by public decision-making.

Representative democracy requires those who carry out their policies as representatives of the community to have the community’s authority to do so.

Queensland’s system of representative democracy provides for the election of single representatives for groups of citizens divided into geographically located voting districts.

The Voices & Votes discussion paper provided some data and other relevant information about young people engaging in our system of representative democracy in Queensland. This included information related to young people:
• as candidates for election to the Legislative Assembly and local government;
• as elected representatives in the Legislative Assembly and local governments;
• participating in registered political parties in Queensland;
• enrolling to vote; and
• voting in state elections.

Evidence to committee inquiry

In submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry, young people provided the committee with their views about democracy.

Vibewire Youth Services:

Democracy is underpinned by the premise that classes of people will, where necessary, stand up for their own interests and their own rights, and that they should have the ability to do so without fear of persecution. Individuals are able to organise into groups for solidarity, and they may lobby their elected representatives as they see fit.

Young people are placed in a very awkward position within this democratic process. They are not children, so they do not gain the protection afforded their younger counterparts, nor are they considered adults by older generations. They do not have the ‘excuse’ of immaturity to exclude them from the responsibility of societal, and therefore political, engagement like children do, but they do not have the knowledge or life experience of an adult on which to base informed political opinion. As a result, many refrain from participating in politics altogether.

Gordon Douglas:

For the purposes of this submission, democracy will be defined as active and continuous participation and scrutiny in the political process.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

Democratic citizenship is the full and equal participation of citizens as partners in all aspects of the political, social and economic life of our society. This partnership is a dialogue between the people and their government and is the essence of a truly inclusive and dynamic society.

Young people are often excluded from this dialogue. To understand the views of young people more accurately in regard to voting and enrolment responsibilities, the Australian Electoral Commission coordinated the Youth Electoral Study (YES) which investigated youth voting behaviour [see Chapter 3]. The study found that young people were in fact very interested in political issues affecting our communities and societies. Young people were concerned with what they considered as ‘real’ issues, although they were not necessarily interested in political parties and politicians.

The principles underlying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically article 12, state that ‘young people who are capable of forming their own views have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the young person, and that the views of the young person be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the young person’. The principles underlying article 12 relate directly to the ability of young people’s right to voice their opinions and vote for candidates and political parties that make decisions which impact upon young people’s lives.

Young people are a critically important part of our community and society. In recent years, governments internationally, nationally and locally have begun to look at the ways in which young people can participate, be engaged and involved in meaningful ways.

Allowing young people to vote once every four years will not bring about true democratic change for young people.

Only through the active involvement of young people in the political process can issues such as youth unemployment and funding for education really be addressed. Young people fall within a minority of the population but, as with all sectors of society, the majority should always endeavour to give a platform for minority groups to speak and share their views, particularly when it concerns issues pertinent to them.
3 - Young people engaging in democracy - available information

At the commencement of the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee identified two issues of concern regarding young people and democracy. These issues had become apparent to the committee during preliminary research:

- although young people are active in their communities on issues of relevance to them, they feel disengaged from formal democracy; and
- when compared with people in previous generations, young people are participating less in formal democratic processes, including the electoral process.

In the Voices & Votes discussion paper, the committee noted that:

All democracies report that young people are less inclined to enrol and to vote than older people. Traditionally, as young people move through life and become more aware of the role of government and their civic responsibility, they become more likely to vote.

However, research in countries where voting is not compulsory suggests that a generational change may be occurring whereby the pattern of non-voting by young people will persist as they mature. The effect of such a change, over time, would be a significant decrease in the total number of people participating in democracy.

This trend is a major challenge to democracy in these countries.

However, the Voices & Votes response form also noted (at page 8) that:

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.

The committee has, so far as possible, collated information about the rates of young people’s engagement in both formal and informal processes of representative democracy in Queensland. The available information is outlined below, followed by an overview of relevant research projects from Australia and overseas which have informed committee considerations.

Evidence to committee inquiry

Electoral engagement

The Voices & Votes discussion paper set out relevant available statistical data regarding enrolment and voting by Queenslanders aged 17 to 25 (provisional enrolment is possible at age 17). This data is reproduced below and, where possible, has been updated.

Enrolment

Table 1: Enrolment of young people, including as a percentage of the eligible population - 30 June 2006 (Source: AEC & ECQ)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>21-25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>34,652</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>49,303</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>38,275</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>49,079</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>21,687</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32,066</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>12,585</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>18,712</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>12,329</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>14,960</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Number of people in Queensland across various age groups enrolled at the close of the electoral rolls - 2004 federal election (Source: AEC)

(* includes a proportion of then 17 year olds who would have turned 18 by election day)

Figure 2: Number of young people enrolled in Queensland - June 2003 - May 2005
(Source: AEC & ECQ)

(June 04 - Nov 04 figures exclude September 2004 data due to Federal Election; see Figure 1).
Figure 3: Non-voting, by age, by enrolled persons - 2001 and 2004 state elections
(Source: ECQ)

Figure 4: Non-voting, by age, by enrolled young people aged 18-25 - 2001 and 2004 state elections
(Source: ECQ)

Analysis of information
In the Voices & Votes discussion paper, the committee made the following observations about the above data on enrolment and voting:

Enrolment
- young people aged 18 to 20 are under-enrolled;
- the numbers of young people who are enrolled to vote increases significantly from 17 to 25, and in particular from 21 to 25 when 85% are enrolled;
- from about the age of 20, young people are enrolled in significantly greater numbers than those aged 18 and 19, and in similar numbers as people in other age groups;
- over two years (2003-2005), there was a decrease in the number of young people enrolled in each age group from 17 to 25, with the largest relative decrease in the combined 21 to 25 year group;
- in real terms, on 19 January 2004, approximately 39 721 people aged 18 to 20 and 35 797 people aged 21 to 25 were not enrolled to vote in Queensland - when compared to the average number of people who
vote in each electorate in a state election, 25 000, the approximate total number of young people aged 18 to 25 who were not enrolled to vote, 75 518, equates to approximately three electorates of voters;

- enrolment of young people in Queensland, as a percentage of the eligible population, is notably lower than in some other States and is below the national average in each age category;

**Voting**

- in the 2001 and 2004 state elections, young people aged 21 to 30 were less likely to vote than people in other age groups, including 18 to 20 year olds;

- at the 2004 state election, non-voting by 18 to 30 year olds who were enrolled to vote occurred at an average rate of 13.7%, whereas non-voting by people in other age groups averaged 7.0%;

- in the 2001 and 2004 state elections, despite lower rates of enrolment by young people aged 18 to 20 compared to those aged 21 to 25, 18 to 20 year olds who were enrolled to vote were more likely to vote than those aged 21 to 25;

- non-voting by enrolled young people increased significantly between the ages of 18 and 25, and non-voting by young people in each age group increased between the 2001 and 2004 state elections;

- 12 879 young people aged 18 to 20 who were enrolled to vote at the 2004 state election did not do so - when compared to the average number of people who vote in each electorate at a state election, 25 000, this number is greater than 50% of the voters in one electorate;

**Electoral engagement**

- when the approximate number of young people aged 18 to 20 who did not vote at the 2004 state election is combined with the approximate number of young people who were not enrolled to vote at that election, the total is 52 600 - compared with the average number of people who vote in each electorate at a state election, 25 000, this is equal to the average number of people required to elect two of the 89 representatives in the Queensland Parliament.

Following the release of the *Voices & Votes* discussion paper, the Queensland daily newspaper, the *Courier-Mail*, contained a report which further analysed the data about enrolment and voting by young people:

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**Youth Cast Vote Against Politics By Staying Away**, Courier Mail, THU 21 JUL 2005, p01

By Malcolm Cole, Chris Griffith and Matthew Watson

MORE than a third of Queenslanders aged 18 to 20 did not vote at the last state election, prompting claims the political process is failing young people.

Electoral Commission of Queensland figures show 39,720 people aged 18 to 20 were not on the electoral roll for the state poll in February last year. Another 12,877 were enrolled but failed to vote, making a total of 52,597 who did not have a say.

About 101,000 people aged 18 to 20 did vote but the turnout was down on the 2001 poll.

Paul Kornell, 19, of Yeerongpilly in Brisbane’s south, blamed the irrelevance of the political system for his lack of interest in voting last year at what would have been his first state election.

Mr Kornell yesterday said he didn’t even know if he was on the electoral roll -- although he thinks his partner may have enrolled him.

“It’s just like choosing between two options -- option A and option B,” he said.

“There’s not really much you can change. You choose the party but they pretty much do what they want.”

“If they want young people to vote, then they’ll need to make it more relevant. At the moment, it’s targeted to our parents.”

A parliamentary committee will look for ways to connect with young people. Suggestions so far include better civics education or lowering the voting age to engage young people sooner.

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**Other forms of democratic engagement**

The *Voices & Votes* discussion paper identified other formal and informal electoral opportunities for young people to engage in democracy in Queensland. Some available data regarding these opportunities for engagement in democracy is set out below, grouped according to different categories of engagement.

More generally, at the *Voices & Votes* workshops, young people were asked to discuss:

- What are your experiences of community and democratic activity?
What have you done?

In addition, to find out ways in which young people had sought to take action, the *Voices & Votes* response form listed a variety of ways of taking action. Respondents aged 12 to 25 were asked to indicate which forms they had participated in - where they had not experienced a form of taking action, young people were asked to indicate whether they would like to take action in that way. The responses received from 46 young people - who filled out a response form by way of making a submission to the *Voices & Votes* inquiry, or at a forum at Springwood High School organised by the Member for Springwood or a Zone Constitutional Convention - are represented below.

*Figure 5: Activities young people have done and would like to participate in.*

![Pie chart showing activities young people have done and would like to participate in.]

Have a voice as a candidate or representative for the Legislative Assembly or local government

**Legislative Assembly**

In the 2004 state election, a total of 353 candidates nominated for election to the 89 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Only 11 people aged 25 or younger have ever been elected to the Legislative Assembly. *Figure 6* indicates the ages of the Members of the (current) 51st Parliament at the date on which they were first elected to Parliament.

The committee contacted all registered political parties in Queensland and asked them to provide information about candidates aged 18 to 25. Information was not received from the Queensland Liberals or One Nation Queensland Division. The Nationals and the Greens advised that no candidates aged 18 to 25 ran in the 2004 general state election. The Australian Labor Party told the committee that, three candidates between the ages 18 to 25 stood for the ALP in the 2004 election, but that none of these were in ‘winnable’ seats and none was successful. However, the ALP State Secretary asked the committee to note that:

*These figures are misleading to some extent due to the stability of the Parliament and the huge successes by the ALP in 2001 and 2004. As an aside, there were eight further candidates between 25 and 35 years of age, of which three retained their seats and a further two won seats for the first time.*
Figure 6: Ages of current Members of Parliament when first elected
(Source: Queensland Parliamentary Library)

Figure 7 indicates the average ages of the Members of the Legislative Assemblies since the commencement of the 30th Parliament on 01 August 1944.

Figure 7: Average of the ages of Members of the Legislative Assembly at the commencement of each Parliament since 1944 (Source: Queensland Parliamentary Library)

Local Government
There are 1125 local government councillors, including mayors.

A census was conducted by the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc and the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation following the local government elections in March 2003. It indicated that no councillors were aged under 25, and that 5% of councillors were aged between 25 and 34. (However, only 64% of councillors completed the census and may not have completed all questions.)

Participate in the activities of a political party

The committee contacted all registered political parties in Queensland and asked them to provide information about the proportion of members of their respective parties aged 18 to 25. Information was not received from the Queensland Liberals or One Nation Queensland Division. The Nationals advised that the proportion of the Nationals membership aged 17 or 18 to 25 inclusive is 1%. The Greens advised that the proportion of its membership in this age group was negligible, and the Australian Labor Party told the committee that, at 1 July 2005, 7.3% of its members were aged 25 or below, and of these members, 15.5% were aged 15 to 18.
Be a member of the State Youth Council

The Queensland Youth Council is a group of 20 young people who work to increase young people’s participation in government decision-making and community life. The Council provides advice to the Minister responsible for youth about issues affecting young people. This advice relates to:

- Government policies, programs and services that impact on young people; and
- current and emerging issues and concerns of importance to young people.

The Queensland Youth Council also:

- has a role in supporting and monitoring the development and implementation of Government policy related to young people across Queensland; and
- aims to promote positive images of young people by showcasing young people’s participation in Government decision-making processes and community life.

Seek appointment to a Queensland Government board or committee

The Queensland Government has a register of people who would like to be appointed to Government boards and committees.

On 30 July 2006, there were 1047 people on the government’s register. Forty-two of these 1047 people were aged 15 to 25. Three of these 42 young people on the register had been appointed to Government bodies.

Participate in a Youth Parliament

A number of times each year, the Queensland Parliament conducts Youth Parliaments at which legal studies students debate Youth Bills designed to address issues of concern to young people. In addition, the Parliament and the YMCA run Youth Parliaments. These allow young people from a variety of backgrounds to experience the parliamentary process of formulating and enacting legislation on young people’s issues. Legislative outcomes are forwarded to relevant Government Ministers for consideration.

Each year, approximately 270 young people participate in Youth Parliaments. The YMCA conducts one Youth Parliament per year, and 89 young people participate. The participants are from around Queensland and represent the electoral districts represented in the Legislative Assembly. In addition, the Queensland Parliament convenes two Youth Parliaments each year, with approximately 90 secondary students participating in each of these. In 2005, an additional Youth Parliament was held in Rockhampton during the regional sitting of the Queensland Parliament.

Participate in local government activities such as youth councils, youth advisory groups, reference groups and forums

Most local governments in Queensland engage with young people through various processes such as youth councils, youth advisory groups, reference groups and forums. These provide an opportunity for young people to participate in local government. Assistance is provided by the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc to ensure representation and diversity, including representation of young people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Each year, a Speakout Youth Conference is held respectively in northern and southern Queensland. Each conference provides an opportunity for young people involved in leadership in their local community and/or City or Shire to:

- engage in activities and educative processes;
- learn from each other and share ideas;
- develop leadership skills, capacity and understanding;
- have an opportunity to respond to the government (federal, State and local) agendas;
- raise matters for consideration by government.

Take part in a consultation process undertaken by a Queensland Government Department or agency

In Queensland, young people can respond to questions asked generally by government about specific issues. For example:

- state and local government agencies frequently ask for public input into policy-formation and decision-making about matters such as the ‘green bridge’ over the Brisbane River near the University of Queensland; and
parliamentary committees generally invite the public to contribute their views to matters under inquiry, such as in this inquiry by the Legal and Constitutional Committee.

All people in Queensland are able to access public consultation opportunities through the Government e-democracy portal at: www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au.

Take part in a Queensland Government youth consultation mechanism

The Queensland Government’s Youth Charter outlines the basic principles required to ensure that the specific views of young people are not only heard but included in Government and community decision-making processes (accessible at: www.generate.qld.gov.au).

The Government’s GENERATE website (www.generate.qld.gov.au) provides connections between young people and Government, including in the form of:

- web discussion forums, with issues discussed by young people tabled as part of a regular report to the Premier; and
- a facility for on-line feedback on proposed legislation or legislative amendments (limited to selected legislation ‘that could affect their lives’).

Take action to influence democracy in Queensland via the activities of a non-government organisation, student union, trade union, collective or representative organisation

Many young people have a genuine interest in broader issues, such as the environment or human rights. In the pursuit of these issues, young people engage in a variety of activities which are outside of, but seek to influence, formal democratic processes.

Examples of activities which may involve young people seeking to influence democracy in Queensland include participation in:

- activities of non-government organisations, such World Vision’s Global Leadership Conventions run in every State capital and some regional centres with the aim of empowering young Australians to fight against poverty and injustice (see: www.worldvision.com.au/youngaustralians/glc);
- student unions (see: eg, www.nceu.org.au);
- trade unions, such as the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association (‘SDA’) (see: www.sdaq.asn.au/about.php);
- environmental organisations, such as the World Wildlife Fund or the Wilderness Society (see: www.wwf.org.au and www.wilderness.org.au);
- collectives which seek to represent the views of young people, such as the Young Australian Rural Network (see: www.yarn.gov.au); or
- humanitarian organisations, such as Amnesty International (see: www.amnesty.org).

Work as a volunteer

Data provided by Volunteering Queensland indicates that an increasing number of young people are taking part in voluntary activities. In Queensland, nearly one-third (32%) of volunteers are under 25 years of age, and people aged up to 25 are more likely to engage in voluntary community activities than people in any other age group.

In submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee was told that young people do take action to achieve change.

YANQ:

There is strong support for democracy in Australia, but widespread mistrust of our democratic institutions and politicians. Furthermore, young people are politically active, but, perhaps because of high levels of mistrust for formal political processes, choose to participate in non-traditional ways such as boycotting products, donating money or time or taking part in rallies. This mirrors research by Professor Pat Seyd from England who found, through interviews with over 13,000 people, that three out of four citizens took part in political activity during the year.

Vibewire Youth Services:

Young people have varying levels of maturity, knowledge, skills, articulation and influence. Some are engaged directly with the party political system, political issues impassion some, others do not concern
themselves with such matters at all, and still others are disengaged due to a perceived lack of time and/or skill, rather than intention on their part. In other words, it is not simply young people who must change their approach to political involvement, political systems must change to create new and better access points for young people.

Other relevant information and research - Australia

Youth Electoral Study - Australian Electoral Commission, Australian National University and University of Sydney

A current four-year study by a team of researchers from the AEC, Australian National University and University of Sydney aims to find out:

- why young Australians are less likely to enrol to vote than older people, despite voting being compulsory; and
- what motivates young Australians to vote.

In December 2004, the first report of the YES was released. The findings in the report were taken from research comprising a national survey of Year 12 students and group discussions with young people conducted in a representative sample of 16 federal electorates throughout Australia. In summary, the YES Report no. 1 concluded that:

- More young people under 17 say they intend to enrol to vote than the number of young people 17 and older who are actually enrolled. Young females outnumber young males in both their intention to enrol and their actual enrolment.
- Few young people know they can enrol at 17, and those that do often find out from their parents.
- The vast majority of young people intend to vote when they reach 18, but 50% wouldn’t vote if it wasn’t compulsory.
- Although voting is important to young people, the link between a citizen’s right and duty is not powerful.
- Being able to vote is less important than other ‘rites of passage’: 18th birthday, leaving school, getting a driver’s licence, going to the school formal and being able to drink legally.
- Half of all young people feel they lack the knowledge to understand political issues, understand political parties, make a decision when voting and to actually cast their vote. Most don’t trust politicians. Despite this, young people are interested in what, to them, are the ‘real issues’.
- Parents are the main source of information for young people about voting.
- TV and newspapers are also important sources, but are viewed with scepticism. The importance of teachers ranks somewhere in the middle. Interestingly, the internet is not an important source of information on these topics.
- Some young people think a tax break or even concert tickets would be an incentive for them to vote. However, many also believe that there should be no incentive as voting is a responsibility that comes with citizenship.

The second YES report, Youth, Political Engagement and Voting, was published in late 2005 (www.aec.gov.au/_content/What/publications/youth_study_2). YES report no. 2 related to the involvement of young people in a range of democratic processes at school and in the community and the effect of such involvement in later engagement in democracy, including voting.

The conclusions reported in YES report no. 2 were that:

- By high school, many young people are involved in activities such as signing petitions, collecting signatures for a petition or going to a rally. Young people 15 years ago were involved in very similar activities. Young people also differentiate between the social movements they would most likely support (eg, the anti-globalisation movement or environmental movement).
- Young people who are involved in most of the forms of democratic activity are more likely to vote than those who are not.
- Supporting many of the social movements is positively related to a young person’s intention to vote, however the strength of this does vary between the different movements.
- Young people involved in volunteering or community organisations are more likely to be active citizens.
• Some schools try to shape young people’s ideas of ‘acceptable’ forms of engagement (eg, attending a protest is banned, but writing letters is encouraged).

• Participating in student elections (by either voting or standing for office) is positively related to a young person’s intention to vote, however the student elections, student associations and outcomes they achieve vary widely between schools. Not all can be described as democratic and in these cases, young people tend to be quite cynical.

**National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS)**

Established under a cooperative funding arrangement between the Australian, State and Territory Governments, NYARS aims to facilitate nationally-based research into current social, political and economic factors affecting young people. It operates under the auspices of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

In 2004, NYARS commissioned a Youth and Citizenship survey to:

• critically analyse the concept(s) of citizenship and its implications for young people;

• ascertain young people’s perceptions of citizenship and determining factors; and

• identify what strategies could be utilised to advance empowering concept(s) of citizenship among young people.

The qualitative findings of the Youth and Citizenship survey included the finding that 89% of respondents wanted to participate in influencing politics and government. The methods of participation which were seen to be the most effective were voting in elections, youth and student representative organisations and through community groups. Writing to politicians or newspapers, signing petitions and calling talkback radio were seen to be the least effective.

Respondents were also asked about the extent to which young people are affected by the decisions of governments at different levels, the international political sphere and by Australian and international business. The responses indicate that the highest level of perceived impact is the decisions of State/Territory Governments, followed by the Australian Government.

**Dr Ariadne Vromen**

Research conducted by Dr Ariadne Vromen (Vromen, 2003) indicated that young people in Australia participated in a variety of collective political and social experiences. Dr Vromen found that 93% of young people had been very involved in a group of some kind within the previous five years. These groups included sporting and recreation groups. When these groups were excluded, and consideration was of participation in groups which might seek to influence government, 69% of 18-34 year olds had taken part in these in the previous five years.

**Australian Youth Research Council**

Currently, the Australian Youth Research Centre is undertaking two research projects which, when results are published, will provide significant information in this area.

First, the AYRC is conducting a Youth Civil Engagement and Social Connection in Post-industrial Society - a Comparative Study. This is a three-year longitudinal study which will analyse young Australians’ perceptions and practices of civic engagement, comparing this analysis with data from linked research projects in Italy, Germany, the UK and the Netherlands.

Second, a Learning for Activism project will collect first-hand information from young Victorians aged 15 to 24 who are interested and involved in activity such as being a representative on a school student representative council, taking part in demonstrations, posting a political blog or standing as a political party candidate in elections. The project aims to gain a better understanding of what motivates people to become active in politics, learn what skills they bring to activism and identify some of the barriers they have overcome.
Other relevant information and research - Overseas

Elections Canada

The authors of an Elections Canada study concluded that age is one of the best predictors of electoral participation - better than income, educational attainment, interest in political issues or perception of voting as a civic duty (2003).

Older voters have always turned out in greater numbers than younger voters. As people move into the workforce, settle down and begin raising families, they become more aware of the role of government and grow more inclined to take an active role in choosing their government. As a result of this lifecycle effect, older voters are more heavily represented than younger voters in any given election. In recent years, however, generations are voting at lower rates than did previous generations at the same age.

Using Canadian Election Studies data going back to 1968, Blais and his colleagues examined the voting behaviours of four generations of Canadians. They found that, at the same age, participation rates were two or three percentage points lower for Baby Boomers than for the pre-Boomer generation. Rates were ten percentage points lower for Generation X voters than for Baby Boomers, and another ten points lower for the Echo Boomers compared to Generation Xers. In short, young voters are generally less likely to vote than older voters, and today’s young voters are even less likely to vote than previous generations of young voters. As more recent generations begin to replace older generations among the voting population, this generational effect is dragging down the overall turnout numbers.

International IDEA

In 1999, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) conducted a study of voting turnout by age in 15 European democracies. It found that electoral participation rates around the world increased steadily between 1945 and 1990, but that since 1990, participation had fallen.

In Youth Voter Participation - Involving Today’s Young in Tomorrow’s Democracy, the International IDEA concluded that low voter participation among young people was a serious and widespread problem for contemporary democracies:

In many countries, particularly in Latin America and newly-established democracies, people have expressed deep concern not only about the overall low level of participation, but especially among specific groups like youth, women, and the indigenous population. In 1997, the International IDEA published a report that analysed statistics from more than 1,400 parliamentary and presidential elections held between 1945 and 1997 in over 170 countries. Among the findings of the report is that turnout across the globe rose steadily between 1945 and 1990, increasing from 61% in the 1940s to 68% in the 1980s. But since 1990 the average has decreased to 64%.

Increasing reluctance among youth to participate in politics and exercise the right to vote is particularly alarming and amounts to a weakening of democracy. Therefore, it is imperative to reverse this trend and re-engage youth in the political and democratic process.

With a special focus on youth turnout, the International IDEA report used official registers (in countries where the electoral system required an official register recording voters’ dates of birth) and surveys to analyse the relationship between age and turnout in national parliamentary elections in 15 Western European democracies. Answers to the following questions were sought:

- What is the relationship between age and participation?
- Is the level of turnout lower for the youngest age groups of the electorate?
- Is there any significant variation in youth turnout across countries?

It was found that the general relationship between age and turnout was the same in almost all countries, and agreed with previous research on electoral participation (references are to turnout by enrolled voters across the countries):

**Turnout is usually low among the youngest age category (80%), then increases more or less pronouncedly as electors approach middle age, reaches the highest levels of participation among people between 60 and 69 years of age (around 93%), and finally decreases slightly to around 90% for the oldest age group...**

**With the exception of Belgium and Italy, all countries show their lowest levels of turnout in the group of electors aged between 18 and 29 years. The rate of turnout increases as people get older in all 15 nations...**
Young voters pose a puzzle in two ways. First, they abstain more than any other age category: in all countries except for Italy and Belgium, even people over 70 participate substantially more than electors under 30. Secondly, abstention remains difficult to explain considering that young citizens today have higher levels of education and better access to political information than ever before, which should boost their participation levels.

The data collected by the International IDEA also indicated that:

- the higher a country’s average level of turnout, the higher the level of participation by young citizens; and
- participation is not only a matter of experience, but also of age, and may be a generational phenomenon.

Audits of political engagement - The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society (UK)

Jointly, the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society have undertaken three annual audits of political engagement in the United Kingdom (see: www.electoralcommission.org.uk). By way of a Political Engagement Poll carried out by Ipsos MORI, the audits measure how central the public think politics is to their lives.

Relevant findings of the 2006 audit include:

- **Most UK adults do not feel they know much about politics.**
- **Just under four in 10 (39%) say they know at least ‘a fair amount’ about politics, down from the 45% recorded by our previous audit.**
- **Over half say they are interested in politics and a similar proportion say they would be ‘absolutely certain’ to vote at an immediate general election.**
- **A third feel that the present system of governing Britain works well and that ‘When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run’.**
- **Only a minority, 14%, are politically active.**

Among young people, levels of political knowledge, interest, action and participation are lower than among the population as a whole. There is also worrying evidence of the emergence of a cohort of young people who did not take part at the 2001 general election and who are not voting as they get older.

Committee conclusions

The data and information set out in this Chapter corresponds with many of the experiences and views the committee heard from young people during the course of the *Voices & Votes* inquiry. Committee conclusions drawn from those views are set out in Part A and repeated on page 9 of Part C. Additional conclusions that can be drawn from the data include those regarding enrolment and voting by young people aged 17 to 25 set out above, and that young people:

- are disengaged from formal processes of democracy (excluding voting) - young people are almost never Members of Parliament or candidates for election to Parliament, members of local governments, members on Queensland Government Boards or committees, and are rarely members of political parties;
- in small numbers, are members of the State Youth Council, participants in Youth Parliaments or participate in local government representative activities, but the opportunities for such engagement are limited;
- may engage with Government via community or youth consultation mechanisms, particularly if they are better educated and wealthier, but are apparently more likely to contact government to seek information;
- generally, participate in a variety of community activities, either individually or collectively;
- are more likely to engage in voluntary community activities than people in any other age group;
- are more likely to be active in our system of representative democracy if involved in any form of community activity or volunteering; and
- feel that they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to have democratic ‘literacy’, including the capacity to exercise an informed vote at the first election at which they are entitled to vote.
The data also shows that, as found in the audits of political engagement in the UK, there are likely to be considerable disparities in levels of engagement in democracy by young people from certain groups within Queensland communities. This issue is of concern to young people themselves, as the committee heard from many young people that they knew people their age who were completely detached from democratic processes.

Of similar concern are the indications that people of all ages are ‘disengaged’ from formal processes of representative democracy. While the scope of the *Voices & Votes* inquiry is limited to Queenslanders aged 12 to 25, the information considered by the committee for the purposes of the inquiry indicates that many of the issues regarding the engagement of young people in democracy in Queensland may apply more widely to citizens of all ages in many established democracies around the world.

It is important that these phenomenon receive detailed consideration in Queensland so that, where necessary, practical responses additional to those in this report might be developed to address them in future. An annual poll of democratic engagement, as recommended in Chapter 9 would be of great benefit in this activity.
4 - Factors affecting young people’s engagement in democracy

Information and research outlined in Chapter 3 showed a trend in advanced industrial democracies towards disengagement from formal democratic processes, including voting. Research regarding young Queenslanders indicates that that trend is also occurring in this State, despite the existence of compulsory voting. In this Chapter, the committee sets out evidence it received and other relevant information and research findings regarding factors which may be influencing this trend.

In the Voices & Votes discussion paper, the committee set out the International IDEA’s summary of reasons provided by young people around the world for not voting:

- disillusionment about the political system;
- complaints about the political parties and candidates (ie, didn’t like any candidate, parties unresponsive to their needs, lack of information about candidates);
- not interested in the political and/or electoral process;
- doubts about the effectiveness or the difference their vote would make;
- complaints about corruption in politics;
- too busy or too concerned with other things;
- not registered (or incorrectly registered) to vote;
- uninformed about where and how to vote;
- illness or unexpected emergency;
- pressure from peers;
- absent either through work, school or on vacation;
- form of protest;
- religious reasons;
- simply forgot;
- no particular reason.

Evidence to committee inquiry

In State and local government by-election exit polling conducted for the committee by a parliamentary intern, young voters in the state by-election for the electorate of Chatsworth and the local government by-election for the Brisbane City Council ward of Chandler provided the following responses.

Since the last election, have you taken advantage of any opportunities to voice your opinions to the government or any political parties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too busy</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons given for not being politically active included:
Comments listed by respondents under ‘Other’ included:

- No one’s shown interest in me
- Don’t think it will make a difference
- Wrote to a federal member, but I’m not interested in a local level
- Just hasn’t happened
- Never came up
- Political groups are a bit full on
- Been overseas
- No one came to me
- This is my first time voting

Submissions to the committee’s inquiry discussed factors affecting young people’s engagement with democracy.

YANQ:

Seriously addressing poverty and inequality, in Australia and Queensland would make it much easier for many young people to participate in our Democracy. For instance, many of the young people that YANQ's members work with are receiving below poverty-line social security payments. Many are also attempting to live independently from parents because of conflict within the family, and thus do not receive support (in cash or in-kind) from parents. For these young people, maintaining stable accommodation (which is required in order to vote) is an ongoing struggle. Suggesting ways of making it easier to register to vote misses the point entirely.

Living in poverty is associated with poor access to education and low education outcomes. It also means experiencing higher levels of poor health and stress. Hardly the preconditions for active citizenship.

Vibewire Youth Services:

The question ‘do you care about politics?’ is the wrong question. The question should be ‘what do you care about?’ If you ask this question and provide the space for young people to reveal their thoughts, you’ll rapidly discover that young people care deeply about all aspects of their world. It is not political ideas or issues that have turned young people off, it is the political process that has turned them off.

Fred Fletcher:

Of all the peoples in this country the Aboriginal people are the least enrolled to vote, the least represented in government and have the least understanding of the system.

UQ government students:

Lack of trust and cynicism about politics and politicians was apparent in many responses. Politics was described as a ‘foggy muddle of scandal and bickering’. Students declared that ‘the Australian youth of today cringe at the very sound of words such as “democracy”, “politics” and “government” and that ‘politics needs to clean up its community image. Many youth feel a great distaste for politicians and political activities’. Another wrote:

To young people, the two major parties locked in their seemingly endless arm-wrestle for electoral supremacy, offer little more than a choice between Fruit Loops and Coco Pops - both saccharine, hollow in the middle and of dubious nutritional value. You wouldn’t want to eat them every day if you expected to “grow up big and strong”, and neither will Australia.

YANQ:

The reality is that in 2005 the majority of young people are relegated to the spectator stands in both small and large decisions that affect their lives. This might include the activities of their local youth service, planning for their public spaces, processes within their schools or the development of government policy.
The cumulative effect of this is to limit young people’s development of a culture of engagement. This experience is amplified for culturally and linguistically diverse young people, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and for those marginalised by poverty or other barriers.

According to the 2001 census, 17.1% of Queenslanders were born overseas. For those that have arrived recently, they face a number of obstacles to becoming active citizens. Not being able to speak English or not understand the ‘Australian’ way of doing things can make it difficult to understand how our democracy works and to participate in it.

Gordon Douglas:

... many policies and institutions have been set up to facilitate young peoples’ engagement with democracy, such as the State Youth Advisory Council, the Young Workers Advisory Council, and the Young Parliament. However, there is limited capacity for the targets of these policies to engage with these processes, since they are specifically not engaged. I doubt many young people not already politically connected somehow will have even heard of this inquiry. This arguably even contributes to economic mistreatment of young people, who remain unaware of workplace entitlements and other industrial programs.

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:

Traditional authority structures, under which young people are expected to defer to Elders, may limit the opportunities for Indigenous young people to participate in many community-based civic activities.

For many Indigenous youth, issues such as family violence, homelessness, crime and substance abuse are problems they face everyday. These types of issues, where Indigenous young people are significantly over-represented in the juvenile justice system(FN) and constitute 24 per cent of all children in care, take precedence over democratic and civic participation for many Indigenous young people.

It should also be noted that many Indigenous young people appear to prioritise involvement in sporting activities over civic participation.

With 39 per cent of Indigenous Queenslanders living in rural, remote or very remote areas, distance from regional centres is a major contributing factor to Indigenous youth feeling alienated from democratic processes at the state and federal levels.

However, more direct causes of low voter enrolment and civic participation in Indigenous young people appear to include:

- Feelings of marginalisation as distinct peoples within mainstream political processes
- The failure of mainstream political processes to address issues of ongoing concern
- A deep-seated distrust of government and its institutions arising out of historical practices
- Alienation from the activities/policy concerns of the major parties.

Vibewire Youth Services:

Given the techno-hype that saturates rhetoric around young people’s social arrangements these days, one thing that often gets overlooked when exploring young people’s social habits is the way young people network themselves offline. Sporting clubs, interest groups, community and youth groups, university disciplines, university clubs and societies, art collectives even as informal things as who young people recreate with, they all illustrate the highly-networked way that young people relate to and organise themselves and each other.

Politicians ... half-heartedly attempt to fill this “democratic deficit” using youth participation projects such as Youth Councils and Advisory Groups. But such organisations hardly have the ear of government and only attract certain kinds of young people. In fact, no single engagement mechanism in and of itself will be able to fill the democratic deficit. It is only through the pursuit of multiple mechanisms ... that young people in all their diversity can be more fully engaged.

Legal Aid Queensland:

Young people are not a homogenous group; they have culturally diverse backgrounds, and have varying life experiences. Creative and strategic thought into processes to minimise barriers to enable participation for young people are essential. Some potential barriers to participation may be, for example, difficulties in accessing transport, previous negative past experiences of bureaucratic processes as being tokenistic, experiences of being discriminated against, low self-esteem, low literacy, homelessness, poverty, inaccessibility of venue, and limited time.
Youth Advocacy Centre:

Whilst YAC supports young people’s right to participate in all kinds of decision making we acknowledge that in practice young people’s desire to participate is variable, depending on individual circumstances. The young people YAC interact with often have experiences with the legal system that leave them feeling disempowered and therefore uninterested in participating in a system that is seemingly unconcerned with what young people think. This disillusionment with the legal system is transferable to the political system more generally.

Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:

There was some concern that the limited pool of young Indigenous people participating … can lead to a ‘tall poppy’ syndrome.

Vibewire Youth Services:

In general, the same young people often show up in multiple of these locations. As a result, these consultative mechanisms don’t deliver a representative youth voice, and most young people neither know of their existence nor feel comfortable trying to enter this space.

Other relevant information and research - Australia

Australian Youth Research Council

As noted in Chapter 3, two current research projects of the Australian Youth Research Centre will assist understanding about the factors which influence young people’s engagement in democracy:

- Youth Civil Engagement and Social Connection in Post-Industrial Society - a Comparative Study; and
- Learning for Activism.

Heath

In a recent publication, Heath (2006, pages 155 to 157) a young Australian with a background in active engagement in democracy, states that traditional democratic institutions, ‘beige-town politics’, are failing young people:

People are more interested in political issues than ever, but the standard outlets for those feelings are unable to open up and change to accommodate this interest and the way it is most often expressed. Not only are they changing they are going backwards... Compare politics to another sector and notice the lack of equilibrium. Surely it’s irony of the highest order that while we have almost unlimited consumer choice we believe we no longer have political choices.

The reasons for disengagement from mainstream politics have nothing to do with the lack of sms voting. We are trying to use systems designed in the early 20th century for people living in the 21st. I don’t use an icebox because it wouldn’t meet my needs, and many people ask why they should spend a lot of time worrying about who is in parliament when few of its members address their concerns or are willing to respect their confidence and intelligence. It’s not rocket science.

The language and framework of politics - concepts like ‘left’ and ‘right’ are increasingly removed from the everyday complexity of most people’s lives. Soon enough we will reach a critical mass of faithlessness that undermines the whole edifice. Even when people are moved to political acts many are so alienated from the whole word ‘politics’ they simply don’t recognise these acts as ‘political’...

Other relevant information and research - international

International IDEA

In 1999, International IDEA published, Youth Voter Participation - Involving Today’s Young in Tomorrow’s Democracy. The report analysed ‘the problem of low voter participation among young people, its implications and ways to overcome it, with the objective of promoting electoral participation among young people throughout the democratic world’. Reasons for not voting provided by young people to International IDEA are set out above. International IDEA found that:

As people grow older they acquire resources that facilitate participation: familiarity with parties, candidates, political and electoral processes, integration in the community, political knowledge and skills, and so on. They also tend to become more attached to parties and to internalize ideologies.
**Bristol City Council (UK)**

In the United Kingdom, the Bristol City Council released, *Democracy, what does that mean?* in June 2005. The report had been commissioned as part of an evaluation of a UK Local e-Democracy National Project (see: www.bristol-city.gov.uk). Findings were that (pages 5 and 6):

- Many young people hold views on current issues, and are interested in having their say on things which affect their lives.
- Many young people do not perceive democracy as relevant to themselves, because they see democracy as related to ‘politics’ rather than the chance to have their say on issues affecting their own lives.
- The generally negative associations with politics, and the lack of a positive association with ‘democracy’, suggest that a new language may be necessary to encourage engagement by young people.
- Young people, whether they are actively engaged in democracy or not, feel that because of their age, the government may choose not to listen to them and/or not to take their views seriously. This often makes them cynical about the idea of giving their views.
- Nothing will encourage young people to take an interest in speaking up about their issues if they do not believe action will be taken as a result.
- Many young people feel that face-to-face contact offers many opportunities for interaction. However, face-to-face contact is perceived by some young people to be intimidating.

**Power Commission (UK)**

*The report of Power: An Independent Inquiry into Britain’s Democracy* (2006) was a project of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. The Power Commission was set up to find out what was happening to democracy in the UK - why had disengagement from formal democratic politics in Britain grown in recent years and how could it be reversed?

The Commission comprised ten people from different backgrounds and political views. It believed it vital to re-engage the British people with formal democracy to avoid:

- the weakening of the mandate and legitimacy for elected governments - whichever party is in power - because of plummeting turnout;
- the further weakening of political equality because whole sections of the community feel estranged from politics;
- the weakening of the effective dialogue because whole sections of the community feel estranged from politics;
- the weakening of effective dialogue between governed and governors;
- the weakening of effective recruitment into politics;
- the rise of undemocratic political forces; and
- the rise of a ‘quiet authoritarianism’ within government.

In a detailed way, the Power Commission report analysed disengagement in Britain. In her foreword (pages 9 to 10), Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Member of the House of Lords, said:

*The disquiet is really about having no say. It is about feeling disconnected because voting once every four or five years does not feel like real engagement. Asking people set questions in focus groups or polling is a poor substitute for real democratic processes. Voting itself seems irrelevant to increasing numbers of people: even supposing there is a candidate you like, if you are in a constituency where outcome is preordained and your favoured choice is not IT, there is no point turning out to the draughty church hall and inserting your vote in the ballot box. It is also about feeling that there is no choice, despite our living in the era when CHOICE is the dominant political mantra - there is very little on offer as the main parties now seem to be much the same. It is about a belief that even Members of Parliament have little say because all the decisions are made by a handful of people at the centre and then driven through the system. Politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the hands of privileged elites as if democracy has run out of steam.*

The report identified three key factors of disengagement in Britain:

- the intensity of alienation;
- the vibrancy of participation outside formal politics; and
the cross-national nature of the problem.

The Power Commission found that formal democratic processes in Britain had failed to keep step with the way people live.

**The Hansard Society (UK)**

The UK Hansard Society is an independent, non-partisan educational charity, which exists to promote effective parliamentary democracy ([www.hansardsociety.org.uk](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk)).

In February 2006, the Hansard Society reissued a pamphlet by Dr Declan McHugh and Dr Philip Parvin, *Neglecting Democracy*. Originally published in 2005 prior to the 2005 general election, the pamphlet sets out an analysis of the complex relationship between British citizens and their state (at 10 to 11):

> People now approach politics and political institutions differently from how they once did. The way in which people participate in the democratic process has changed: many tend not to vote, as they see the commitments and actions of political institutions and politicians as divorced from the issues which affect them in their lives. Instead they sign petitions, attend meetings, boycott products, and hold demonstrations: political actions which are real, visible and born out of genuine political commitment, but which circumvent traditional mechanisms and structures. Hence, critics who argue that civic disengagement is the consequence of a wider erosion of ‘social capital’ - or social trust - among the public are only half right. They are correct that traditional structures and networks - trade unions, working clubs, church groups and so on - that used to act as facilitators of political debate and organisation have declined and that this has caused a shift in the way people understand themselves and their place in the political community. But it is simply not the case that this has caused the kind of generalised disengagement with political issues or the death of political debate in Britain that certain commentators fear. The problem is not widespread political apathy, but rather that a vital link that connected citizens to the state and the formal democratic process has been broken.

**The Hansard Society - Professor Coleman (UK)**

In *A Tale of Two Houses: the House of Commons, the Big Brother House and the People at Home*, (2003, pages 757-758), Professor Stephen Coleman suggests that:

> Democracy currently faces a ‘crisis of public communication’ and the mediation of politics is at an all-time low.

Professor Coleman’s advice is that ‘the rhetoric of reconnection is always in danger of falling prey to three erroneous reactions’:

- the notion that connecting citizens to the political process is impossible, except for the basic level of participation in important elections;
- placing faith in civic education to drive reconnection; and
- relying on technology to deliver citizens from disconnection.

Accordingly:

> A strategy for liberating political democracy from its current cultural ghetto requires a conception of two-way accountability; a creative and exciting use of the new technologies of interactivity; and the nurturing of genuine respect between PJs [players on the political field] and BBs [non-players]. This will require give and take from both players and non-players on the political field.

**Stanford Center on Adolescence (US)**

In June 1999, researchers and specialists in youth development gathered under the auspices of the Stanford Center on Adolescence to participate in a conference entitled “Creating Citizenship: Youth Development for Free and Democratic Society.” Faculty and doctoral students (from sociology, psychology, education, political science, anthropology, medicine, and law) from universities in the United States as well as from England, Germany, Israel, Northern Ireland, and Poland attended.

The conference consensus document stated that:

> Significant numbers of young people are not acquiring important capacities [that prepare them to understand and actively participate in the political system] because the experiences listed above are not readily available, not widely known, or underutilized. Indicators that fuel our concern include:

- Low rates of voting participation among newly enfranchised voters.
• Indifference or unthinking distrust of public figures.
• Declining willingness to assume leadership roles in formal political and civic organizations among young adults.
• Non-inclusion and discrimination experienced by minority and disadvantaged youth.
• Acts of incivility and violence among young people from all sectors of society.

We believe that the following policies and practices exacerbate this negative situation:
• Cultural messages (from families, media, and other sources) which exaggerate values of marketplace success and of power.
• An absence of opportunities for ongoing and reflective engagement in their communities for many sectors of the youth population.
• A lack of connection between the institutions in which young people are engaged as adolescents and those institutions which it will be their responsibility to shape when they become adults.

In order to deal with these issues, we believe it is important to create a meaningful change in policy, practice, and research.

**Canadian Council on Learning**

Research staff of the CCL have given consideration to available evidence regarding electoral participation rates, in order to determine whether they indicated decreased confidence in democratic processes, increased political cynicism or signalled a decline in people’s attachment to Canada (CCL 2006). The CCL provided answers to the following questions:

**Why are young voters staying away from the polls?**

Although young people may engage in non-voting forms of political participation, there is no evidence that such activities replace voting. People who engage in non-voting forms of political participation are at least as likely (and often more likely) to vote as those who do not.

Another popular perspective is that today’s young voters are unusually cynical about politics and the political process. Younger Canadians are in fact less cynical, report greater satisfaction with Canadian democracy and elections, and hold more positive opinions of the federal government than their older counterparts.

**What keeps young voters from the ballot box?**

One answer that does find some support is that young people are less engaged in and knowledgeable of current political issues. The current generation of young people seems to be less knowledgeable than were previous generations. Over time, increasing proportions of young Canadians are demonstrating “low” political knowledge on [relevant] surveys. In contrast, this proportion is decreasing for older Canadians.

Young people are less likely to be interested in politics, less likely to read newspapers, and less likely to see voting as a duty shared by all citizens. All of these factors suggest that young people are not particularly engaged in the Canadian political discourse; these same factors are also correlated with a failure to vote.

**Why are today’s young Canadians less engaged in the political process than were previous generations?**

One place to look for answers is in citizenship education and particularly in changes over time in the nature of citizenship education in Canada. Citizenship education no longer pervades the entire curriculum but is now restricted to a much smaller place within social studies and civics curricula.

**Can we infer a direct relationship between changes in citizenship education and declining voter participation?**

In a 2004 Canadian Election Study, survey respondents were asked whether they had taken a civics course in high school. Those who answered “yes” were significantly more likely to report that they would vote in the next election. Intriguingly, this effect did not hold for respondents who reported high levels of interest in politics, but it did hold for those with low interest in politics. That is, people with little interest in politics are unlikely to vote, but are significantly more likely to vote if they took a civics course in high school. These data do not allow us to draw a relationship between the quality of civics education in high school and subsequent voting behaviour, but they underscore the point that citizenship education is tightly linked to later voting patterns.
Institute for Research on Public Policy (Canada)

In *Are Young Canadians becoming Political Dropouts?* (2005), Milner states that the phenomenon of non-voting by young people may be especially acute in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, but it is an international one. A comparative analysis by Franklin (2004) of turnout trends in 22 democracies indicates some of the factors that may contribute to young people not voting:

- age groups are differently affected by the character of elections;
- voting is, to an important degree, habitual, and habits are developed, in particular, as a response to the perceived competitiveness of the first elections for which one is eligible; and
- young voters have not yet developed habits of voting and non-voting.

In short, Milner says that:

*Turnout decline will accelerate as newly eligible-to-vote cohorts, set in their non-voting ways, replace older cohorts with developed voting habits.*

A further factor identified by Milner is the importance of the distinction between ‘informed citizens who choose not to vote and potential voters who fail to vote because they lack the basic information needed to distinguish among the choices – including the choice not to participate’:

*The real threat to democracy, I maintain, lies not in young citizens choosing not to vote, but in their lack of the basic knowledge and skills required to make that choice on an informed basis.*

Promoting Democracy (Netherlands)

In 2006, the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Department of Constitutional Matters and Legislation published, *Promoting Democracy - An international exploration of policy and implementation practice*. The publication was the report on a comparative study undertaken of policy and legislative initiatives from 18 countries aimed at promoting constitutional democracy.

The study, discussed further below, provided an overview of 58 initiatives from the 18 countries geared towards:

*...a specific problem which is being experienced not only in the Netherlands but also in the other thriving, more established democracies. This problem relates to the decreasing confidence in public and political institutions. This problem is often referred to as ‘the gap between citizens and their government’ or ‘the gap between voters and elected representatives’.*

Bogart 2005 (Canada)

In *Good Government? Good Citizens? Courts, politics and Markets in a Changing Canada* (2005), WA Bogart suggests that in Canada a convergence of factors have reduced the scope of activity for the legislative and executive branches of government and of public enthusiasm for responsible government. The factors identified are:

- failures of the political process to achieve significant progress on key issues such as the Constitution, the status of Quebec and the well-being of Indigenous peoples;
- the increasing power of the market vis-à-vis the state and associated reductions in government programs;
- the increasing concentration of political power, particularly in the Prime Minister’s Office; and
- the ascendance of the courts under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Committee conclusions

The information and research set out above, as well as the material and views communicated to the committee in public submissions indicate that, despite compulsory voting in all Australian jurisdictions, and the federal nature of our system of representative democracy, the phenomenon of disengagement of young people from formal democracy, including voting, is likely to be similar to the phenomenon being experienced in advanced industrial democracies around the world.

In Queensland, factors affecting young people’s disengagement in democracy are likely to include:

- the reasons for non-voting listed by IDEA set out above;
- the socio-economic or cultural conditions experienced by some young people;
• existing democratic processes themselves are not accessible, attractive or responsive to young people;
• lack of trust and cynicism towards institutions of democracy;
• cynicism and lack of respect for politicians and political parties;
• perceived failures of representative government to resolve or progress difficult issues;
• young people have many competing demands for their time and interest;
• lack of skills to ‘have a say’ on issues affecting their lives and take action;
• belief that action taken by young people will not result in change;
• a sense of estrangement or alienation from processes of representative democracy;
• the increase of the power of Executive Government, leading to a rise of ‘quiet authoritarianism’;
• preference for opportunities for engagement which exist outside of the processes of representative government;
• changes in society, and the ways in which people live, make decisions and interact; and
• insufficient information to exercise an informed vote or to have an informed say.

Generally, disengagement results from both a lack of knowledge, skills, opportunity and motivation on the part of young people and a failure of representative democracy as it is currently practiced.

Research further suggests that disengaged young people can be categorised as either political dropouts, who don’t vote for a wide range of reasons, or political protesters who are well informed and choose not to vote. The combination of factors responsible for disengagement will therefore vary between young people depending on their particular circumstances, abilities and experiences.

Strategies which might be introduced to address the factors affecting young people’s engagement in democracy are considered in Chapter 5.
5 - Possible strategies to increase young people’s engagement in democracy

In advanced industrial democracies around the globe, attempts are being made to address the trend of young people’s disengagement from formal democracies. In this Chapter, the committee sets out the relevant evidence it received in this regard, as well as an overview of some of the more significant strategies currently being proposed or implemented in other jurisdictions.

Evidence to committee inquiry

At the Voices & Votes workshops, young people shared with the committee their ideas for strategies to increase engagement with democracy.

Young people discussed the topic, What practical assistance / resources do young people need to become more active in democracy? Their responses to the committee are set out below.

- **Make it fun** - incentives, excursions with activities and BBQ’s, videos, computer games, an annual festival for Parliament, political board game

- **Media** - youth-oriented news and media, election coverage, newspaper for youth, motivational style of presentation, non-patronising, program like Behind the News, live broadcasts like Big Brother, diversified media, other broadsheets besides Courier Mail, more publicity / advertising - sponsor TV programs, eg a local version of ‘West Wing’

- **Promotion** - more and better promotion of postal votes, different ways of marketing voting, don’t focus on the compulsory aspect, use young role models, use general promotions, eg collectable political beer caps

- **Consultation and feedback mechanisms** - seek our opinions more actively and with greater enthusiasm, use SMS, the radio, the Internet, provide a quick view of all the major issues, MSN Messenger promotions, eg download skins, icons, display pictures (like Pepsi and Reebok promos), Spam, political youth website that outlines current and possible future policies, surveys, visits from politicians, personal approach, workshops, large forums / conventions, capture regional areas, well-advertised, teacher / politician conferences, a youth council where we can talk and be heard, mail outs, explain how political stuff affects us, put it in our language, present youth views to the appropriate authorities

- **Education and knowledge** - Schools should teach about government policies, not only legal studies, so that when the time comes, we will understand about voting, basic, factual, varied approaches, practical rather than theory-based, start learning about democracy at a young age, eg. 12+, education about how and where to vote, basic overviews of parties (unbiased), understanding different parties’ policies, visiting Parliament, consistency across schools, visits from government members, all schools (state and private), offer a government traineeship

- **Advocacy** - relevant spokesperson, influential people, youth-friendly politicians young people can relate to (eg Peter Garrett), youth organisations granted opportunities to be a part of community committees

- **Websites** - voting on-line or via a mobile phone, government website for young people, interactive, email questions, on-line forums

- **Accessible information and resources** - MPs’ offices should be youth friendly, provide contacts, pamphlets and information booklets

- **Right to vote** - voting at a younger age gives youth more of an opportunity to be active and involved

- **Local community resources** - youth groups, community billboard, focus on local issues, experience making a difference in your community, smaller local actions

- **Visible outcomes** - do more for youth, make them want to be involved, when we raise issues, actually listen and that will ensure a greater respect

- **Funding** - support youth agencies to allow disengaged and disadvantaged young people to have a voice

- **Incentives** - educational credits or benefits for being active in youth committees / political activities, financial incentives
In addition, young people participating in the **Voices & Votes workshops** told the committee what had, in their experience, been most effective in achieving outcomes and/or getting a discussion going.

- Sending a complaint
- Advertising
- Youth talking to youth (word of mouth) - generates youth interest and motivation
- Community consultation
- Electronic forums
- Meeting people with similar issues from different backgrounds and with different experiences to share information and ideas
- National youth groups / forums
- Workshops like this involving young people in discussions and feeling confident that this information will go somewhere
- School initiatives, including breakfasts, compulsory discussions regarding society, public policy, government, discussions with teachers, public notices, school council, student body, ideas box
- Conferences on youth issues

**Submissions** to the **Voices & Votes** inquiry also contained many valuable suggestions about strategies which should be implemented in Queensland, both in relation to electoral engagement and engagement in other democratic processes.

**Electoral engagement**

**Inspire Foundation:**

Creating partnerships with youth initiatives can help raise awareness and a cultural commitment to participating in elections. Partnering with online youth services such as [www.actnow.com.au](http://www.actnow.com.au) can also help link the action of voting with issues that young people experience in their everyday lives.

Unless Governments support existing services developed for and by young people in which to foster civic engagement we risk alienating young people from formal processes of government.

This Committee can help redress the increasing disengagement of young people from formal political process and political parties by educating, promoting and supporting the ways in which young people are getting involved and taking action.

**Hon Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety:**

The young people interviewed stated that they have been inspired to vote from encouragement of adults in their lives, in particular youth workers who have suggested that one person can and does make a difference. One young person was inspired by the movie and novel ‘Looking for Alibrandi’ where character discusses voting and says that voting does count, and the freedom of Australians have to vote should not be taken for granted.

**E/Professor Colin Hughes:**

I continue to argue for compulsory voting as strongly as possible. Recently the victims of the New Orleans floods were invariably called “poor and black” and it was added that was why the political process ignored them. But they were also non-voters, and that was the most immediate reason why they could be shamefully ignored by several levels of government. It may be an elementary level of participation, but it is has value for justice and equity considerations.

**Hon John Mickel MP, Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:**

The circumstances and experiences of a young Aboriginal person in Inala will be different from the circumstances and experiences of a young Aboriginal person in one of the state’s Deed of Grand in Trust (DOGIT) communities, and different again from the circumstances and experiences of a young person growing up in the Torres Strait. This diversity of circumstance and experience needs to be taken into account in developing effective strategies to combat low rates of civic participation.

As observed in the discussion paper, it is also reasonable to expect that Indigenous youth are more likely to become engaged in formal democratic processes if they are already involved in informal processes at the
local level. On this basis, DATSIP considers that long-term strategies to improve democratic participation ought to:

- In the first instance, ask Indigenous young people what issues they would like to have a say in and how they would like to have that say.
- Use the results of that consultation to develop a range of whole-of-government initiatives that provide Indigenous young people with positive opportunities to engage in informal citizenship activities in relation to issues of particular concern to them.

Non-electoral engagement

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry provided the committee with views on possible strategies.

Legal Aid Queensland:

Given our involvement with young people with legal disputes, Legal Aid Queensland has a particular interest in advocating for all young people to assist them to develop a greater understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities. Accordingly, the underlying framework for Legal Aid Queensland’s submission is that:

- all children and young people have the right to be educated;
- the vulnerabilities of children and young people brought about by their age and/or inexperience necessitate special assistance for children in understanding what their legal rights and responsibilities are; and
- there is a direct relationship between young people learning and understanding their legal rights and responsibilities, and young people engaging in democracy in Queensland.

Understanding the law and young people’s participation in democracy are interlinked. There are numerous youth development research studies that suggest that young people do want to participate in their local community and decision making that affects their lives. Many youth agencies facilitate opportunities for young people to have their say on community issues, however, there are also governing laws which limit, and at times contradict the type and extent of young people’s full participation in society. For example, in Queensland, 17 year olds are regarded as too young to buy alcohol, get married without parental consent, enter into many types of legally binding contracts, or sue another party in most civic disputes. However, despite these factors, and not being able to vote at 17, young people in Queensland are considered criminally responsible as adults from this age, and are sent to adult prison from this age, as previously noted in our submission.

Gordon Douglas:

No single engagement mechanism in and of itself will be able to fill the democratic deficit. It is only through the pursuit of multiple mechanisms, YACs amongst them that young people in all their diversity can be more fully engaged.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

The Commission recommends that addressing the injustice of inequality must form a crucial part of any strategy developed to encourage the participation of young people in democratic processes.

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:

...in the context of this inquiry, it is worth mentioning that Partnerships Queensland also recognises the critical importance of developing social capital. This is reflected in its adoption of community engagement mechanisms, such as negotiation tables and community justice groups, as the preferred way for government to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The first young peoples’ negotiation table was held in Bundaberg on 14 November 2005 and represented an important step in seeking the view of Indigenous young people in that region on issues that impact on their lives.

These initiatives need to be supported by action across the whole of government to support and encourage Indigenous civic participation in formal and informal settings and at all levels of government.

Having regard to the foregoing, there would appear to be utility in developing strategies that build on the participation of Indigenous young people in some areas of the state in local government and community-based civic processes and the interest of many Indigenous young people in sport.

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Engaging young people, in schools or elsewhere, calls for a range of opportunities including outreach, culturally appropriate and interest based activities. Young people are less likely to engage in formal decision making processes where they haven’t previously had the opportunity to participate informally. Informal strategies provide a relatively safe environment for young people to take some initial steps in active participation. Informal strategies could include surveys, facilitated group discussion or sports, cultural and arts based projects. Furthermore, young people are more likely to become actively involved in decision making in areas that they have a real interest.

The Voices & Votes youth jury made two recommendations relevant to non-political engagement:

- Formation of an umbrella youth organisation, ‘Get Young People Involved’ (GYPI), to educate and engage young people on democracy. The organisation should ensure:
  - young people in rural and remote areas benefit from its activities;
  - Members of Parliament are involved in its activities; and
  - issues important to Indigenous young people are taken into account; and
- Indigenous Youth Ambassadors to assist the engagement of Indigenous young people in democracy.

Other relevant information and research - Australia

Heath

Heath (2006, pages 156 to 157) advises young Australians:

Ignoring institutional politics is stupid. It affects every part of your life - at work, how you get to and from work, your ability to fund your lifestyle, the way in which you are perceived by the law and in the community. It doesn’t just shape you - you can use political skills and institutions to shape your lives and your communities.

Heath provides suggestions for young people to achieve lasting social change by engaging in democracy in formal and informal ways:

- Agitate and make changes in your immediate environment - be a better line manager at work, change your household’s environmental approach.
- Get plugged in - make sure you have access to the information that will keep you up to date on news and developments on the issues and values that matter to you.
- Vote and campaign around elections - this is when politicians and citizens pay most attention to political issues.
- Be an ethical consumer and a socially responsible investor - buying organic and buying shares that don’t fund companies selling arms to child soldiers is not that hard!
- Don’t waste your time writing a letter or email to an MP unless you have a plan to follow it through or are making a tailored contribution to an organised campaign. All the other correspondence is chucked out or they use your details to send you junk mail about how important they are.
- Actively support organisations that share your values - donate money, buy their publications, share them with your friends - activism is not a dirty word.
- Learn how to articulate that politics is what happens in your daily life and spread this message.
- Pay attention in school or university to citizenship education. If you’re past all that, make an effort to do a short course on it or buy a book about our political system.
- Volunteer your time if you have any spare. Time is so much more important than money to some groups, so being time-rich but cash-poor actually means you can make more of a difference.

Other relevant information and research - overseas

Stanford Center on Adolescence (US)

In June 1999, a conference entitled ‘Creating Citizenship: Youth Development for Free and Democratic Society’ held at the Stanford Center on Adolescence produced a consensus document which stated that:
In order to sustain a society where democratic governance and civil discourse thrive and where the psychosocial development of members of that society is fostered, opportunities to engage in civil society and in the political system should be widely available.

To prepare them to contribute to this kind of society and to foster their political development, young people need face-to-face interpersonal experience in contexts and organizations that are meaningful to them. They should have opportunities to take part in groups and to engage in activities that advance the public good; that incorporate them in reciprocal social networks; and that embody respectful conduct toward familiar and unfamiliar individuals. Young people should acquire the knowledge and capacities that prepare them to understand and actively participate in the political system.

We have identified a number of qualities and capacities of young people that we believe are essential in achieving these goals:

- A civic identity that includes commitment to a larger sense of social purpose and a positive sense of affiliation with the society.
- An awareness that decisions made in the public political process directly and indirectly affect their private lives and futures.
- Knowledge and the capacity to acquire information necessary to navigate the social and political world, including an understanding of democracy and the functioning of its institutions, current issues of importance, and modes of participation that are likely to be effective.
- A balance between trust and skepticism and a constructive tension between support for legitimate authority and willingness to dissent in relation to the political system and civil society.
- The capacity for making autonomous choices and decisions.
- The capacity and willingness to engage in shared discourse which is tolerant of other opinions and dissent.
- Respect for other individuals and the groups to which they belong.
- Skills of cooperation and negotiation, including the ability to work in a team and present an effective argument for one's views without denigrating the views of others.
- The willingness and ability to assume leadership roles when appropriate.
- Belief in their ability to make a difference by acting alone or with others, including a belief that institutions should be responsive to such actions.

To promote these qualities and capacities, we believe that the following experiences are important and should be available to all young people, consistent with their developmental needs:

- Sustained contact with organizations that treat young persons with respect, operate according to civil rules of conduct, and create opportunities for the safe expression of views.
- Civic education in schools that provides an experience of democratic society. This means education that enables students to acquire meaningful knowledge about the political and economic systems, to recognize the values of democratic society, to discuss important and potentially controversial issues, to find personally meaningful role models, and to understand the contribution made by organizations in civil society including advocacy groups.
- Opportunities to reflect about the meaning of experiences they have in their communities for their personal and political identities.
- Education about the media that encourages young people to read newspapers and to be critical consumers of print, television, video, and Internet sources.
- Opportunities for youth to communicate their own political and cultural expressions to a wide range of groups and to engage in constructive dialogue.

**Bristol City Council (UK)**

The Bristol City Council report, *Democracy, what does that mean?*, found that there a certain things that could motivate young people to engage and also a number of barriers that may make them decide not to engage in democracy (at page 19).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Non-engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to good information about the issue</td>
<td>Little information available about the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling strong emotion in relation to the issue</td>
<td>Nor really interested or passionate about the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being interested in the issue and ‘what happens next’</td>
<td>Not really interested in outcomes or actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling enthusiastic about the impact that giving their views would have</td>
<td>Feeling cynical about the impact that giving their views would have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having positive past experience(s) of participation (including positive</td>
<td>Having not received feedback or seen any action as a result of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outcomes/actions)</td>
<td>and therefore become cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding it easy to participate (eg in terms of accessibility)</td>
<td>Limited access to technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing how to participate</td>
<td>Unsure of how to participate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Committee conclusions**

Based on the findings of this inquiry and research from other jurisdictions both here and overseas, it appears that strategies to re-engage young people in democracy fall into three broad areas:

- reform for active learning about democracy;
- electoral reform;
- reforms to the ways in which representative government engages with people, including the use made of community and media organisations and networks.

The following chapters will explore each of these areas in more detail.
6 - Active learning for democratic engagement

The central role of citizenship education in democratic engagement has been widely endorsed. According to Professor Sir Bernard Crick (Kerr 2004), advisor to the UK government on this issue, the central aim of strengthening citizenship education is to effect:

No less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally: for to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting; to build on and to extend radically to young people the best in existing traditions of community involvement and public service, and to make them individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves.

Existing policies

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, primarily through some units in the P-10 subject Study of Society and Environment and the senior subject of Legal Studies. Only one school in Queensland presently offers the ‘Political Studies’ syllabus. Although the Federal Government’s Discovering Democracy program was adopted in a significant number of primary schools, funding for this initiative ceased in 2004.

Students also experience democracy at school; for example, through elections for school council members and/or school leaders, but these vary in the way that they are conducted and the extent to which students’ votes alone determine the outcome. In practice, only a small proportion of secondary students learn about our system of representative democracy or experience democracy.

Additional educational opportunities relevant to democracy may include:

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

Previous recommendations regarding civics education in Queensland

Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committees

In previous inquiries, this committee and the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committees of the 49th and 50th Parliaments have made recommendations regarding civics education in Queensland.

These recommendations were for the development of a civics education strategy in Queensland to improve the level of awareness and understanding of the Queensland Constitution, and specific recommendations to ensure that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders receive appropriate civics education to allow participation in democratic processes (see LCARC reports nos 12, 13, 24, 42 and 46 at: www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC).

Queensland Constitutional Review Committee

The QCRC was established in May 1999 to investigate whether there should be reform of and changes to the Queensland Constitution through a major program of community consultation conducted by a Constitutional Review Commission. Chaired by Emeritus Professor Colin Hughes, the QCRC distributed an issues paper and held public meetings throughout Queensland.

On 1 February 2000, the Commission delivered its report to the Queensland Premier (QCRC 2000).

In that report, the QCRC recommended that:

R18.1

That the Minister of Education made a ministerial statement regularly to inform the Legislative Assembly of progress on the implementation of civic education in the State.
R18.2
That the Electoral Commission Queensland be encouraged to develop an electoral education centre and adequate resources for such a facility be provided.

Issues
The Voices & Votes response form asked young people to discuss:
- 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?

Teachers were asked to discuss:
- How does your school approach civics education and practise democracy?
- How could students be better prepared to engage in democracy?

Issues relevant to active learning for democratic engagement are given consideration below, under the following headings:
- Active learning in schools
- Other opportunities for active learning
  - Parliament of Queensland
  - Electoral Commission Queensland
  - Non-government organisations

Active learning in schools

Evidence to committee inquiry

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry discussed the importance of learning about democracy.

Christy Volpe, 16:
There should be programs in school that allow students to know when and how to enrol by a visual presentation.

Anonymous:
Teach us about democracy.

Make it more interesting so we can store it in our heads more sufficiently.

An Nguyen:
I think that going to the Parliament House with the school gives a chance for us to learn about the democratic process.

Jason Nidaou, 17:
Programs should be implemented in school, i.e. work shops.

UQ government students:
...a more participatory environment at school, including experience with elections and student representation, would provide useful training in democracy.

Gordon Douglas:
Due to the importance of the school and TAFE system, it is worth mentioning education in a political sense. Learning about the numerous parliamentary and extra-parliamentary democratic practices would also empower young people to be able to access them.

... education about political rights and duties for democratic contribution and participation are severely lacking, and could be changed to make Queensland stronger economically and a more robust democracy, and
therefore curriculum changes could be amended to stimulate young people’s democratic engagement to a greater extent.

A case can be made for the curriculum of secondary schooling - and especially compulsory secondary schooling - to be reworked over the next two parliamentary terms to devote more hours to citizenship education, including workplace laws, legislative systems, extra-parliamentary state support mechanisms and so forward.

Fred Fletcher:
I know that if Aboriginal People could understand the Political System and how it can change their lives, they would vote young and old.

Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:
It is understood that many Indigenous youth at the recent state election had no knowledge of the mainstream parties' policy platforms and allocated their votes simply on the basis of ‘knowing’ the candidate rather than supporting their policies.

This raises obvious questions about the impact of poor standards of literacy on the ability of people to meaningfully exercise their citizenship entitlements and adequacy and reach of civic education being taught in schools. DATSIP considers that these matters should be raised with the Department of Education and the Arts in the context of the committee’s separate inquiry into the implementation of the government’s response to the Hands on Parliament report.

...there are significant question marks over the adequacy and reach of civics education being taught in schools. Concerns have also been raised over the appropriateness and relevance of the curriculum.

In this context, DATSIP suggests that consideration needs to be given to:

- Teaching civics education as a subject in its own right.
- Supplementing school-based initiatives with community workshops to reach young people who, for whatever reason, are not attending secondary school.
- Expanding civics education to primary schools.
- Ensuring that civics education is taught in a way that is relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. In this regard, orthodox teaching methods are often inappropriate and consideration needs to be given to the adoption of more 'hands on' and practical teaching methods.

Ensuring that civics education highlights Indigenous involvement in civic processes (eg. Wave Hill Station and the Bark petition) and the contributions of Indigenous political leaders to Australian political developments (eg. Neville Bonner, Eddie Mabo, Charles Perkins, Lowitja O'Donoghue and Noel Pearson) and the reconciliation movement (eg. Jackie Huggins and Patrick Dodson).

It should also be noted that many young Indigenous Queenslanders' only experience of Parliament and Cabinet is as one-off observers at a regional Cabinet meeting or on school excursions to Parliament House in Brisbane and Canberra. While these experiences are not to be belittled, they arguably do little to increase the knowledge base and enthusiasm of Indigenous youth or inspire them to participate in democratic processes. Conversely, they may in fact reinforce perceptions of alienation, exclusion and irrelevance.

YANQ:
Civics education is important for young people, but needs to be underpinned by providing many opportunities for young people from an early age to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

When YANQ asked its members for their advice on this submission, a number expressed the view that civics education in schools was vitally important and expressed concern at the perceived lack of civics education in schools. While there can be some debate over whether schools should focus more or less on civics education, it is clear that it does form a part of the curriculum, and at the very least most students in Queensland would be exposed to the ideas behind our system of democracy. However without an array of genuine opportunities to practice some of the principles of democracy in their own lives (rather than act as spectators or 'play' actors), is it any wonder that some young people leave school without much knowledge or interest in how our formal democratic systems work.

Unfortunately, for many young people schools do not provide real opportunities for young people to 'have a say', let alone make crucial decisions about what they learn at school. There is no reason however why this needs to be the case. A small number of democratic schools do exist in Australia and overseas that
encourage and support students to make decisions about what and how they will learn. There are a number of schools that operate on this model.

Hon Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety:

It was believed that this process needed to take place before young people left school and before they turned 18 years of age, to ensure that young people would be fully prepared for voting. The emphasis here was on attracting the attention of young people and then putting into place processes where young people could explore the ‘real’ issues that they care about.

Legal Aid Queensland:

In Legal Aid Queensland’s experience, a key to increased participation and interest in democracy is young people learning and understanding their legal rights and responsibilities at a young age or at least by the time they are voting age.

Gordon Douglas:

A problem ... has been the lack of connection between young people and the institutions which affect them. [We] can release many statements, policies and directives to schools as a channel of communication to their students, but the schools simply ignore these for varied reasons, and so the communication fails. If the schools were to recognise their role as the principal institution in contact with young people, and to forge links with other departments for mutually beneficial goals, this situation could be changed for much greater gains for young people.

Murray Campbell:

I hope the Committee will recommend that ECQ abandon its long standing obfuscation and conform more closely to its responsibilities under the Electoral Act 1992, its own Charter and Corporate Goals. As such, ECQ should reintroduce an electoral education program that will effectively support the democratic culture of this state, especially as it applies to young people. Appropriately designed an electoral education program can be cost effective and highly successful. Reliance on one-off advertising campaigns is no longer good enough, if indeed it ever was.

Youth Advocacy Centre Inc:

Given young people’s variable desire to participate it is critical that community legal education about participation in the electoral process is accessible to all young people in Queensland. Any educational campaign would need to highlight the impact of the right to vote on political decision making and the legal process more generally. Information on registering to vote must be age appropriate and accessible to young people.

Ms Barbara Stone MP:

Students stated that they felt very inadequate if they had to vote soon. They believe that the school system gives them some education in grade 7 and others classes may have some lessons in grade 9, however by the time they leave school and vote it is forgotten.

Mock elections, mock parliaments and visits to the Parliament were also stated as having educational value to students. Many said while they may have gone to polling booths with parents it was not the same as having to do it themselves. They believe it can look complicated and rather than be embarrassed would rather not go and vote.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

The Commission notes that whilst there are a number of existing programs and curricula already developed and implemented in primary and high schools, there is concern that these curricula may not be implemented consistently across all schools, both within the state and private school systems. Another concern is that once students reach secondary school, civics education may become only an elective. This means that many students are not participating in civics education past primary school.

The Commission recommends that Education Queensland include civics education as a core unit for young people throughout high school. Attendance within this unit could also address the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, allowing young people to understand their rights, and how these rights form part of their citizenship and their right to participate in democratic processes.

The Commission recommends that many of the strategies aimed at engaging Indigenous communities could also be used with isolated and rural young people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
To implement this strategy the Queensland Government would need to consider providing additional funding to the Parliamentary Education Services to support the development and implementation of culturally and age appropriate programs and material to help raise awareness and educate all young people in the community about the voting process.

Inspire Foundation:

This submission argues that the Government should explore new ways of delivering civic education to young people, and that greater investment be made in developing and evaluating scaleable resources which can be accessed by isolated schools, as well as young people engaged in home schooling or school of the air, at low unit cost.

The internet is expected to become young people’s preferred information source by 2007 (Scott 2004) and a growing body of evidence finds that e-learning initiatives have the potential to enhance face-to-face promotional and educational services at a fraction of the cost. Online services can provide young people with an active learning space where they can reflect, network, engage and build skills.

It is important to note that research finds that students do not necessarily relate their experience of student democracy (say, in Student Representative Councils) with broader democratic structures or politics (Saha, et.al. 2005). Schools must consider ways to genuinely involve students in broader decision making - and encourage students to participate in this process.

At Voices & Votes workshops young people discussed: Should education about democracy be made a priority? If so, how? How can schools as institutions better model democracy? What support and resources do schools need to teach effectively about democracy?

The young people’s advice to the committee was that:

- Yes, schools should be more democratic and model democracy in the classroom, students should be able to help make decisions on school issues, eg vote on some topics like curriculum, uniforms, tuckshop menu, school playground equipment, learning different positions in Parliament (eg. class PM)
- There should be opportunities for all students to get involved, not just academic, sporty or popular students
- Democracy studies should start in Year 8 and 9 (others said upper primary school grades 5, 6 and 7), introduce discussion and debate then work up to politics
- By Year 12, classes should teach school leavers about voting and how to vote
- Schools should have a mock Parliament and/or a mock vote similar to real elections - the students should elect the student council to represent the student body so students can have a voice, the Electoral Commission could be involved to help with the process and provide information and let the kids run it (could be compulsory, some people are lazy about voting at school)
- Education on democracy should include debating, workshops, practical work, eg filling in forms
- The subject should be compulsory
- A balanced view should be taught, not just conservative views
- Schools should keep students updated on what’s actually happening in the media
- To engage young people, special guests such as Parliamentary Liaison Officers, Members of Parliament, inspirational people, or role models could visit schools to teach about democracy and schools should hold excursions to Parliament House
- Have the politicians teach the subject because they know about democracy, or else someone who appeals to young people
- There should be support for country schools
- There should be a local amalgamated Parliamentary Youth Party with representatives from all over the state, student councils, the community and young people interested in politics
- Provide a free pamphlet that informs young people about state, federal and local Parliament in a way we understand
- We should learn about the fight for democracy to increase interest, including ANZACS, women’s right to vote, different cultures, and study different forms of governance, eg. dictatorship, socialism, representative, also learn about what’s relevant in Australia at the current time
• Class resources should include videos and books
• Maybe through the internet, MSN / pop-ups, internet voting
• Teachers should be better educated in it
• Keep it simple and interactive - role plays, real issues, current issues

The Voices & Votes youth jury made three recommendations regarding education about democracy:
• A compulsory unit, taught in Years 10 and 12 English, on the basics of democracy and politics in Australia;
• An enrolment and democracy van to visit schools and other places where young people are, including Schoolies’ Week, possibly with incentives to enrol; and
• Formation of an umbrella youth organisation, ‘Get Young People Involved’ (GYPI), to educate and engage young people in democracy. The organisation should ensure:
  - Young people in rural and remote areas benefit from its activities
  - Members of Parliament are involved in its activities; and
  - Issues important to Indigenous young people are taken into account.

Participants in the online and paper polls also answered a question about their experiences of education about democracy:

At school, did you (or do you) learn about how to be involved in democratic processes in Queensland?

On-line Poll

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>33%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>67%</td>
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Paper Poll

<table>
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<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>52%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>48%</td>
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Other relevant information and research - Australia

ACER

A report by the Australian Council of Education Research was prepared following participation in a study of 90,000 fourteen year olds in 28 nations by the International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement. The ACER report found that Australian students scored around the middle of the international distribution in terms of overall civics skills scores. However, it was stated that the data revealed an underlying problem. The acceptable score of Australian students on basic civil knowledge and skills measures did not translate into a desire to engage in democracy, or as described by the IEA, ‘conventional citizenship’. In short, there was a disconnection between identification and engagement, or the ‘being and doing’ aspects of citizenship (Rahn 2004 and Bennett 2005).

The IEA study found that 83% of students did not consider it important to join a political party to be a good citizen; 55% regarded knowledge of Australian history important; 50% thought it important to follow issues in the media; and 66% said that it was not important to engage in discussion about politics.

While there was a strong commitment to voting, this might have reflected the compulsory nature of voting in Australia. At the same time, however, being active in democracy received significant support from students: 80% said it was important to engage in activities that benefit others; 74% wanted to protect the environment; and 68% were concerned about human rights.

The ACER report concluded that Australian students were inclined to look beyond government for solutions to political problems.
Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth of Australia (MCEETYA)

A. In 2002, MCEETYA (see: www.mceetya.edu.au) conducted a survey of civics education policy around Australia. MCEETYA concluded that civics was not within the eight key learning areas required for Australian curricula, and that curriculum documents around Australia commonly contained three areas of content:

- the history of democracy in Australia and the operation of government and the legal system;
- Australian identity and cultural diversity; and
- the set of skills and values necessary for informed and active participation as a citizen.

B. In 2004, MCEETYA introduced National Assessment in Civics and Citizenship and, for the first time in Australia, nationwide sample survey testing of Years 6 and 10 students took place. Subsequent survey tests will be held at three-year intervals.

The assessment of civics and citizenship is part of a national plan that is progressively being put in place to monitor and report on student achievement against the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century. The national goals and the importance of monitoring student achievements in relation to the goals were agreed to by all State, Territory and Federal education ministers in 1999.

One of the national goals specifies that students, when they leave school, should ‘be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia’s system of government and civic life’ (Goal 1.4). Moreover, students should ‘have the capacity to exercise judgment and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their lives and to accept responsibility for their own actions’ (Goal 1.3).

At the time of publication of the Voices & Votes report, the MCEETYA report on the National Assessment in Civics and Citizenship had not been published.

Youth Electoral Study

Relevant findings to date of the Youth Electoral Study being undertaken over four years by the Australian Electoral Commission, the Australian National University and the university of Sydney have been that:

- about one-in-two students felt that they lacked the knowledge to understand the issues, the political parties, or to make a decision about voting;
- only about half of students in the YES sample felt prepared to vote, although males felt more prepared to vote than females;
- students in group discussions as part of the YES suggested that few students understood voting and what happened to their vote when it was counted;
- school teachers were a ‘moderate’ source of information about voting (behind parents, and ahead of television and newspapers);
- participation in specific civic activities has a positive relationship with the intention to vote in Federal elections; and
- students indicated that, in some schools at least, there is considerable cynicism about the effectiveness of student elections and student governments, school elections are not perceived to be democratic, and student governments are not taken seriously.

Federal Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

At the time of publication of the Voices & Votes report, the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters was conducting an inquiry into the adequacy of electoral education. The focus of the inquiry included, but was not limited to:

- the current status of young people’s knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system;
- the nature of civics education and its links with electoral education;
- the content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities;
- the school age at which electoral education should begin;
- the potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs;
- the adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities;
• the adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens;
• the role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education;
• the role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education;
• the access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament; and
• opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Submissions to that inquiry were available at: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/education/tor.htm

Other relevant information and research - Overseas

IEA Civic Education Study

The IEA Civic Education Study was two-phase and cross-national study involving 28 countries (Torney-Purta et al. 1999, 2001; Kerr et al. 2002). It gave voice to the views of over 90,000 fourteen year olds, their teachers and head teachers in the 28 countries on citizenship and education issues. The study found that schools and community organisations have untapped potential to positively influence the civic preparation of young people. Schools are part of the everyday experiences of young people. They throw up problems that matter to students and provide opportunities for them to take part in ‘real’ actions. This sense of school efficacy (of improving things in school) identified in the study may be as important a factor in future political behaviour as the broader sense of political efficacy (the relationship between citizens and national government) (Kerr 2003).

United Kingdom

In 1997, an Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools was set up and chaired by Professor (now Sir) Bernard Crick, who suggested that:

Citizenship is more than a statutory subject. If taught well and tailored to local needs, its skills and values will enhance democratic life for us all, both rights and responsibilities, beginning in school, and radiating out.

Accordingly, Professor Crick’s Advisory Group said that effective education for citizenship should be made up of three separate but interrelated strands:

• social and moral responsibility - ‘children learning from the very beginning self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, both towards those in authority and towards each other’. This strand acts as an essential pre-condition for the other two strands;
• community involvement - ‘learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community’. This, of course, like the other two strands is by no means limited to young people’s time in school; and
• political literacy - ‘pupils learning about, and how to make themselves effective in, public life through knowledge, skills and values’. Here the term ‘public life’ is used in its broadest sense to encompass realistic knowledge of, and preparation for, conflict resolution and decision-making, whether involving issues at local, national, European or global level.

In the United Kingdom, citizenship education is now a statutory subject. Since September 2002, all secondary students in ‘key stages 3 and 4’ - 11 to 16 year olds - are entitled to continuous learning about democracy. In addition, citizenship, together with personal, social and health education form a non-statutory framework at key stages 1 and 2 - ages 5 to 11.

Under the national curriculum, schools have a statutory responsibility to teach the programs of study for citizenship at key stages 3 and 4. The programs set out what young people should be taught and provide the basis for planning schemes of work. Schools also consider general teaching requirements for inclusiveness, use of language, use of information and communication technology.

Young people aged 11 to 16 are entitled to learn about:
• becoming informed citizens;
• developing skills of enquiry and communication; and
developing skills of participation and responsible action.

The UK experience has identified four fundamental challenges if citizenship education is to become firmly established in schools. These are curriculum development, community involvement, professional development and active participation in democracy.

The effectiveness of the UK reforms will be considered in a longitudinal study. The National Foundation for Educational Research is conducting an eight-year Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study commissioned by the United Kingdom Department for Education and Skills. The main aim of the study is to assess the short term and long term effects of citizenship education on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of pupils.

David Kerr (2003), Director of the UK Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study, has asserted that:

*the real unknown is the extent to which the introduction of citizenship education into the curriculum in England will succeed in building the notion of ‘efficacy’ amongst young people: the notion that they, as individuals and in collaboration with others, can make a difference to what happens in their school, at home, in their local communities and in wider society. Only after a generation of pupils has experienced citizenship education in schools will we be able to form any judgment about this.*

Canada

The Canadian Council for Learning (CCL 2006) has suggested that, while lowering the voting age is a reform that should be given consideration, measures to engage people who do not participate in elections and are not engaged in democratic processes should be put in place in the education system:

*Other options include having Canadian schools play a much bigger role in encouraging electoral participation. Teachers could design classroom activities and assignments around acquiring the kinds of concrete political knowledge required to cast an informed vote. They could also treat the process of registering to vote and actually voting as real-life learning opportunities.*

In an article for the Canadian Institute for Research on Public Policy, Milner (June 2005) suggests that an important component of learning about democracy is the information gained through contact with relevant actors in the processes of democracy:

*Thus, importance should be accorded to the positions on relevant issues taken by the different parties at the local, regional and national levels. Party representatives should be invited into the classroom both physically and electronically. In this way, the wall between political life and “real” life that serves to justify political abstention is removed.*

United States

In the US, policy makers tend to define and fund civic education programs (run primarily in schools) based on highly conventional citizen models. Bennett (2005) contrasts this ‘Dutiful Citizen’ model with a model to ensure learning about democracy by an ‘Active Citizen’, or a ‘self-actualising citizen’:

*who may see her political activities and commitments in highly personal terms that contribute more to enhancing the quality of personal life, social recognition, self esteem or friendship relations, than to understand, support and involvement in government.*

It is suggested that ‘effective civic education models need to address substantive changes in citizen role’s which are due to an historic set of social changes that appear to be occurring on a transnational level, while finding ways to motivate young people to find ways to engage meaningfully and effectively in civic life’.

Bennett proposes an approach which enables ‘young learners to participate in defining their personal political world as part of the learning process, and to find more meaningful pathways that lead to conventional politics and government’. It is suggested that students be equipped to accomplish ‘substantial transformations of government, citizenship and democracy ... in knowing and effecting ways’.

Other opportunities for active learning about democracy

Parliament of Queensland

Evidence to committee inquiry

The committee wrote to the Clerk of the Parliament requesting information regarding provision by the Parliament of Queensland of education activities for people aged 12 to 25. These are provided by the Parliamentary Attendants (generally primary school students) and the Parliamentary Education Services
The advice received regarding education activities currently provided by the Queensland Parliament is outlined below:

**Parliamentary Education Service**

The Parliamentary Education Service comprises two staff, supplemented by administrative assistance from elsewhere in the Parliamentary Service. It is estimated that 75% of staff time is spent on education activities for young people aged 12 to 25.

The Parliamentary Education Service provides parliamentary education programs and services for a range of clients, including secondary, TAFE tertiary students, educators, public servants, electorate officers and parliamentary service staff.

The programs and services include:

- Schools seminar program for senior secondary students and teachers;
- Youth Parliaments for senior secondary students;
- Tertiary/TAFE student seminars programs including ESL groups;
- An internship program for tertiary students;
- Parliamentary education and training seminars for public sector officers;
- Presentations for electorate officer training seminars and parliamentary service staff induction programs;
- Information services via website, multi media and hard-copy resources for students, members and staff and the wider community; and
- As required, PES contributions to historical exhibitions and displays.

**Parliamentary Attendants**

Parliamentary Attendants provide educational tours of Parliament House for a range of clients, including school students and members of the public. The tour program for school students was developed by Parliamentary Attendants in conjunction with the Parliamentary Education Service.

In the six month period 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006 Parliamentary Attendants provided 314 tours to 10,457 students.

**Electoral Commission Queensland**

In Queensland, electoral education activities in schools are generally provided by Divisional Returning Officers employed by the Australian Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission Queensland does not presently have an electoral education unit.

**Evidence to committee inquiry**

The Acting Electoral Commissioner, Western Australia, advised the committee about the WAEC Electoral Education Centre which provides educational and community awareness programs to primary and high schools, as well as tertiary and community groups throughout Western Australia. One aspect of the EEC is a Joint Civics Education program (JCE), run in conjunction with the Parliament of Western Australian and the Constitutional Centre of Western Australia. The committee was advised that, ‘The JCE receives strong support from country and metropolitan schools and is being expanded throughout the State.’

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 Educational 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 (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.

**Other relevant information and research - Australia**

Electoral Education Centres in Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide operate under joint arrangements between the Australian Electoral Commission and respective State Electoral Commissions. The centres conduct pre-arranged electoral education sessions for groups from all school levels, tertiary students and the
community, to provide an opportunity to learn about the electoral processes in an interactive way. Each group is given an electoral education resource pack.

The 2004-2005 Annual Report for the Australian Electoral Commission indicates that in that year, the Education Centres hosted 108,493 visitors and also conducted activities for over 21 000 other participants in off-site or outreach activities.

Other relevant information and research - Overseas

Strategies of the United Kingdom Electoral Commission attempt to provide active learning opportunities. For example, ‘Do Politics’ aims to get young people involved in democracy. It may be accessed at: www.dopolitics.co.uk. ‘Do Politics’ conducts workshops and events, and provides resources and training across the UK for young people.

Similarly, in May 2005, some 500,000 school students in the UK voted in a mock election organised by the Electoral Commission 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.

In Canada, the Canadian Centre for Learning (CCL 2006) suggests that ‘Beyond schools, other institutions also have a responsibility to educate young voters about election issues’; for example, Elections Canada adopts a ‘multi-pronged strategy’ which includes the following initiatives:

*Elections Canada has launched its own initiatives, including a Young Voters website, and they also support the civic education efforts of other non-governmental organisations.*

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.

Non-government organisations

Other relevant information and research - Australia

The Constitution Education Fund - Australia is a private organisation providing civics education across Australia which aims to help all Australians gain a better understanding of the Australian Constitution and the Constitutions of the States of Australia by:

- developing educational support material and publications (including in languages other than English and for use with computers and other technologies);
- providing these materials at no cost to schools and educational institutions;
- training Constitution spokespersons across Australia;
- advertising to encourage public interest in the Constitution;
- conducting seminars;
- maintaining centres where educational material can be distributed to regional areas.

The Constitutional Education Fund’s goal is to engage young Australians with their democratic heritage six times between the ages of eight and 18. Projects include: a national Democracy in Schools project; a First Voter Project in Queensland; a NSW Civics and Citizenship Challenge; and an Undergraduate National Essay Competition.

The First Voter Project aims to encourage first time voters to gain an enhanced awareness of the political system and develop a greater interest in Australian society.

The pilot project, to be conducted in Queensland, will seek a representative sample of 16-19 year olds who are involved in full-time education, or undertaking work and study. The final selection of participants will answer questions on political history, civic values and the democratic process with the incentive of winning cash and prizes.

The project aims to gather research data on the reasons some young Australians show limited interest in voting with a view to developing strategies to improve future outcomes.
Other relevant information and research - Overseas

In Canada, Student Vote aims to provide Canadian students with an opportunity to actively participate in a non-partisan parallel election experience during an official election period. The Student Vote project is a program supported by government education departments, non-government education bodies, Electoral Commissions from federal and provincial jurisdictions and the media.

Elections are held in schools at the same time as general federal or provincial elections. Editorials on Student Vote are published in regional daily newspapers throughout the campaign period, and results of the Student Vote Election are published in regional daily newspapers and broadcast on major television networks.

The mission of Student Vote is to provide enriching experiences, which will promote citizenship and participation among young Canadians. Individuals involved in Student Vote pledge to work with other like-minded organizations to engage young Canadians into civic and community life.

As in Canada, in the United States, there are non-school organisations which have developed programs to educate young people about democracy and democratic engagement.

‘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/).

As part of the Kids Voting USA service, ‘DoubleClick Democracy’ (see: 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/).

Committee conclusions

Active learning in schools

The committee gave careful consideration to emerging research that indicates that, to be active in democracy, people need to have early intensive and positive experiences and opportunities to achieve change or make a difference by way of engagement in any form of community or democratic activity. This may include a wide range of activities from signing a petition to volunteering or initiating a local community project.

The research from Australian studies and from other jurisdictions indicates that, to engage in formal democracy young people first need:

• to be informed citizens;
• to have skills of enquiry and communication;
• to be provided with opportunities for participation and responsible action; and
• to have a sense of personal efficacy, so that they believe they can make a difference.

However, despite many previous recommendations regarding the need for all Queensland students to experience democracy and receive effective education about representative democracy, few students currently have the opportunity to learn in this way in Queensland schools.

Changes in education, with the introduction of a preparatory year which will mean that in time students leaving school will be older, and a requirement that to age 17 students are ‘earning or learning’, provide an opportunity to ensure that all students actively learn about democracy at the time at which it is generally of most relevance to them - when they become eligible to enrol to vote.

Accordingly, the committee recommends that the Minister for Education provide all students in Queensland with an entitlement to learn about democracy, including their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how
to take action on local community issues. The committee suggests that this civics program, to be known as Active Democracy, should be mandatory for the middle and senior phases of schooling (years 6-12) and be delivered as a separate subject or integrated into existing subjects taken by all students. In addition students should be able to gain credits towards their Senior Certificate from their participation in extracurricular citizenship activities in the school or wider community.

The Active Democracy program should be supported by the creation of a Democracy Centre in Brisbane. The Democracy Centre should be established by way of a joint arrangement with the Minister for Education, the Attorney-General, the Speaker of the Queensland Parliament, Electoral Commission Queensland and the Australian Electoral Commission and located either at Parliament House or incorporated into the redevelopment of Old Government House on the Queensland University of Technology campus. The Democracy Centre should provide a major outreach program delivered via a ‘democracy bus’ to continually tour communities in rural, regional and remote Queensland. The ‘Smart State bus’ provides a model for an interactive and active learning centre which would provide a focus for engagement of the wider community as well as support school based student learning about representative democracy.

The committee has heard from young people about their concerns that schools which teach democracy should also practise democracy. Accordingly, the committee recommends that the Minister for Education require schools to practise greater democracy, to model the principles described in the Active Democracy program and to enable students to experience democracy in their lives at school. At the very least the conduct of school elections for leadership positions should model the principles that underpin state and local government elections.

In addition, the committee is conscious that, while many school students travel to Canberra to visit institutions of our Australian system of representative democracy, those experiences are not possible for other students, for reasons such as expense or difficulties in travel from regional and remote areas of Queensland. The committee recommends that the Minister for Education give consideration to providing subsidies to students from rural and regional parts of Queensland to visit Brisbane. In Brisbane, students could visit the Queensland Parliament, the proposed Democracy Centre, the Law Courts and other places relevant to learning about democracy in Queensland, such as the Brisbane City Council Chambers and the Brisbane Museum.

Parliament of Queensland

As an additional support to the Active Democracy program in schools, and to provide additional opportunities for active learning about democracy, the committee recommends a co-ordinated outreach program to be undertaken by the Parliamentary Education Services to create ‘Active Democracy in a Box’ kits with information, discussion and ideas for action for schools.

In addition, the committee recommends that young people aged 16 to 25, including those at secondary schools and universities, be provided with increased opportunities to actively learn about democracy at Parliament House.

To support Members of Parliament in their role in the Active Democracy program, the committee additionally recommends that the Queensland Parliamentary Education Services be funded to prepare:

- relevant resources to assist Members of Parliament to speak to primary, middle and senior school and TAFE students, as well as community groups; and
- a ‘toolkit’ for Members of Parliament containing ideas and strategies for engagement with young people.

Electoral Commission Queensland

In some other Australian States, under joint arrangements between the Australian Electoral Commission and the relevant State or Territory Electoral Commission, co-operative and innovative electoral education programs have been delivered. The committee recommends that in Queensland the Electoral Commission Queensland should sponsor a program of grants to schools for innovative electoral education programs under a joint agreement with the Australian Electoral Commission.

To complement the Active Democracy program of learning for students in upper secondary school or the equivalent, and to introduce the ‘habit’ of voting to students of this age, the committee recommends the introduction of a program of mock elections for the 2010 general state election. The mock elections should use the model developed by the United Kingdom and/or Canadian Electoral Commissions, and should be a joint initiative of the Electoral Commission Queensland and the Minister for Education.

The committee further suggests that, while the Electoral Commission Queensland constantly evaluates the effectiveness of its awareness and information activities, consideration should be given to:
• upgrading the Electoral Commission Queensland website to provide more accessible, interactive information for young people about enrolment and voting;
• partnering with youth organisations and networks to provide information on their websites and publications;
• using young people to liaise with schools, universities and TAFEs, workplaces and young people in Indigenous communities about enrolment and voting;
• providing, with confirmation of enrolment, an information pack about representative democracy in Queensland and how young people can be engaged; and
• support of non-partisan, informative coverage of state election campaigns and election nights, by and for young people, possibly based on the model of support provided to by the AEC to Vibewire (Vibewire.com.au) to conduct ‘Electiontracker’ during the 2004 federal election or the ‘JTV’ program on ABC2.

Non-government organisations

In Australia, non-government, non-school organisations have not, to date, played a significant role in supporting learning by young people about engagement in democracy, particularly formal democratic processes. While, with compulsory voting, Australia does not have the ‘turn-out-the vote’ concerns of jurisdictions where voting is not compulsory, the committee suggests that the adoption of such a role by non-government organisations would be welcomed in Queensland. The proposed Active Democracy program would allow such organisations to provide students with opportunities to learn about and participate in democratic engagement.
7 - Electoral reform

Voting age

Existing law

The Electoral Act 1992 (Qld) provides that those ‘entitled to vote’ are, generally, people who:

- are 18 years of age and over;
- are Australian citizens; and
- have lived in a Queensland electoral district for at least one month.

In the Voices & Votes response form, the committee noted that the minimum voting age in other countries ranges from 15 to 21 and, internationally, there is no uniform minimum voting age. While international law recognises a right to vote (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 25(b)), it does not recognise that that right commences at a given age. The United Nations Committee on Human Rights has stated that, ‘The right to vote at elections and referenda must be established by law and may be subject only to reasonable restrictions, such as setting a minimum age limit for the right to vote’ (General Comment No.25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service).

Article 12(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child may be relevant to the setting of a minimum age limit for the right to vote. It requires that State parties ‘shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’. A ‘child’ is defined in Article 1 of the Convention to be ‘every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier’.

Issues

The Voices & Votes response form invited young people to discuss, and advise the committee on the following issues:

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

The Voices & Votes response form referred to research which indicated that the introduction of compulsory voting in Australia had effected a 23% overall increase in voting (Milner 2002).

Appendix B to the Voices & Votes discussion paper set out the minimum ages set by law for other activities.

Evidence to the committee inquiry

In the on-line and paper polls, respondents were asked: Should the voting age be lowered from 18 to 16? The responses are represented below.

On-line Poll

| YES       | 32% |
| NO        | 68% |

Paper Poll

| YES       | 31% |
| NO        | 69% |

At Voices & Votes workshops, young people discussed with committee members their views about whether the voting age should be lowered.
### About raising the voting age
- to 20, or 21 and over, more mature, have a better understanding about the world and politics, more aware and informed in decision-making

### About non-compulsory / voluntary voting
- voluntary from the age of 16 - 20, 16 - 18, or 18 - 20, enrol to vote at 18 but have a choice whether to vote until 25 then compulsory

### Other suggestions
- must have a licence to vote, if you’re responsible enough to drive you should be able to vote, school leaving age should be raised and there should be compulsory citizenship education including enrolment and voting, voting age shouldn’t be lowered but something else should be put in place to involve youth and hear their ideas, eg youth should be able to vote on things that affect them directly, eg school, working age, etc, could have a ‘youth vote’ as a poll or survey even if it’s not counted

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**Submissions** received by the committee indicated a diversity of views on a reduction in the voting age.

**Cr Aidan McLindon:**

I believe we should make it legal for people at the age of 16 years old to be eligible to vote in all local, state and federal elections. This will allow discussions to take place in Year 11 and 12 on our political system and encourage young people to take an interest through an increased awareness of politics.

It will also make candidates from all parties to take into account a new demographic in the voting world and there having to embrace and include youth issues.

**Arthur Stanley, 18:**

I think it should be 20 years to vote.

**Jarrad Keskinen, 14:**

I think it should stay at 18.

**Albert Donamce, 16:**

No, because you’re not old enough to make a voting decision.

**Kiesha Coghill, 15:**

I don’t think it should be brought down because it is too young and people are still making their mind up about their future after school.

**Katrina Osborne, 16:**

I think it should be kept the same because lowering it would give more responsibility to a 16 year old who wouldn’t want that.

**Shannah McKellar, 16:**

I think it should be kept the same because 16 is too young to vote.

**Malcolm Nelson, 15:**

I think they should keep the voting age the same.

**Kayla Farlow, 15:**

I think it should be optional for younger people (16-17) and compulsory for people over 18.

**Lachlan Madden, 16:**

We are classed as teens till 18 years of age. Leave it.

**Albert Donamce, 16:**
No [don’t lower the voting age], because you’re not old enough to make a voting decision.

Anonymous, 14:
Lower the age but don’t make it compulsory.

Keiren Limpus, 14:
We should be able to enrol whenever after 16 but before 18.

Inspire Foundation:
Young people suggested that people aged 16 and 17 should have optional voting rights and compulsory voting should be left at 18.

YAC:
YAC supports the lowering of the voting age to 16 years of age and supports the view that voting between the ages of 16 and 18 year of age should not be compulsory. Young people’s issues are often ignored by the broader political agenda. This may be attributable to a lack of young people’s voices in the political process. By including 16 to 18 year olds in the electoral system, young people’s issues are more visible to governments and politicians. The right to vote is also an important mechanism by which society formally acknowledges citizenhood. Extending the right to vote to the age of 16 sends an important message to young people that their experiences and perspectives are valued.

Changing the law to reduce the voting age is an opportunity to be a more inclusive and participatory society. Young people should be involved in the decision that impact upon them.

UQ government students:
Other less frequently cited solutions to the problem of engaging youth were changing the voting age either to 16, or even 15, with one suggestion that voting at this age should be voluntary. Two students canvassed raising the voting age to 21 and 20.

Legal Aid Queensland:
We note that the voting age was last lowered in 1973. We submit that the legal responsibilities of young people have changed considerably since that time and that young people are now more likely to be directly affected by government policy.

We acknowledge that not all young people would necessarily be interested in voting at a younger age, but that many would have good reason to be interested. We note that responsibilities start earlier than a young person’s eighteenth birthday. A young person may have left school and be working and paying taxes. Alternatively, a young person may be studying full-time, but engaged in political activity. In our submission, it is also highly relevant to note that young people in Queensland are considered criminally responsible as adults from the age of 17, and are sent to adult prison from this age.

In short, young people are directly affected by government policy on a variety of issues including social security, education, the environment and the legal system.

Therefore, we submit that it may be appropriate to extend non-compulsory voting to young people aged 16 to 18. At a minimum, we submit that the government should continue to monitor public opinion on this issue.

Hon Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety:
Young people felt that the voting age should not be lowered because they believe young people need to be mature enough to be informed when they vote. For them, this means that young people need to be able to understand the issues, and know what they are voting about.

YANQ:
Young people from 16 years of age upwards should have the (voluntary) right to vote.

Despite being treated as adults in other important areas, sixteen and seventeen year olds in Queensland have no political say.

In a society like ours, voting in elections is the major way most people take part in the political process. There are other methods, of course.

But the efforts of young people under 18 can be largely ignored because politicians know that they’re not losing votes by ignoring issues that are important to those young people. So the right to vote is a very
important part of living in a democracy. Perhaps if 16 year olds had the right to vote, politicians wouldn’t be so quick to jump to the youth-bashing “law and order” agenda every time an election loomed.

If we can ask young people to die for their country, allow them to take civil actions, or expect them to be legally responsible for their actions and the effect they have on others, it is unreasonable to deny them a vote in who governs. It is time therefore to lower the voluntary voting age to 16, with the compulsory voting age remaining at 18.

Don Willis:

…the franchise is the primary and most tangible way for citizens to be involved in the democratic process and for them to exercise their political sovereignty.

If the voting age was ever lowered it would still be essential for voting at the lowered age to be compulsory. Not only is this because of the benefits of compulsory voting which are not apparent under voluntary voting, but also because making voting voluntary for 16 or 17 year olds could cause them to be confused about whether or not they were subject to compulsory voting requirements once they attained the age of 18.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

The Commission would welcome further research and discussion on this issue prior to forming an opinion in regard to lowering the voting age. In addition, the Commission recommends that research and discussions take place at a national level in regard to this issue. The Commission recommends that young people be consulted as part of any future discussions.

In 2005, the members of two Youth Parliaments held at Parliament House in Brisbane and a third Youth Parliament held in Rockhampton debated the Electoral (Voting Age) Amendment Bill. This was a mock bill to amend the Electoral Act 1992 (Qld) to lower the voting age to 16 years of age. At each of the three Youth Parliaments, the bill was defeated along party lines. In each case, a subsequent informal vote of the young Members of Parliament on the proposed initiative indicated that a majority did not support the lowering of the voting age from 18 years.

Other relevant information and research - Australia

Private Member’s bill - New South Wales

In 2005, a private member’s bill introduced into the New South Wales Parliament sought to lower the voting age. The bill was defeated. The Hon. Ian Cohen MLC described the intended effect of the bill:

The bill will qualify 16-year-olds to vote in parliamentary elections. However, voting for 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds is not to be compulsory. Whereas at present provisional enrolment of persons can occur at the age of 17 years, the bill will provide for the provisional enrolment of persons from 15 years of age. The bill will not confer a right or privilege other than the entitlement to vote at an election, impose an obligation or liability or qualify a person to hold a position or exercise a power upon persons under 18 years of age.

(Legislative Council Hansard, 21 June 2005.)

Consideration was given to the bill by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee of the New South Wales Parliament’s Legislative Council (see: www.parliament.nsw.gov.au).

In New South Wales and other Australian jurisdictions, other private Member’s bills introduced to lower the voting age have similarly been defeated.

NYARS 2000

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 (61%) 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).

Australian Democrats Youth Poll 2005

Respondents to the Youth Poll 2005 were asked, Should the voting age be lowered to 16? Three-quarters of respondents to the poll do not believe that the voting age should be lowered - similar to results from previous Youth Polls.
Other relevant information and research - Overseas

United Kingdom

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.

Canada

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL 2006) has observed that the possibility of lowering the voting age often makes its way into the public discourse, and suggested that it was a reform that should be given consideration:

*Mark N. Franklin has argued that reducing the voting age to 16 would provide young citizens with their first opportunity to vote at a less unsettled time in their lives, when they are more open to the influence of teachers and parents who may encourage them to vote. Since people’s response to their first opportunity to vote often sets a lasting pattern, this question merits further study.*

Committee Conclusions

Questions regarding the lowering of the voting age were central to the *Voices & Votes* inquiry.

During the term of the inquiry, however, the committee has heard a range of different responses to questions regarding the lowering of the voting age. There has been no clear consensus from young people on any of the relevant questions.

On the one hand, the committee has heard views similar to the suggestion to the *Voices & Votes* youth jury by Dr Peter Chen that ‘what gets measured is valid’; that is, if young people’s views and concerns are to be taken seriously and represented in our democratic system, young people must vote for our elected representatives. On the other, many young people told the committee that they did not feel that they knew enough to cast an informed vote at an earlier age, and that they had so many other new responsibilities in their lives at ages 16 and 17 that an additional responsibility to vote should not be imposed.

In the absence of strong support for electoral reform in this area, the committee recommends that, in Queensland at this time, the voting age should remain at 18.

However, the committee notes that this is an issue which could be revisited by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee at a later time. In this context, the committee is aware that other recommendations made in this *Voices & Votes* report, if implemented by the Queensland Government:

- might lead to a change in the level of support for the voting age to be lowered;
- will ensure the availability of greater and more reliable data about the engagement of young people in formal democratic processes, including the electoral process; and
- will increase the confidence and readiness of young people to engage in formal democratic processes.

Enrolment

Existing law

In its *Voices & Votes* discussion paper, the committee provided the following information:

An ‘eligible person’ must enrol to vote in federal, state and local government elections. An eligible person who fails to enrol without a valid and sufficient excuse commits an offence.

An ‘eligible person’ is a person who 18 years of age or older and an Australian citizen. Certain people (e.g. people of unsound mind who are incapable of understanding the nature and significance of enrolment and voting and people who serving a sentence of 3 years or longer for an offence) are not entitled to be placed or retained on an electoral roll.

To be eligible to enrol, a person must also have lived in an electoral district for at least a month.

A person may enrol as a provisional voter from the age of 17. This enrolment takes effect when the person turns 18. (More information is available at: [www.ecq.qld.gov.au](http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au))
In relation to an ‘eligible person’ in Queensland, the electoral roll is jointly maintained by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and the Electoral Commission Queensland (ECQ). This means that an elector is only required to complete one form to enrol for Federal, State and local government elections. The AEC is responsible for maintaining up-to-date electoral rolls for these elections. When an enrolment form, or a change of enrolment details form, has been received, it is processed by the AEC. The AEC then sends the voter an acknowledgment card to advise him or her of the respective electoral divisions she/he is enrolled in. Legislative recognition of this arrangement is reflected in the *Electoral Act 1992* (Qld) (section 62) and in Part VI of the *Electoral Act 1918* (Cth).

The AEC processes information from enrolment forms and enters it onto a computerised data base. This data is then made available to other electoral authorities to produce rolls for state and local government elections and by-elections as required.

Previously people seeking to enrol to vote, or to transfer their enrolment, were required to complete and submit a signed electoral form witnessed by an elector or a person entitled to enrolment. Recent reforms by the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006* (Cth) mean that, in future, an applicant for enrolment must provide documentary evidence of his/her name by providing his/her driver’s licence number, or if the applicant does not have a driver’s licence, he/she must show to an elector in a prescribed class of electors a prescribed kind of identification document, or alternatively, have the application countersigned by two electors who have known the applicant for at least one month and can confirm his/her name (see s98AA *Electoral Act* (Cth)).

**Issues**

The *Voices & Votes* response form asked young people to discuss two issues regarding enrolment:

- How could the ECQ make it easier for young people to enrol and become registered to vote?
- Do you think young people could be disadvantaged if there was no opportunity to enrol after an election is called?

The wider issue of enrolment is considered below within two areas: A. enrolment process; and B. close of rolls.

**A. Enrolment process**

**Evidence to committee inquiry**

**Submissions** to the *Voices & Votes* inquiry suggested to the committee ways in which the rate of enrolment by young people might be increased.

**Rebecca Leeks, 22:**

Get neighbours to run a story where the high school students are enrolling to vote or actually voting when they’re 18 and excited about it.

**Reece Pianta, 18:**

Have ‘enrol to vote days’ at universities and in schools where the ECQ goes to the location assists young people with completing forms and then takes the forms away and processes them. This way it becomes far easier for young people register as it is virtually effortless.

**UQ government students:**

Triple J was applauded by a number of students for encouraging enrolment. Other ideas were to make voter registration forms available at high schools, universities, Centrelink and at youth group venues. Students approved receiving registration forms on their 17th birthday, with their OP results or by ticking a box when they got their driver’s licence.

**Inspire Foundation:**

Online registration. Allow the form to be completed and sent over the net rather than just by hand as many more young people now are using computers on a daily basis to complete their homework as well as chat to their friends and visit their favourite websites.

Link ECQ site to other popular sites (such as www.actnow.com.au) that young people visit often and make it appealing to someone who doesn’t want to read an essay on how to apply.

Ensure that eligibility to vote information is clear and easy to understand.
Have devoted days at schools to where mass enrolling to vote can occur for grade 12 high school students.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

The Commission considers that Education Queensland, schools and universities play a crucial role in promoting and raising awareness amongst young people in terms of enrolling to vote and also the ability to enrol provisionally from the age 17. The Commission considers that provisional enrolment is not widely known or advertised and is therefore not accessed by many young people.

Darren Kruck, 24:

Is it available online?

Eryn Fox, 15:

It would be easier if students’ names could be automatically added to the enrolment list at the completion of school as many young people don’t want to do it themselves.

Emily Fox, 15:

A number of students leave school between the age of 15 - 16 years because of employment, traineeships and apprenticeships. A system to remind school leavers and contact them with information could be registered when they lodge a TFN form with their employer to encourage enrolment.

Brett Mansfield:

There isn’t really an easier way, unless people go on the role automatically and thus have to vote when they become of age.

Anna Wells, 14:

Make more flexible ways to enrol, online, at schools, provide information on billboards, or pamphlets located at supermarkets, and other key places young people go often.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

Should automatic enrolling be introduced, the Commission recommends further consideration of the issue of young people being fined for not voting. For example a young person may be unaware that they have been automatically enrolled to vote and may face a subsequent fine, which may financially disadvantage the young person. In addition consideration is required if a young person does not pay the fine. The Commission would not support a system in which young people may unnecessarily come into contact with the judicial system.

Furthermore, the Commission notes the strategy mentioned in the discussion paper of identifying young people through tax office and motor vehicle registration papers. The Commission considers this a viable process to help support young people enrol to vote. In addition, the Commission recommends that young people could be automatically registered as part of their driver’s licence application.

The Commission notes that automatic voting registration may not engage all young people, as some young people are unemployed and do not have the ability to own or register a motor vehicle. There are also a number of homeless young people without fixed addresses that may find it difficult to register to vote. The Commission recommends that the ECQ look at accepting differing forms of identification for young people registering to vote. There will be a number of disadvantaged young people who will sit outside of many of the strategies designed to engage the majority of young people. The ability to access and support ‘at risk’ young people will require careful consideration by the ECQ when developing strategies to engage all young people in the democratic process.

Legal Aid Queensland:

We submit that the primary factors affecting young people’s motivation and decision to enrol are awareness and accessibility.

Any measures to increase young people’s awareness of the process of enrolment and their eligibility for enrolment should be explored. It is recommended that innovative and creative media campaigns be funded to engage and prompt young people in taking an interest in participating in this process.

Voter registration through ECQ liaison with Education Queensland, the Australian Taxation Office and Queensland Transport could be an efficient way of capturing the attention of young people. This could take the form of reminders to vote at school, upon lodging tax returns and upon obtaining/renewing driver’s licenses. To explore this proposition even further, it could be argued that young people be automatically
registered upon reaching voting age, although obtaining correct electoral information for this process could be difficult without liaison with other government agencies.

Finally, it must be added that young people need to be aware of the potential for them to enrol provisionally from the age of 17. We submit that provisional enrolment is not widely known and is an important factor in encouraging young people to vote.

Anonymous:
People should be automatically enrolled.

Henry, 17:
When the person turns 17.5 a letter is sent to you by the Government with all the relevant information to vote.

Richard, 17:
When we turn 18 we should automatically go on the electoral roll.

At Voices & Votes workshops, young people were asked: Should enrolment be automatic (i.e. done by the government) once you reach the relevant age? Young people provided committee members with their advice:

| Yes | - many young people are unsure of how to enrol, less hassle for the individual, everyone will be enrolled, compulsory voting should require automatic enrolment |
| No  | - goes against freedom of choice and speech |
| Suggested ways to achieve automatic enrolment | - being contacted by the government to alert upcoming 18 year olds saves time and worry, when you apply for your learners licence, through schools in grade 11 |
| Other comments | - Voting for one person doesn’t give us the chance to give our view on policies, eg anti terror laws, should be able to vote directly for who you want to be Prime Minister, voting should be issues based |

The Voices & Votes youth jury, made several recommendations of relevance to enrolment. They were for:

- Enrolment, via ticking a box, on forms such as those for a drivers’ licence, 18+ card, Australian citizenship, tax file number or Centrelink benefit.
- An information pack for young people on enrolment.
- An enrolment and democracy van to visit schools and other places where young people are, including Schoolies’ Week, possibly with incentives to enrol.

Although the committee requested information about the feasibility of the ‘tick-a-box’ youth jury recommendation from the Australian Electoral Commission, the Electoral Commission Queensland and the Minister for Transport, the committee did not receive clear information about the practicality of the ‘tick-a-box’ to be enrolled option.

Other relevant information and research - Australia

Australian Democrats Youth Poll 2005

Respondents to the Youth Poll 2005 were asked, If you’re 18, are you registered to vote? Of those eligible to vote, 87% of respondents advised that they were on the electoral roll. This was a significant increase on the response to the same question in to Youth Poll 2004 (60%). It was suggested that the increase might be ‘due to last year’s Federal Election’.

The committee notes that the Youth Poll 2005 also reported that ‘Few young people are aware they can register on the electoral roll at age 17.’

Other relevant information and research - Overseas
Enrolment options

Research papers by CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org) indicate that, in the United States:

*States that allow Election Day registration, on average, have youth voter turnout rates that are 14 percentage points higher, and they are more likely to be contacted by a political candidate.*

*Three of the top five states for youth voting in 2000 allowed Election Day registration.*

*Other state laws that seem to increase youth voting are: early voting at convenient locations and voter registration at state motor vehicle agencies.*

*In states that mailed sample ballots & information about polling places and extended polling place hours, youth turnout increased by about 10 percentage points.*

Enrolment on election day

In Canada people are able to enrol at a polling station on election day. In New Zealand, the roll closes on the day prior to election day.

Automatic enrolment

In other countries, registration is done by the government so that people are automatically registered when they reach voting age. An international report by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (1999), *Youth Voter Participation*, suggested automatic registration by the government rather than it being a duty of each person to enrol.

Enrolment via drivers’ licence forms

The United States Congress has enacted the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (also known as the ‘Motor Voter Act’) to enhance voting opportunities. That Act requires States to (in addition to any other methods of voter registration they offer) give their citizens the chance to register to vote for federal elections when they apply for, or seek to renew, a driver’s licence. The Act further requires that states must offer voter registration opportunities at all offices that provide public assistance and all offices providing state-funded service-programs for people with disabilities. Each state must also designate additional offices within the state (eg. public libraries, public schools, government bureaus, tax offices, welfare offices etc) as voter registration agencies. Citizens may also register to vote by mailing in a completed application for registration form.

The NVRA became effective in many states on 1 January 1995. It has been reported that 28 million new voters have registered to vote since 1995 because of the National Voter Registration Act (www.civicyouth.org).

Committee conclusions

The committee is conscious that, while many young people believe that it is important to enrol to vote, enrolment is just one of the many requirements imposed on people aged 17 and 18. The fact that many young people presently enrol once an election is called may indicate both a desire to have the opportunity to vote and also that many young people do not take steps to ensure that opportunity until they have to vote.

Since 1914, it has been compulsory in Queensland for eligible electors to vote. The committee is of the view that, if it is compulsory to vote, eligible electors should automatically be enrolled on the electoral roll once they become eligible to enrol - in most cases, this is when young people turn 17 and are entitled to be provisionally enrolled. Such ‘direct’ enrolment’ would mean that young people’s electoral citizenship would be automatically recognised.

Accordingly, the committee recommends that the Attorney-General amend the *Electoral Act 1992* (Qld) to provide for the direct (automatic) provisional enrolment of all eligible electors once they reach 17 years of age.

The committee recognises, however, that it is unlikely that universal direct enrolment of all 17 year olds could be implemented immediately. While Queensland databases might identify certain groups of young people of that age, such as school students or TAFE students, these databases would not include all relevant young people. Therefore, the committee recommends that, until such time as direct enrolment of almost all 17 year olds is possible, certain interim measures be adopted.
The committee recommends that the Electoral Commissioner should:

- request that the Minister for Transport include on all drivers’ licence application, renewal and change of address forms, a box which may be ticked to indicate consent for the applicant’s details to be forwarded to the Electoral Commission Queensland which will then send the applicant an electoral enrolment form;
- arrange for electoral enrolment forms to be available in a wider range of locations such as supermarkets, libraries and local government offices; and
- renegotiate existing arrangements with the Australian Electoral Commission to ensure that senior secondary school students, TAFE institutions, universities and workplaces with large numbers of young employees receive visits from either AEC or ECQ officers to provide young people with an opportunity to complete enrolment forms.

In addition, the committee recommends that the Minister for Education ensure that secondary schools and other educational institutions with students aged 16 to 18 assist AEC and ECQ officers visiting schools to enrol students.

Finally, as interim measures, the committee recommends that the Minister for Education require provisional enrolment as a prerequisite for a Senior Certificate, QTAC and TAFE results; and that the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice request of the Federal Treasurer and Minister for Social Services respectively that enrolment be a prerequisite to the issue of a taxfile number and Centrelink payments.

Of particular concern regarding enrolment by people once they turn 17 or 18 is the amendment to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006 (Cth) to require additional proof of identity prior to enrolment. The committee notes the significant statements of concern about this aspect of recent amendments to the Commonwealth electoral legislation made by many electoral law academics and human rights law academicians.

In the context of the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee has heard that many young Queenslanders aged 17 and 18 have limited proof of identity. Accordingly, the ability of young people to enrol will be significantly affected. However, the committee has also heard from young people that the enrolment process should be made easier for them, not more onerous. Accordingly, the committee has recommended the adoption of direct enrolment in Queensland, as discussed above. Until such time as direct enrolment can be implemented, the committee recommends that, regarding new requirements for proof of identity on enrolment, in relation to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006 (Cth), the Attorney-General should:

- advise the federal Special Minister of State of the difficulty many young people may have in producing sufficient proof of identity to enrol and request that the federal Special Minister of State consult with State Attorneys-General regarding the drafting of regulations under the Act; and
- request that the federal Special Minister of State monitor the impact of the Act, and conduct a review of the Act after two federal elections.

### B. Close of rolls

#### Existing law

The ‘close of rolls’ refers to the time by which voters must enrol or change their enrolment details prior to an election. In Queensland, the electoral roll is closed a minimum of five days after the ‘issue of the writs’ to commence the election period before the rolls are closed.

Recent amendments to the Electoral Act 1913 (Cth) effected by the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006 (Cth) provide for electoral rolls for federal elections to close:

- at 8pm three days after the ‘issue of the writs’ for those needing to update their details; and
- at 8pm on the day of the issue of the writs for new enrolments.

Prior to the relevant amendment to the Electoral Act, voters had a week after the election writs were issued to enrol or to change their enrolment details. In the seven days after the writ was issued for the 2004 federal election, 78 000 people enrolled for the first time and 345 000 updated their details. Following the close of the rolls for that election, a further 150 000 attempted to enrol.
Figure 8: Enrolment between issue of writs and close of the electoral rolls-1995, 1998, 2001, 2004 state elections

Issues

The Voices & Votes response form asked young people to discuss and respond to the following question:

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

Evidence to committee inquiry

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry expressed significant concern regarding the close of the electoral roll once an election is called.

Rebecca Leeks, 22:

If they close enrolling earlier, this would definitely be unfair towards young people.

Brett Mansfield:

Some young people wouldn’t even think about it. They have no interest in voting. Others wouldn’t think about it until the election and so they would be disadvantaged.

Anna Wells, 14:

I think that people are not aware of those sorts of details, so they are disadvantaged. Also, what if they don’t listen/read media sources. Then they could not know there’s an election until it’s too late to enrol.

Inspire Foundation:

Young people at the Inspire Foundation felt that closing the rolls up to a week in advance disadvantaged young people. In addition to leaving rolls open for longer, young people believe that having online registration would make enrolment easier for first time voters.

Often times young people work whenever they can get work and sometimes that means working up to or more than 10 days straight. Therefore if they can enroll on the net it would be a much more viable option for many young people.

If young people are restricted, simply because they have not thought about enrolling before an election is called, and realise on the day of the announcement that they need to enroll, but aren’t given the opportunity, they will be severely disadvantaged. Not to mention pissed off if they get a fine.

E/Professor Colin Hughes:

Sudden closing of the roll prior to a federal election with the effect of preventing many thousands of potential young voters from enrolling is certain to discourage participation substantially.
Legal Aid Queensland:

In addition, the critical factor in motivating young people, and raising young people’s awareness of the need to enrol is an election. We therefore submit that campaigns targeting young people must be boosted at this time and the time permitted before closing electoral rolls should be extended to ensure young people are not disadvantaged.

There is no question that young people would be disadvantaged by closing the rolls immediately after an election is called. As has been stated earlier, when it is considered that most young people enrolling would be first-time voters, it is unsurprising that the announcement of an election is considered a key trigger in encouraging young people to enrol.

We submit that if anything, the time allowed to register to vote should be extended.

We note that Special Minister of State, Eric Abetz, has recently made a speech to the Sydney Institute proposing that the Electoral Roll be closed immediately upon calling an election. We submit that this change would drastically disadvantage young people from registering to vote. Minister Abetz argues that disadvantage to young people would not occur because young people do not overwhelmingly favour one political party over another. We submit that this argument ignores the importance of getting young people to enrol and become involved in the political process, regardless of which party they may vote for.

A further issue of concern is the negative impact that a refusal of enrolment may have on a young person’s willingness to engage in future political participation. If a young person eagerly attempts to enrol before an election, but is told that they will not be eligible to vote due to close of the rolls, it is likely that they will become disillusioned with the process. We submit that all attempts by young people to engage in the political process should be encouraged.

Other relevant information and research - Australia

The Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters’ Report on the 2001 federal election (JSCEM 2002) recommended against any change in the close of the rolls period. In the JSCEM Report on the 2004 federal election (JSCEM 2005) that committee split on the issue with the majority recommending that the rolls be closed early. A committee majority took the view that ‘whilst acknowledging the efforts made by the AEC in attempting to ensure that the electoral roll is updated with integrity during the close of the rolls period, the committee considers that the volume of transactions which takes place during that period limits the AEC’s ability to conduct the thorough and appropriate checks required to ensure that integrity’. A committee minority took the opposite view, referring to the Australian Electoral Commission’s suggestion that the seven day close of rolls period be retained.

Committee conclusions

During the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee has heard that young people feel that they would be disadvantaged if there were no opportunity to enrol once a general state election was called. The committee recommends that there be no change to the present arrangements which allows people a minimum of five days after the issue of the writs for an election to enrol and to update their enrolment details.

Under the joint roll arrangements between the ECQ and the AEC, the amendments to the Federal electoral legislation to require additional proof of identity will apply to Queensland people. This more onerous requirement may mean that, to enrol, young people will have to ensure they possess sufficient proof of identity. This may take some time. Accordingly, the committee believes it important that:

- the present Queensland arrangements regarding the close of rolls following the issue of the writs for a state general election remain; and
- activities to maximise enrolment, discussed above, be directed to ensuring young people have many opportunities to enrol.

Electoral system

Existing law

In Queensland, a system of optional preferential voting is used to elect Members of parliament for 89 single member electorates. A fact sheet about ‘OPV’ is available from: www.ecq.qld.gov.au.
Issues

The Voices & Votes response form invited young people to discuss the following ‘new idea’ from the United Kingdom:

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.

The Voices & Votes response form then asked young people to discuss and respond to the following question:

• 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?

Evidence to committee inquiry

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry discussed possible reform to the electoral system.

Brett Mansfield:
Proportional representative voting sounds good. It needs to be fairer so that minor parties have more of a chance, because they are more tuned into the people of Australia and are more likely to represent the voice of the people.

Don Willis:
...there would be great merit in consideration being given to the adoption of voting system whereby a broader cross section of community views could be represented in the Parliament.

The Response Form pointed out that in Queensland a system of optional preferential voting is used. Of this system concern has been expressed that not only does it risk becoming a de facto first-past-the-post voting system in which an elected member may not be able to claim the majority of the overall vote, but also, “if voters simply follow party instructions to vote for one candidate and out of ignorance or unfamiliarity do not allocate preferences, then if their votes exhaust this could be a denial of a true democratic outcome”. The reality is, as the Response Form notes, that the current voting system in Queensland makes it very difficult for minority views to achieve representation in the Parliament.

Proportional representation appears to offer a voting system in which a more diverse range of views may be able to be represented in the Parliament.

Doing so may help to encourage young people to become willing to engage in the democratic process if they can see that their views can be given a real voice in the Parliament.

YANQ:

Besides executive domination of the Parliament, another problem with our current system of voting is the exclusion of minorities from parliament. This is particularly the case for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. 15% of the Australian population were born in non-English speaking countries, yet they are consistently under-represented in our parliaments.

There are a number of solutions to this problem. One solution favoured by YANQ is to introduce a system of proportional representation, such that the make up of Parliament more closely resembles the preferences of the population. Queensland’s electorate based, first-past-the-post system makes it difficult for minor parties or independents to gain seats, despite being supported by significant numbers of voters. This system also can result in parties gaining total control of the parliament, without gaining a majority of votes. The current Legislative assembly is dominated by the Labor Party which holds almost 71% of the seats (63 out of 89), yet it only received 47% of the primary vote.

A proportional voting system would make it easier for minor parties to be represented and thus reinforce the need to build and maintain coalitions. This would enrich parliamentary debates by introducing a diverse range of voices and allow more citizens to feel that, at the very least, their concerns were heard in the State’s primary decision making forum, the Parliament.
Our democratic institutions need reforming to address sources of mistrust among the public... Queensland needs to introduce a system of proportional representation within the Legislative Assembly.

An almost fundamental condition for democracy is a relatively equal citizenry. Aristotle, for instance argued that a good society would be characterised by a democratic State run for and by a free and equal citizenry. He also argued that in addition to being democratic, the State must also provide “lasting prosperity to the poor by distribution of public revenues”. His point being that relative equality of outcome was vital for democracy, as the persistent existence of an underclass would threaten the stability of society.

During the past several years in Australia there has been growing concern among many that, despite a sustained period of economic growth (as measured by Gross Domestic Product), Australia is a more unequal society with too many people living below the poverty line.

Legal Aid Queensland: We submit that the critical factor on this issue is ensuring a level of consistency between voting practice at a state and federal level. As inexperienced voters, it is highly likely that young people would be easily confused by the varying requirements at a state and federal level.

That said, we again acknowledge that this is a change that would have far-reaching political ramifications.

Anonymous: If the voting system was changed it would give younger voters a wider range of electoral opportunities.

Other relevant information and research

In a paper for the Canadian Institute of Public Policy, Milner (2005) contends that, ‘All things being equal, voters are likely to be better informed under PR [proportional representation] than under FPTP [first-past-the-post].’ Milner makes reference also to the finding in the International IDEA report on Youth Voter Participation (1999, page 30) that in countries using PR systems, the average youth turnout rate was estimated to be almost 12% higher than in non-PR countries.

Committee conclusions

The committee has commenced an inquiry which will include consideration of whether the current Queensland electoral system appropriately provides for the election of people who represent the diversity of the people of Queensland. This inquiry, entitled Inquiry into Certain Contemporary Electoral Issues, is currently listed on the Parliamentary Notice Paper.

Soon after the tabling of this Voices & Votes report, the committee will issue a discussion paper for the Inquiry into Certain Contemporary Electoral Issues. The discussion paper will invite discussion and response to the committee on issues including the merits change to another electoral system, such as proportional representation or mixed-member proportional voting for the election of the Members of the Queensland Parliament and/or local authorities.

Fixed election date

Existing law

In Queensland, there is no fixed election day for state elections. The Premier may advise the Governor to dissolve the Legislative Assembly at any time during the parliamentary term in order to hold a general election.

Under the Constitution of Queensland 2001, the Queensland Legislative Assembly is elected for a parliamentary term of three years in duration, but the Legislative Assembly may be dissolved sooner by the Governor (s16 Constitution of Queensland, s2 Constitution Act Amendment Act 1890 (Qld)). As the relevant section is an ‘entrenched’ provision (see s4 Constitution Act Amendment Act 1934 (Qld)), a referendum in specific terms would need to be carried for there to be a change to a fixed term. In 1991 a referendum held to increase the term of a Queensland Parliament to four years, with no fixed minimum period, was narrowly defeated.

Queensland is the only state legislature with a three year term, as all other States have four year terms. Some states have their election dates fixed. In November, for example, Victorians will vote in the first fixed-date general election in that State.
In Queensland, elections for all local government authorities are generally held every four years on the last Saturday in March.

**Issues**

The *Voices & Votes* response form noted that a fixed election day might assist with planning of civics education activities.

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.

In the *Voices & Votes* response form, the committee then asked young people to discuss, in the context of effective education about democracy, the issue of a fixed election date:

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

**Evidence to committee inquiry**

Submissions to the *Voices & Votes* inquiry discussed whether the election date should be fixed.

**Reece Pianta, 18:**

*Yes fixed dates would not only allow a higher level of practical civics education but also improve perceived government accountability.*

**Darren Kruck, 24:**

*Yes, but not only that, it also gives both the government in power, and the opposition a chance to plan their office from election to election, thereby giving even more opportunity to have measurable election promise outcomes.*

**Erynn Fox, 15:**

*If the elections were in a fixed term, political parties and politicians could spend more time presenting their policies and being involved in the education process with rural areas and young voters.*

**Emily Fox, 15:**

*Holiday and special event dates are remembered by most people, if a fixed date for elections was included in the education process and early awareness courses, this date would be seen as important by young people and voters.*

**Don Willis:**

*I do not agree that fixed election dates will necessarily facilitate an increased interest by young people to be involved in the political process. None of the reasons given on page 3 of the Discussion Paper indicate a link between young people’s disinterest in political participation and the lack of a fixed parliamentary term. In any even, I do not think it is realistic to suggest that the current maximum three-year parliamentary term inhibits educational institutions from providing instruction and learning opportunities in democracy and civics education.*

**E/Professor Colin Hughes:**

*...[A]n election that officially lasts only a month can make it harder to do the on-the-ground organizing that has become so critical to American democracy. ‘In an election where they call it 30 days ahead of time, the system works against building citizen involvement,’ says Joe Tripodi, an American political consultant who has advised the Labour campaign and who worked for Howard Dean. (NYT, 1/5/05)*

**Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:**

*The Commission considers that fixed election dates may support young people to form voting habits from a young age. If young people were taught civics education in schools and given the opportunity to participate in mock elections which coincided with real elections, this may encourage young people to understand and acknowledge the election process and actively encourage them to participate in the voting process as young adults. The fixed election dates and the involvement of the education department, parents and schools in promoting the importance of participating in the voting process may encourage young people to maintain their participation in future elections.*
Inspire Foundation:

I think fixed terms are an excellent idea. Currently the government's are in power for around 2 and half years, how does that achieve anything for the wider community. A fixed term holds the government accountable to election promises and to deadlines for implementing reforms and change.

Others pointed out that the period during which an election is called and the date it is held can be confusing. A fixed election day would help ensure that all people knew when they would need to vote (and would also help clarify by when they need to enrol).

Legal Aid Queensland:

A fixed election day would be invaluable in allowing clear education to young people on the electoral process. It would be far easier for young people to remember when to vote and when they would need to enrol by if elections were held on a fixed day. That said, we acknowledge that this is a change that would have far reaching political ramifications.

Other relevant information and research

In 2004, following a request from the then Premier and Minister for Trade, the committee undertook a limited examination of the issues surrounding four year parliamentary terms, following extensive review of the issue in 2000 by the committee of the 49th Parliament.

In 2004, the committee sought the view of each registered political party represented in the Queensland Parliament and each Independent Member of Parliament on support for one of three models:

- Model 1: Four year terms with no fixed minimum term (the model rejected at the 1991 referendum).
- Model 2: Four year terms with a fixed three year minimum term (as recommended by the Queensland Constitutional Review Commission and endorsed by the previous LCARC).
- Model 3: Four year terms with a fixed election date (as occurs in New South Wales and at the local government level in Queensland but not previously considered by the committee)

The committee noted in the letter to political parties and Independents that the Electoral Commissioner Queensland had estimated that the cost of holding a stand-alone referendum would be $9 662 730.

By way of a letter dated 19 September 2004, the committee provided the following advice to the Premier:

As indicated in our correspondence to you of 21 April 2004, the committee has sought the view of each political party represented in the Queensland Parliament and each Independent member of the Queensland Parliament on the question of four year parliamentary terms.

In summary, there are varying degrees of support for four year fixed parliamentary terms from independent members and all political parties except for the One Nation Party.

On 18 October 2005, the Premier wrote to the committee to advise that he intended to write to the Prime Minister for permission to approach the Governor-General to hold a referendum on the issue of four year parliamentary terms at the same time as a Federal referendum.

Committee conclusions

During the Voices & Votes inquiry, the committee has considered whether a fixed election date might facilitate active learning about democracy, as discussed in Chapter 6 of this report. The committee heard strong support from young people for a fixed election date.

As discussed elsewhere in this Chapter, a fixed election date would increase the opportunity for young people to engage in representative democracy by way of voting as it would:

- facilitate planning of active learning about democracy, including the planning of mock elections, as discussed in Chapter 6;
- increase awareness, and discussion of general state elections, and increase the rate at which people, including young people, turn out to vote;
- provide young people with a certain date by which they would need to be on the electoral roll and, given new additional requirements regarding proof of identity to enrol, ensure that they have sufficient proof of identity to meet enrolment requirements;
- assist young people to adopt the ‘habit’ of voting;
- contribute to the social aspects of ‘Election Day’; and
• assist the ECQ, political parties, the media and others to disseminate information to inform young people about the voting procedure and to assist young people to cast an informed vote.

The committee asks that the Premier note the views of young people heard by the committee during the Voices & Votes inquiry.

Voting

Existing law

Compulsory voting was introduced in Queensland in 1914 and by the Commonwealth in 1924.

At federal, state and local government elections, it is compulsory for all persons who are enrolled to vote to turn up to a polling station and have their name marked off the electoral roll as having been given a ballot paper. A person who fails to do so without a valid and sufficient excuse commits an offence.

In Queensland, the ‘compulsion’ to vote is provided by provisions of the Electoral Act 1992 (Qld), namely: section 150(2) requires enrolment by providing that a person who is entitled to be enrolled, but does not enrol, commits an offence which attracts a maximum fine of one penalty unit; section 101 states that those who are enrolled are entitled to vote; section 3 defines those who are entitled to vote as ‘electors’; and section 164 states that an elector who fails to vote (ie, have his or her name marked off the electoral roll at a polling station) at an election without a valid and sufficient excuse is liable to a maximum penalty of one penalty unit. One penalty unit is equal to $75.

Issues

The Voices & Votes discussion paper included the following observations regarding the effectiveness of taking action by way of a vote:

Engagement counts because history shows that one person, or one vote, can make a difference.

- In 1998, the Labor Party formed government in Queensland with the support of one independent Member of Parliament, Mr Peter Wellington MP.
- After the 1995 state election, the Labor Party initially held government by only one seat. A by-election was ordered for the seat of Mundingburra, which was subsequently won by the Liberal Party. This meant that the Labor Party and the National/Liberal coalition held an equal number of seats. One independent Member of Parliament, Mrs Liz Cunningham MP, caused a change of government when she gave her support to the National/Liberal coalition. Mrs Cunningham then held the balance of power until the 1998 election.
- In 1970, the former Premier, the late Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, won a party leadership contest by one vote.
- At the 1957 state election, the sitting ALP member, Mr Francis Forde MP, lost his seat by one vote to the Country and Liberal Party candidate. Another ballot was held because the count was so close. The seat was again won by the CLP candidate - this time by a margin of 414 votes.

Collective engagement can make a significant difference - young people’s collective voices and votes can count in surprising ways.

- Seats have been won or lost in Queensland elections by less than 100 votes - for example, in 1998 the Labor Party won the seat of Mansfield by 83 votes, and in 1995 the Liberal Party won the seat of Greenslopes by 41 votes.
- Based on the 2004 state election, in eleven of the 89 electorates, less than 1000 votes would be needed for seats to change hands.

Many young people have a significant number of contacts in their mobile phones or their email address books. These young people could, through a collective effort, change the election outcome in one or more seats, or the entire state - just as they do when voting in Australian Idol.

In the Voices & Votes response form, the committee asked young people to discuss:

- How could the ECQ make it easier for young people to cast their votes?
- 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 to do so?
Relevant issues are considered below under the headings:

A. Voting for the first time;
B. Access to the ballot box;
c. Electronic voting;
D. Advance voting; and
E. Electoral awareness and information.

A. Voting for the first time

Evidence to committee inquiry

At *Voices & Votes* workshops, young people advised the committee about how voting can be made easier:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting days</th>
<th>should be on weekdays, Saturdays are good, public holidays, preferably on school days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time limit</td>
<td>should be longer, eg 2 or 3 days, a week, this could be for people with jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment and voting methods</td>
<td>using electronic enrolment and voting (internet, email, SMS, however this has security and identity issues), postal voting, ability to update personal details on-line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling booths</td>
<td>more locations, eg. shopping centres, university campuses, make ballot papers easier, put the voting card on display, stop people from handing out brochures, Senate voting card should be simplified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory voting</td>
<td>both non-compulsory and compulsory voting were supported by different people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing who to vote for</td>
<td>political parties need to show youth what they stand for, websites clearly outlining the policies of candidates, Year 12 information session or a subject at school, presentations by organisations / government (as with schoolies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing how to vote</td>
<td>give examples, need information on how to vote away from home and interstate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Minister for Child Safety:

*There was some ambivalence about voting generally. The young people stated ‘why vote?’, ‘it doesn’t matter who wins’, ‘you don’t feel like you make a difference’, ‘it doesn’t mean anything’. However, they also expressed the feeling that voting is important and that young people need to ‘put their voice across and stand up for Australia’. They stated that they see voting as a big decision because it means that they have to choose the leader of a country.*

Eryn Fox, 15:

*I think the first year of being eligible to vote should be made optional. This could prepare young voters for their next vote.*

Krystal Razboresk, 16: *They need to focus on the people side of voting and highlight the positives of voting.*

E/Professor Colin Hughes:

*It is desirable that the Committee explicitly endorse continuation of compulsory voting at State and Local Government elections for it appears quite likely that its abandonment for Commonwealth elections will be an issue at the next federal election, due in 2007.*

Ronelle Douen, 17:

*Make it fun - get a group of friends together to vote.*

Lazarus Cinnabar, 17: *Try to tell them that their vote does count and not just another vote just for the sake of it.*

Bianca Brooks, 15:

*Show the consequences of not voting and enrolling.*

Anonymous:

*Inform us on the area of voting.*
Pay us.

Make it compulsory to vote for people in leadership positions in school.

Implementation of the youth’s voice and ideas - LISTEN TO US!

Michael Greer:

Give us reasons for voting for things we believe in.

In State and local government by-election exit polling conducted for the committee by a parliamentary intern, young voters in the state by-election for the electorate of Chatsworth and the local government by-election for the Brisbane City Council ward of Chandler provided the following responses.

Studies have shown youth don’t enrol to vote. Is voting important to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to have my say</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of civic duty</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s the right thing to do</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in a particular candidate succeeding</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in a particular candidate failing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would you vote if it was not compulsory?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other relevant information and research

The Youth Electoral Study 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.

Committee Conclusions

The committee has given consideration to research which indicates that ‘habit’ is an important factor regarding whether young people will turn out to vote. Despite our system of compulsory voting in Queensland, statistical information set out in Chapter 4 of this report indicates that many young people who are on the electoral roll failed to vote at the 2001 and 2004 state general elections. The indication that a higher proportion of 21 to 25 year olds failed to vote is of significant concern. Given these statistics, the ‘compulsion’ to vote at state and local government elections should be retained.
It is crucial that at the first election after a young person has enrolled, voting is perceived to be an important and valued opportunity to ‘have a say’. In addition, young voters require clear, accessible information about procedures for voting. Accordingly, the Electoral Commission Queensland should receive additional budgetary funding to undertake activities to maximise voting by young and first-time voters such as:

- Use of SMS technology to remind young people to vote; and
- Provision of a ‘souvenir’ to first time voters, such as a colourful wristband.

**B. Access to ballot box**

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

**Issues**

The **Voices & Votes response form** suggested the following ideas for discussion.

*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.*

**Evidence to committee inquiry**

In the **on-line and paper polls**, respondents were asked: If next Saturday was a state election day, would you have difficulty getting to a polling station on that day?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On-line Poll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Poll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Submissions** to the **Voices & Votes inquiry** provided the committee with young people’s views.

**Charlie, 16:**

*I believe that the voting hours should be extended. E.g. 6am - 9pm.*

**Sam Watson:**

*Election day should be a holiday.*

**Anonymous:**

*Instead of having just one day to vote, give people a week to vote, for those who are away on holidays etc.*

**Rachel Plant, 21:**

*To encourage voting for those 18 - 25 year old people it might help to have a separate space ion voting days where we can vote that is more ‘casual’ and is less ‘boring’. E.g. held in a local ‘hot spot’ with entertainment from local bands etc.*

**Reece Pianta, 18:**

*ECQ could open up polling booths on Fridays for students at schools and uni’s. Effectively students could go down and cast votes at lunchtime/in between classes or could have a lesson off on voting day. Some year 12 students are 18 years old and so are eligible to vote and again this takes the perceived ‘effort’ out of voting.*

**Emily Fox, 15:**

*On-line voting, polling booths open for 2/3 days, in areas such as universities or closer to some areas where young people don’t have to travel or pay to get to the voting booths.*
Inspire Foundation:

- **Use SMS technology to remind people about the dates and times of elections.**
- **Take the polling stations to places where young people are already engaged.** Say to a shopping centre, a local PCYC, or youth centre. They don’t need to be big stations, but enough to garner attention and encourage the young people to quickly walk in and cast their vote and keep on their way.
- **Have poll stations open longer - say until 7pm.** Make it so that there is something at the polling booths that will entice people to come and vote. For example, a free sausage sizzle off the BBQ, or a rock band that playing at the school between certain hours that they can come and watch for free after they vote. Turn voting into an event rather than a chore.
- **Some young people feel that they don’t have enough information about where polling stations are and what they have to do when they get there.**

Eryn Fox, 15:

*It would be better and easier if polling stations were open for more than 1 day for young people. It would be more convenient and accessible as some youth aren’t financial or have transport of their own.*

Legal Aid Queensland:

*The opening hours for polling stations should be lengthened to reflect the fact that many young people are engaged in casual employment that occupies them on a Saturday and which can prevent them from voting. Young people would be more motivated to make the effort to vote if they are also aware of alternate options which do not require them to vote on that day. We submit that many young people and/or their employers are not aware of voting entitlements and options when committed in a work capacity on the day of an election and recommend that the AEC take action to publicise these options.*

*Further, it would be easy to target young voters by ensuring that polling stations are located at universities, shopping centres and local schools - places that young people would have a greater familiarity with.*

**Other relevant information and research**

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.

**Committee conclusions**

The committee heard from young people that, for a variety of reasons such as lack of transport or work commitments, they often have difficulty getting to a polling booth on Election Day. Accordingly, the committee suggests that the Electoral Commission Queensland trial new locations for polling stations, such as universities and major shopping centres. The committee is aware, however, that there are significant costs attached to the use of some venues which would otherwise be suitable as polling stations.

Similarly, rather than extend the hours that polling stations are open, the committee notes that implementation of the recommendation regarding extension of the right to cast a pre-poll vote should mean that young people unable who are unable to vote on Election Day would be able to vote prior to Election Day by way of a pre-poll vote.

**C. E-voting**

**Issues**

The Voices & Votes response form suggested the following ideas might be ideas for discussion.

*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 and 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.

Evidence to committee inquiry

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry discussed the merits of electronic voting.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

Many young people have an in depth understanding and the ability to access information technology within educational settings and at home. The Commission considers that developing accessible e-voting systems in Queensland and may help to increase the numbers of young voters. E-voting systems could be set up in public places on election day, allowing young people and others who do not have access to home or personal computers to access the internet and vote on-line.

E-voting facilities could be stationed at malls and shopping centres, universities, libraries and other major sites where young people congregate. Another option could be to locate and advertise the e-voting system within internet cafes. If it is simply a matter of logging onto a website, providing identification and casting a vote, perhaps more young people would find this option more accessible. The e-voting system could also have descriptions of the candidates so that young people can make informed decisions as to who and/or which party to vote for.

Legal Aid Queensland:

We understand that electronic voting is not yet at a stage where it could replace standard voting practice, however, we would support ongoing research in this area. Further, we note that the AEC has undertaken research with Electronic Voting Machines and found some clear benefits to this technology. The ability to reduce inadvertent informal votes by informing a voter that they may be about to cast an informal vote, and offering the ability to reconsider; and by offering the ability, for the first time, for blind or other voters with a disability to cast their own, un-assisted vote, through the provision of voice or other technology on the machines. We submit that the capacity to warn about casting an informal vote would be of critical importance to inexperienced voters.

Other relevant information and research

An e-petition to the Queensland Parliament sponsored by the Member for Cook requested that the committee be asked to consider ways in which the people of Queensland might be able to vote electronically. The e-petition stated that this would improve access to democracy for rural and regional Queenslanders and people with disabilities. In the ministerial response to the e-petition, the then Attorney-General and Minister for Justice stated that he had no objection to the committee considering the matter.

In May 2005, the committee resolved to inquire into electronic voting, and certain other electoral matters, and to undertake that inquiry in 2006.

Committee Conclusions

Submissions and other evidence to the Voices & Votes inquiry regarding electronic voting will be considered by the committee in its Inquiry into Certain Contemporary Electoral Matters. This inquiry will include consideration of ways in which the people of Queensland might be able to vote electronically, including so as to improve access to democracy for rural and regional Queenslanders and people with disabilities.
D. Advance voting

Existing law

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.

Issues

The Voices & Votes response forms suggested the following ideas for discussion.

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’.

Evidence to committee inquiry

Rachel Plant, 21:
I think they may but most young people I know do not realise voting in advance is even possible. More education is needed in this area.

Reece Pianta, 18:
Yes but a week may not even be necessary even the Friday before election day might be enough.

Darren Kruck, 24:
For sure. A week gives young people much more time to either (a) remember to vote or (b) realise that they are supposed to vote. Because, a lot of the time, unless a young person actively seeks the information about voting it is often very confusing as to what is happening and when.

Emily Fox, 15:
Voting over an extended period, would give young voters the options of voting on a day suitable to their schedule.

Hon Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety:

Some young people thought this was a good idea and others thought that it would not really matter. Those who were in favour suggested that the idea of having to do something on a particular day, in particular on a weekend, was annoying and inconvenient. They were generally not supportive of an Election Day becoming a public holiday, particularly as this would cause changes to the public transport schedule.

Legal Aid Queensland:

We note that postal votes are already available to people unable to cast a vote on Election Day due to work commitments, amongst other factors. As noted above also, we submit that this is an option that should be more broadly publicised to young people, perhaps upon registration for a Tax File Number.

We submit that extending the availability of postal voting to all voters upon request, may assist, but is not necessarily a process that would further promote voting to young people. Postal voting is, after all, a process that often requires even more organisation than voting in the usual manner.

Jessica Wright, 17:
Incentives, more promotion ideas. Make it fun.

Other relevant information and research

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.


Committee Conclusions
The committee recommends that existing preconditions to pre-poll voting, contained in the Electoral Act 1992 (Qld), be removed so that pre-poll voting is available to any person without conditions. The introduction of a general right to pre-poll voting would provide the Electoral Commission Queensland with an opportunity to review awareness activities regarding the availability of pre-poll voting, including consideration given to the use, where appropriate, of media frequented by young people. In addition, wider use of pre-poll voting might require additional pre-polling stations and, as recommended in this Chapter, consideration could be given to situating these pre-polling stations in venues more readily accessible to young people.

E. Electoral awareness and information

Existing law
The Electoral Act provides (in section 8) that the functions of the ECQ include to:
(d) promote public awareness of electoral matters by conducting education and information programs and in other ways;
(e) implement strategies to encourage persons, particularly those belonging to groups with traditionally low enrolment rates, to enrol as electors.

Issues
In the Voices & Votes response form, the committee noted that:

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 (eg, postcards, posters and school visits).

Young people were asked to discuss:

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

Evidence to committee inquiry

Inspire Foundation:
Be more relevant in their presentations to schools and young people in the sense of giving examples as to how voting and having your say does actually affect the way that politics and the state is run. Have postcards and stickers as well as the current school presentation that relate more to young people rather than the middle aged person who is presenting it. Maybe even getting a young person to make the presentation so that the idea of voting is made more cool to you people these days.

Get young people directly involved with creating the message, don’t patronise young people, respect their intelligence and make it enjoyable.

Legal Aid Queensland:
Accessibility could be boosted by ensuring that there is easier access to enrolment information on the ECQ and AEC websites. While there is information currently provided on both websites, it could be better presented and promoted to attract the attention of young people. Further, it is likely that many young people are unaware of the information provided on these websites. With this in mind, it would be beneficial for the ECQ and AEC to develop links with other websites that young people would frequently visit, such as radio and television websites.

Reece Pianta, 18:
The ECQ could consider an advertising ‘blitz’ (TV, radio, internet advertising on youth sites, newspaper and youth oriented magazines) campaign to target young people and reinforce the fact that enrolment and voting are in their best interests so they have a say in what happens in their communities. Related it back to the concerns of young people - which could be established through focus group/polling etc.

Darren Kruck, 24:
Employ designers and marketing experts that are the same age as the voters the ecq is trying to reach. This means that the information could be noticed and would most likely be in the places that young people would see it. (Street press etc).
Hon John Mickel MP, Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:

In a number of regions this was identified as the single most significant barrier to Indigenous youth participating in democratic processes. In this regard, it is understood that, in some areas, Indigenous youth who attended polling booths for recent local, state and federal elections did not understand that they needed to enrol first and required assistance to fill out the ballot.

Hon Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety:

Generally, young people suggested that other young people were best placed to communicate with young people, and grab their attention. They thought that peer processes were important to minimise the challenges posed by a ‘generation gap’. They suggested that young people might experience adults as confronting, boring and are likely to ‘switch off’ and ignore what they have to say. They thought it important to communicate the message that one person can make an impact on the outcome of an election, particularly when individual votes add up to such a significant number.

Anna Wells, 14:

They need to be publicised and presented in a way that looks appealing to youth - not corny.

Danielle Johnson, 16:

Television ads about things interesting to you people that are connected with voting.

Aaron, 17:

Get celebrities on board, and to get involved.

Sarah, 16:

It is good having an official election run by the electoral commission for our school captains. This teaches us about the process.

Kiara Schip, 17:

Non-biased info on how to vote.

Jaspreet Kalkat, 17:

Tell you the process but not who to vote for.

Piltal Moloney, 16:

They should let us know about the process and give non-biased opinion.

The committee was assisted by information it received from State Electoral Commissioners about the respective educational and awareness activities of other State Electoral Commissions.

The Acting Electoral Commissioner, Western Australia, provided the committee with a short paper describing the Western Australian Electoral Commission’s experience concerning young people’s engagement in the 2005 Western Australian general election, and other ongoing initiatives of the WAEC.

The WAEC found that the most likely way to break through to its target demographic of young people ‘was by employing humour combined with a ‘call to action’ message that made the electoral process relevant to their lives’. Accordingly, with the main aims of encouraging enrolment, keeping the electoral roll up-to-date and maximising elector turnout:

Creative concepts were developed for television, radio and print featuring everyday situations and the consequences of not having a say with the tagline ‘It’s best to be involved in the decision process.’

The advertising and public relations campaign had a high recall rate in the community, particularly within the target demographic, effectively promoting the Commission’s core messages of enrolling to vote and participating in the election process.

In addition to the creative campaign, the Commission also took advantage of an ad-hoc advertising opportunity the day after the final of the popular ‘Australian Idol’ television program. Two advertisements were taken in The West Australian daily newspaper promoting the message of the importance of voting and being involved in the decision process and the alternative consequence of not being involved in the decision process.

The Commission has continued to use the ‘It’s best to be involved in the decision process’ theme in its ongoing advertising, including local government elections and a direct mail-out of a ‘birthday card’ to year 12 students urging them to enrol:
The WAEC advises that, as a result of the WAEC’s mailout in 2004, 24.14% of enrolment forms were filled in and returned.

**Committee Conclusions**

Based on what the committee heard from young people, the committee is able to suggest to the Electoral Commission Queensland ways it might increase electoral awareness and information among young people; that is, the Electoral Commission Queensland might evaluate its existing programs, including consideration of:

- upgrading the ECQ website to provide more accessible, interactive information for young people about enrolment and voting, and ensure that links to the ECQ website are found on the spaces where young people create and share information;
- using young people to liaise with schools, universities and TAFEs, workplaces and young people in Indigenous communities about enrolment and voting; and
- providing people who have enrolled to vote with an information pack about representative democracy in Queensland and how they can have a voice.
8 - Representative government engaging with young people

Parliament and Members of Parliament

Existing law

The Constitution of Queensland 2001 provides for the election of 89 Members the Queensland Parliament each three years. The Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 (Qld) makes further provision for the functioning of the Parliament.

Issues

In the Voices & Votes response form, the committee noted that:

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

The Voices & Votes response form asked young people to discuss:

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

Evidence to committee inquiry

At the Voices & Votes workshops, young people were asked: How should politicians:

- talk to you in language that you understand?
- talk to you directly, regularly, in your own environments?
- listen and respond to your concerns?
- respect your diversity?

Young people’s advice to the committee was:

Increase interaction - without media presence, regular visits to schools, youth groups and social environments where youth congregate, opportunities for work experience with politicians, Parliament, local Members and council, young people and politicians need to work together, be informed before talking to us

Make it interesting - activities, competitions, games, videos, a party to share ideas, events for youth to get together and share their opinions / get to know other youth in the community, non-partisan fun, use a variety of mediums, eg. famous bands to travel with politicians

Improve personal manner - need to appear interested and listen, be more genuine, accountable and honest and be approachable to locals, inclusive

Follow-up - acknowledge letters with responses, respond quickly and respectfully

Communicate at our level - consider, understand and respect audience, don’t use big words, jargon or be patronising, speak slower, answer the question, dress more casually (intimidating), explain issues fully, positive body language, don’t try to impress with teen slang

Use a young representative - a youth officer / spokesperson to cross barriers and translate, mediate and help young people understand, younger politicians need to have a greater role in politics as they have a better understanding of young people's interests and what they want, employ youth representatives to visit schools to explain laws and government issues in a simple way

Increase consultation - workshops need to be held more often and smaller open forums where young people can express their ideas, go to regional areas, surveys asking youth about their concerns

Use technology - have a website, communicate through emails, telephone calls and face-to-face, give live feedback, broadcast at times of peak teenage consumption

Respect diversity - Parliament should reflect community makeup and party system should be open to people of different backgrounds, respect our diversity by funding and supporting youth community
groups/projects

**Provide information** - give young people access to the policy outline, use mailing list for issue updates

**Assist with accessing resources** - provide links to finding politician’s electorate offices, a central information point to direct us to resources

**Show empathy** - don’t disregard issues raised by teens as purely teenage angst, actually listen and try to make a difference, show appropriate concern and respect for teenage issues, donate some personal earnings to youth services, live off what young people get on Centrelink for a month to learn what it’s like to have no money

The *Voices & Votes* youth jury made two recommendations regarding Parliament and Members of Parliament:

- Regular youth juries to inform Members of Parliament about issues important to young people; and
- Formation of an umbrella youth organisation, ‘Get Young People Involved’ (GYPI), to educate and engage young people on democracy. The organisation should ensure:
  - young people in rural and remote areas benefit from its activities;
  - Members of Parliament are involved in its activities; and
  - issues important to Indigenous young people are taken into account.

**Submissions** to the *Voices & Votes* inquiry discussed concerns about Parliament and Members of Parliament.

**Hon Mike Reynolds MP**, Minister for Child Safety:

*Young people will most likely become more interested in being involved in the democratic process if they can see that their input can make a real difference and produce real benefits for society.*

One young person suggested that she has had positive experiences talking with some local members who had come to her school. She said this was successful because they communicated well and listened to her issues, and tried to respond and take some action. Action was very important to her - she stated that young people are disillusioned by consultation without action.

The young people... felt that politicians are a ‘whole other class’, that they talk ‘in another language’ and don't always ‘relate to young people’. They suggested that politicians need to be more down to earth and communicate with young people in ‘real language’ not like a ‘dictionary’. Children in care in particular dislike government representatives talking about them as statistics and not real, feeling human beings.

She also suggested that these interactions helped her see her local members as real human beings rather than label them as politicians. Another young person suggested that it would be helpful for politicians to share their motivation for going into politics, and talk about what they are hoping to achieve, or what they want to change.

The young people thought that young people within political parties and parliament would create role models for other young people and encourage engagement in democracy. However, they also felt that it is important that such participation is not tokenistic, and that young people in these roles are treated equally and that their participation in politics is meaningful. When asked, the young people said that they didn’t feel ready or able to run for parliament themselves.

There was also a sense that politicians could do more in presenting policies of greater relevance to young people, with 55 students advocating this. One noted the Howard government’s dropping of the ‘Youth Affairs’ portfolio from the list of Cabinet Departments as symptomatic of politicians’ lack of interest. Another wrote:

**UQ government students:**

As of 2004 the average age of members of the Queensland Parliament was 48, with only five representatives under the age of 35 and none under 25. With such a disparity in representation it is no surprise that young voters feel indifferent towards politics.

Other comments were: ‘... the only social group spoken for adequately is that of the middle-to upper-class Caucasian male’; ‘politicians are predominantly middle-aged white men’; and ‘the reality is that the overwhelming majority of our prominent politicians are old enough to be the parents or even grandparents of people entering the age of suffrage’. As an alternative, Natasha Stott-Despoja was mentioned approvingly.
There is no doubt this section of the population would be far more encouraged in participating in elections if some attention was actually paid to issues pertaining to young people specifically, such as casual employment conditions or energy sources which are actually sustainable for the next generation.

Many students (43) felt that politicians and parties could do better. Some students suggested that politicians should visit schools more often, along with celebrities and sporting heroes, to promote the importance of voting. It was felt that involving celebrities ‘would portray political discussions and processes as a cool and hip thing’. Another proposed a reality TV show about ‘the insides and what really occurs in the lives of politicians’. One student mentioned the ‘Citizen Change’ campaign in the United States and its promotion by celebrities and the ‘Punk Voter’ website. Paul Keating’s appearance on the cover of Rolling Stone was cited approvingly.

Politicians were exhorted: ‘don’t make promises that can’t or won’t be kept; tell the truth about what is possible and what the outcomes or effects might be’. Another student declared that ‘Most are skeptical (sic) of the conduct of politicians and believe that politics is a waste of time, as nothing gets accomplished’. Other impressions were that ‘young Australians … tend to view politics as an elitist field, and politicians as manipulative creatures’ and that ‘currently a lot of youths (sic) see politicians as stereotypical lying scumbags who couldn’t tell the truth if their lives depended on it’. Another student advised: ‘political figures have to also spruce up their image and bring themselves out of the category whereby people have compared them side by side with car salesman’.

Ms Barbara Stone MP:

Students believe that there is a role for their Member of Parliament to come and address them. This could be in a specific subject on a specific issue or generally.

Young people will not go to them - they need to come to the schools.

For a Member of Parliament to truly represent their constituency they must provide opportunities to actively seek and listen to their constituents views. This however is not as easy as it sounds. Encouraging people to be actively involved in the political process is a hard task, often with little gain and if we don’t engage young people then we will continue to go down this path.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

Political parties and politicians can encourage young people to participate and engage in the voting process through actively taking an interest in issues affecting young people and by communicating with young people face to face. Politicians and their party representatives need to be able to engage directly with young people if they are to show their concern and genuine interest in the issues impacting upon young people.

Penny Laws, 17:

Politicians say they want to hear our opinion and that they care about what we have to say but they never really take any notice.

Inspire Foundation:

Young people feel that politicians are often not interested in understanding the needs or opinions of young people.

[Politicians can better engage] by listening to young people and being available to discuss young people’s concerns with them. If politicians become responsive to young people then young people will become responsive to them. They need to take the first step. They need to get out of their suits and ties and come down to the level of young people and be willing to give them the time that they otherwise give to those who are old enough to vote. This definitely would have to be one of my biggest bug bears.

Jacqueline Clevers, 19:

I think if Parliament catered more for young people’s issues they would more than likely get elected.

Cathy Chapman, 16:

Talk to students in schools more.

Charles Vue, 17:

Come visit students at schools. Listen through chats online. Stop arguing and say something.

Maninder, 16:

Should be younger politicians.
Penny Laws, 17:

Politicians say they want to hear our opinion and that they care about what we have to say but they never really take any notice.

Legal Aid Queensland:

A commonly attributed disincentive for young people to participate in Australia’s democracy - particularly through voting - is their lack of trust in political leaders. Young people, throughout various studies have widely characterized politicians as liars and promise-breakers. It is difficult for young people to be motivated to understand the connection between what a politician does, how policies are made and the flow-on effect of how this affects their lives, when in their view, they believe they do not have powerful, youth related and respected role models in political leadership.

Respect for political and decision making processes emerges when young people are listened to and are encouraged to participate, and are engaged with in meaningful ways; such as face to face meetings with politicians, and through the opportunity to ask questions. There are some basic principles that are essential as a guiding framework for these processes.

In State and local government by-election exit polling conducted for the committee by a parliamentary intern, young voters in the state by-election for the Chatsworth were asked:

*Do you have faith in your politicians to represent your interests effectively?*

Responses from the state by-election were:

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<th>Chatsworth</th>
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<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
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Other relevant information and research

The Hansard Society (UK)

Social research on public engagement in the UK was considered in *MPS and Politics in our time* by John Healy MP, Mark Gill and Declan McHugh (2005). In that publication, it is argued that social change in the UK in recent decades has weakened the bond between the public and the formal political process, and that this threatens the health and legitimacy of the democratic system.

While people remain interested in issues and civic activism is strong in the UK, that interest and activism are thought by participants to be entirely unconnected with ‘politics’. The authors suggest (at pages 7 to 8) that a cultural revolution is needed - that central to the reinvigoration of democracy is the relationship between elected representative and electorate. The latter should take an informed interest and actively offer their views, and the former should take a great deal more trouble to seek, listen and respond to public concerns.

The Power Commission (UK)

The report of the Power Commission suggested that a major trend of the British constitutional arrangements of the last two decades has been the way unelected and indirectly elected authority has gained powers at the expense of directly elected authority. It was stated that there are four elements to this:

- The executive has become more powerful at the expense of MPs in the House of Commons.
- Central government departments have also become more powerful at the expense of local government over the last two to three decades.
- Appointed authorities - quangos - have gained extra powers, particularly at the expense of local councillors.
- Supernational bodies and processes of international negotiation such as the European Union have gained extra powers and influence at the expense of nationally and locally elected representative.

\[2\] A/Professor Murray Print, Dr. Larry Saha, Dr Kathy Edwards, Youth Electoral Study, 2004.
The Power Commission stated that:

*The result of these shifts has been to make political decision-making more opaque, hidden and complex. It means that the people who take key decisions are more likely to be geographically, socially and politically distant from the people who are affected by their decisions.*

**Committee conclusions**

Parliamentary committees are one way in which the people of Queensland, including people aged 12 to 25, are able to engage in the parliamentary process. In Part B of this report, the committee provides a summary of the consultation strategy adopted for the *Voices & Votes* inquiry. In that Part, the committee outlines recommendations regarding the need for Committees of the Queensland Parliament to use innovative engagement methods, including interactive technologies, to maximise engagement by a diversity of Queensland people in committee activities.

The people of Queensland, including those aged 12 to 25, are represented by Members of Parliaments elected to the 89 electorates which cover Queensland. During the *Voices & Votes* inquiry, young people frequently told committee members that their elected representatives should come more often to young people’s spaces to listen to their views and concerns. When committee members replied that they regularly visited schools, YMCAs, recreational facilities and other spaces for young people within their electorates, it was pointed out that Members of Parliament visit schools, most often, to speak to a whole school assembly. Young people said that Members of Parliament do not sit down with small groups of young people to listen to what they have to say and discuss issues with them. Due to experiences such as these during the *Voices & Votes* inquiry, committee members suggest that Members of Parliament engage more regularly with young people in their own spaces both geographic and otherwise, by way of listening to young people’s views and concerns.

In addition, Members of Parliament should provide opportunities for young people to understand that their elected representatives are hardworking but ordinary people with many competing demands on their time. Members of Parliament could, for example:

- create opportunities for young people to engage in work experience in electorate offices, attend functions, and advise on issues; and
- use youth media opportunities, especially those created by young people.

**Local Government**

**Existing law**

The *Constitution of Queensland 2001* provides:

The *Local Government Act 1993* (Qld) provides for the way in which a local government is constituted and the nature and extent of its functions and powers.

**Issues**

The *Voices & Votes* response form raised for discussion the following issues regarding ‘government’ generally, and received responses regarding local government:

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

**Evidence to committee inquiry**

Hon John Mickel MP, Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:

*Indigenous youth tend to take a more active interest in local civic processes, on the basis that there is a clearer and more direct link between individual and community involvement and outcomes (eg. where local government in DOGIT communities are the primary service providers).*

*By comparison, those young Indigenous Queenslanders who live in urban centres (and who constitute a majority within this cohort) appear to feel as alienated from the activities of their local governments as they do from state and federal politics.*
Emily Fox, 15:

Mock senate organised with 3 or 4 neighbouring high schools helped to bring forward discussions of interest that encouraged students to voice their opinions or concerns about local issues. Regular ‘in-school’ discussions with neighbouring schools could be beneficial for rural areas, so students could discuss and collate information for local government representatives to encourage parliamentary involvement.

Participants in the Voices & Votes polling were asked whether they would like to have a greater say in local government:

Would you like to have a greater say in the policies and/or laws developed by state and local governments in Queensland?

**On-line Poll**

- YES: 93%
- NO: 7%

**Paper Poll**

- YES: 61%
- NO: 39%

In State and local government by-election exit polling conducted for the committee by a parliamentary intern, young voters in the local government by-election for the Brisbane City Council ward of Chandler were asked:

Do you have faith in your politicians to represent your interests effectively?

Responses from the local by-election were:

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<th>Chandler</th>
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<td>85%</td>
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For the purposes of the Voices & Votes inquiry, members of the committee met with representatives of the Brisbane City Council and the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc to discuss young people’s engagement in local government.

The committee heard of strategies being implemented to engage young people in local government; for example, that 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 Local Government Association Queensland representative outlined LGAQ and local government activities directed at young people. Committee members heard that:

- in Queensland, 55 local councils have some form of youth council;
- youth councils are not, however, the only mechanism to engage young people in local government - their effectiveness changes over time and depends on resources, the local council, and its aims for the youth council;
some youth councils are advisory groups (eg Redlands holds a youth forum each six months), others become little more than activity/resource based groups (and, eg, Torres Strait has collapsed due to departure of organiser);

the starting point for a local government wishing to set up a youth council or other youth forum is to determine (with assistance from LGAQ) what it wishes to achieve, and a council will then generally advertise for participants who meet given selection criteria, although these selection criteria may not include diversity;

the BCC approach has been that many ways are needed to hear the many voices of young people - physical spaces, cyberspace, local activities, forums, skills development, etc;

there is an over-estimation by young people of the deliberative power of youth councils.

Committee conclusions

The committee is aware that, generally, local governments in Queensland provide opportunities for young people to engage with them in the exercise of their functions, and that local governments do so via one or more of a range of engagement mechanisms. The LGAQ provides significant support in this regard.

To strengthen these existing local government engagement mechanisms, the committee recommends that the Minister for Local Government:

• in a joint arrangement with the Local Government Association of Queensland, evaluate youth councils; and

• develop for local governments a best practice manual about engaging with young people, including ways of creating opportunities for young people to have a voice within local communities, such as regular ‘Have Your Say’ sessions in a central, public space.

Political parties, candidates and electoral campaigning

Issues

In the Voices & Votes response form, the committee noted that:

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.

The Voices & Votes response form asked young people to discuss:

• How can political parties encourage young people’s engagement in democracy?

Evidence to committee inquiry

The Voices & Votes youth jury made two recommendations relevant to political parties, candidates and electoral campaigning:

• Distribution to first-time voters at election time of an A4 sheet outlining the beliefs and policies of all political parties, in language accessible to young people; and

• Non-partisan advertising campaigns targeted at young people to encourage them to vote.

Participants in the Voices & Votes polling were asked whether they felt excluded by political parties in Queensland:

Do you feel shut out of the activities of political parties in Queensland?

On-line Poll

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<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry discussed ways in which political parties might encourage young people’s engagement in democracy.

Ms Barbara Stone MP:

There was wide support for political parties to come into schools (particularly in schoolies week talks) and inform grade 12 students of their policies. This provides opportunities for young people to find out more about the issues that interest them and the thoughts of that political party on the subject and to learn about the political party process.

Inspire Foundation:

I think that political parties need to become more focused on what is affecting the lives of young people. They need to ensure that they are able to explain the decisions and changes that they are making. It seems as though politicians don’t really care about people that can’t vote for them (i.e. young people and teenagers). It needs to start with the politicians if they are ever going to make politics something that is helpful for everyone and not just those who are old enough to vote.

Sarah:

They need to relate issues to kids and stuff that we want.

Emily Stokes:

Political parties should explain their policies and campaigns in simple terms, so as the average or younger person could understand, without the ridicule of other parties.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

Political parties and politicians can encourage young people to participate and engage in the voting process through actively taking an interest in issues affecting young people and by communicating with young people face to face. Politicians and their party representatives need to be able to engage directly with young people if they are to show their concern and genuine interest in the issues impacting upon young people.

Vibewire Youth Services:

The major party youth organisations also prioritise campaigning for party endorsed candidates in local, State and Federal elections.

But for a lot of young people, this option is not preferable. Many young people do not like the perceived need to become a formal member of a political organisation in order to speak on political matters. Others do not know that such organisations even exist.

In State and local government by-election exit polling conducted for the committee by a parliamentary intern, young voters in the state by-election for the electorate of Chatsworth and the local government by-election for the Brisbane City Council ward of Chandler provided the following responses.

Did you feel the political parties incorporated enough youth issues into their policy platforms?

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<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>62%</td>
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Do you feel you received enough information about each party's policies to make an informed decision?

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<td>No</td>
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Other relevant information and research - Australia

Dr Ariadne Vromen

Dr Ariadne Vromen, a lecturer at the University of Sydney, researches about 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 2004).

Youth Electoral Study

The first report of the Youth Electoral Study, a four-year study being conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission, the Australian National University and the University of Sydney, found that the following key points emerged from a survey of young people (at 22):

- Young people do not trust politicians;
- Politicians are seen as liars and promise-breakers;
- Only about one half of the students agreed that parliamentarians could be trusted to do what is right for the country, with males more ‘trusting’ than females;
- Only one-fourth agreed that parliamentarians are honest, with males more likely to agree than females;
- About one-third of the students agreed that parliamentarians were smart and knew what they were doing when running the government.

Heath

Heath (2006, pages 156 to 157) suggests that:

*Mark Latham’s retrospective and bitter advice to young people to stay away from organised politics doesn't stack up. I am reminded of Winston Churchill’s view that democracy is the worst system, except for all the others...*

*What’s missing, though, is the sense that politics is about lived experiences - not theories, ideologies and two-party parliamentary jousting. We run Australian politics like our free-to-air television - pumping out the bland and unsophisticated - and look what’s happening to the audiences for both. Today we live in a world of niche audiences and markets, and people who live lives of multiple identities. If you want a strong relationship with individuals these days, whether its politics or media, you have to give them the respect that comes with acknowledging their identities. You have to invest that respect in people over a long time.*

Other relevant information and research - Overseas

United States

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).

Canada

In November 2005, Canadian Policy Research Networks (www.cprn.org) held a Dialogue and Summit for Young Canadians ‘to bring the voices of young adults [ages 18-25] into Canada’s national conversation’ about the future of Canada. A commentary on that national dialogue made the following observations:
Canada’s political parties tend to ignore young voters ‘because so few vote’. Political scientists have found that only 30% actually vote. Some say they have trouble getting registered and others don’t think voting brings about positive change and that politicians have nothing of interest to say to them.

But the parties need to wake up and realise we all have a lot to gain by engaging young Canadian voters. These people are fully committed to democracy and they have a lot to say.

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL 2006) suggests that political parties have a responsibility to educate young voters about election issues. The CCL says that in Canada:

Political parties are being encouraged to take responsibility for finding ways to educate young voters. During election campaigns they put tremendous effort into educating the public about political issues and their stances on those issues. Now that federal political parties receive vote-related tax dollars to finance those efforts, Rudyard Griffiths and Greg Lyle argue that parties must bear some responsibility for reaching out to politically uninterested young Canadians, encourage them to exercise their political franchise.

Committee conclusions

Registered political parties should work towards being creative forces in Queensland’s system of representative democracy and to improve their public standing. One strategy to be implemented to achieve these aims is to provide young people with factual information in a positive way, and to ensure that young people feel that political parties, their policies and campaigns are inclusive and respectful of their issues and concerns. The committee recommends that registered political parties provide, for distribution, a short, accessible document setting out the party’s history, philosophy and policies.

Positive change could be effected if registered political parties were, for example, to:

- upgrade their web presences to inform young people about their policies, history and activities and to include opportunities for participation in on-line communities;
- create ‘cyber-branches’ for party membership on-line;
- create training and mentoring opportunities for young people; and
- listen to young people in their spaces in order to develop a youth policy for each election campaign, and publish that policy in paper and on-line versions, in factual, easy to read format.

Executive Government

Existing policies

The Queensland Government’s Queensland Youth Charter relevantly provides:

The Queensland Youth Charter outlines the basic principles required to ensure that the views of young people are not only heard but included in government and community decision-making processes.

The charter sets a benchmark for best practice to help government fulfil its commitment to involving young people in decision-making about policy, programs, and services.

The Queensland Government produced the Youth Charter with the assistance of the Queensland State Youth Advisory Council (now called the Queensland Youth Council). The Youth Charter serves as a practical guide to identifying the varying levels of participation and standards required to achieve best practice in involving young people in the business of government.

The charter is designed to help government agencies engage young Queenslanders in the development of appropriate programs, policies, and services that affect young people.

The inclusion of young people in government and community decision-making will result in a balanced, representative, and democratic community that ultimately benefits all Queenslanders.

Statement of commitment

Through the Queensland Youth Charter, the Queensland Government recognises its obligation to involve young people in government decision-making to develop appropriate policy, programs and services.

Queensland Youth Charter principles

The Queensland Government is committed to the following principles which underpin people’s engagement and participation in government processes.

When making decisions about policies, programs and services, government has an obligation to actively engage with young people on relevant issues. This includes issues that directly impact on young people as well as broader community agendas.

Young people have a right to participate in government processes. They also have a right to choose whether they wish to
participate or not, and the degree to which they wish to be involved.

Government has an obligation to ensure that it considers how the impacts of proposed changes to policies, programs and services impact on young people.

Participation will be beneficial to young people. It is intended to be a positive, meaningful experience which acknowledges young people's input and contribution. The government and community will also benefit through young people's active engagement in governance and decision-making processes.

A broad range of young people will be involved, with appropriate supports, to ensure that principles of access and equity are met, and the diversity of young people is recognised. This may include the use of an interpreter or the involvement of an advocate or peer.

Young people will have access to a diverse range of ways to participate or convey their ideas, for example, orally, in writing, through technology or the arts.

Opportunities for young people to participate will be advertised and promoted in diverse and relevant ways and places. Sufficient resources will be provided to enable young people to participate, including information about how they can be involved in democratic processes, adequate preparation to enable them to engage in processes, and necessary practical supports, for example, assistance with transport.

Young people are entitled to timely feedback on the outcomes of decisions made where young people have participated. Government will promote young people's contribution.

Opportunities will be created to enable young people to respond to government agendas and to share ideas and initiate matters for government consideration.

Where young people are involved in, or are subject to, the legal system or government administrative decision-making or review, government will ensure that they have the opportunity to participate. For example, government may engage with young people by:

- explaining processes or proceedings in a meaningful, accessible, and relevant manner
- dealing with matters promptly and explaining anticipated time frames to young people
- establishing practices and procedures which recognise the different needs of young people
- providing support for young people's well-being before and after proceedings
- ensuring processes to challenge decisions are available and accessible for young people.

The principles outlined are subject to the laws of the State of Queensland and the Commonwealth.

Monitoring

The Office of Youth will monitor whole-of-government implementation of the Queensland Youth Charter. Queensland Government departments will provide information about the actions and processes they have conducted to include young people in program, policy, and service development. The Office of Youth will report this information to the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors and the Queensland Youth Council for consideration.

The Queensland Youth Council may then provide advice and recommendations to the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors about ongoing improvements to the Queensland Youth Charter and its implementation by government.

In accordance with the spirit of this charter, the Minister will consider what action needs to be taken to address any concerns.

Issues

The Voices & Votes response form noted (at page 8) that:

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.

The Voices & Votes response form asked young people to discuss:

- Have you used any of the government opportunities to voice your opinions about issues? How effective was it?
- 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?
- What assistance or encouragement do you need from government to take action about the issues you feel passionate about?

The committee wrote to the Minister for Communities requesting advice about the implementation of the Queensland Youth Charter. The Minister advised the committee that reporting on the implementation of the Charter had taken place in 2002-2003. At that time, 35 departments and agencies had responded. An Action Plan was then developed out of that information, with key issues being:
• improving the profile and understanding of the Queensland Youth Charter across government;
• developing improved processes for collecting feedback on the reporting process;
• connecting departments and agencies to resources and skills on good practice in youth participation in government decision making; and
• focusing on departments and agencies that have young people as their major stakeholders.

The Minister advised the committee that in 2006 a review of the Charter would be conducted by the Office of Youth to ensure the Charter’s relevance to whole-of-government priorities and current research in the field on youth engagement policy. The Minister said that the review would include consideration of the associated reporting and improvement framework.

Evidence to committee inquiry

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry contained suggestions about young people’s engagement in decision-making and policy formation by Executive Government in Queensland.

Kylie Durrington, 17:
I think our voices should be heard as we know what we want for our future, but then again the system has worked until now.

Charleen Whyatt:
Stop dismissing what young people say.

Chris Young:
Spend more time talking to and for young people.

Anonymous:
Give us more opportunities to have our say.

Youth Advocacy Centre Inc:
Whilst YAC supports young people’s right to be participate in all kinds of decision making we acknowledge that in practice young people’s desire to participate is variable, depending upon individual circumstances. The young people YAC interact with often have experiences with the legal system that leave them feeling disempowered and therefore uninterested in participating in a system that is seemingly unconcerned with what young people think. This disillusionment with the legal system is transferable to the political system more generally.

Hon Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety:
Generally, young people said that government needs to go to the places that young people gather, and engage with them in their environment. Forums suggested included schools, festivals, community groups and community agencies. They felt that positive relationships between young people and government representatives are essential.

The young people consulted are experienced in, and supported by the Create Foundation, to participate in government processes. They spoke passionately and articulately about how important such processes and experiences have been to them, and how they seek to support other young people to participate. They realized that their passion for these processes is based in their own personal experiences as children in care.

Gordon Douglas:
A problem identified in previous contact with the Office of Youth Affairs has been the lack of connection between young people and the institutions which affect them. OYA can release many statements, policies and directives to schools as a channel of communication to their students, but the schools simply ignore these for varied reasons, and so the communication fails. If the schools were to recognize their role as the principle institution in contact with young people, and to forge links with other department for mutually beneficial goals, this situation could be changed for much greater gains for young people.

Rachel Plant, 21:
To give a group the feeling they’ve been listened to, you need to give them the time of day. This would help show young people they are just as important as other groups in the community.
Young people need to know what they can achieve, realistically, when involved in democratic activities. They do not want to believe they can make a difference only to find out it has been a token gesture.

Sarah:
Ask young people what they want.

Vibewire Youth Services:
...[M]any young people do not use these spaces [government sites], either because they do not know they exist, or they do not wish to engage on a site that is established by a government authority.

Ministerial Regional Community Forum, Ipswich, 17 October 2005:
The most effective process is open discussion.

Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:
The Commission recommends that the Parliamentary Committee’s inquiry into young people engaging in democracy in Queensland acknowledge and adhere to the commitments contained in the MCEETYA declaration, Stepping forward: contributing and changing - young people's involvement in government planning and decision making.

Inspire Foundation:
... research on youth participation shows that involving young people in decision-making is part of “a process of building relationships of mutual obligation and trust across community sectors” (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk & Mulford 2001, p. 20).

Young people are interested in a range of issues, but are often only consulted on issues that a predefined by ‘adults’. One Youth Ambassador writes:
“A young person doesn’t take a keen interest in their superannuation at 16 - they are a long way away from retiring. But they do care about other issues. Allow them to be engaged in creating policies that address issues that effect profoundly on their lives, for example, education, arts, health issues, being able to earn a reasonable income to support themselves. Engage.”

“My experience wasn’t good. In Queensland, a young person has to pay to be involved. We don’t want to have to pay to voice our opinion - I am talking specifically about being involved with the Queensland Youth Council. Another reason I have not engaged in government opportunities is because, I simply don’t feel that what is done and said is ever acted upon. There seems to be no correlation between what we say and what happens in the future.”

This reflects research that many young people are sceptical of formal governance structures (Saggers, et.al, 2004) This has been attributed to confining youth involvement in one particular mechanism (such as Youth Advisory Board or Youth Councillor role) and therefore excluding the opinions of many young people - particularly those who are disadvantaged in some way.

Inspire Foundation said that suggestions from Queensland young people included:
- Face to face
- Online forum
- Workshops
- Conferences
- Don’t only have one-off consultations, develop ideas and create an energy, but continue to monitor it and encourage the development of the young person’s involvement in the decision making process.
- Regular community youth meeting in a local community youth centre (where the politician is there just to listen).
- Feedback to young people what has been done with information gathered from consultations(41-Inspire Foundation)
- Being able to participate in decision making, being asked an opinion, having it noted and acted upon. Being given opportunities to get involved with decision making and policy development is an important part of being a young person. Being able to access resources, track the impact of their contributions, share experiences, networks and learn from positive role models all contributes to the development of political efficacy.
Participants in the *Voices & Votes* online and paper polls responded to a question about engagement in policies and/or laws developed by state and local governments in Queensland:

![Poll Results](image)

**On-line Poll**
- YES: 93%
- NO: 7%

**Paper Poll**
- YES: 61%
- NO: 39%

In *Voice & Votes* State and local government by-election exit polling, one question asked related to engagement in democracy: *Since the last elections, have you take advantage of any opportunities to voice your opinions to the government and/or any political parties?* Responses to that exit poll question indicated that 38.33% of the young votes had taken an opportunity to let government or a political party know their views. However, 61.66% of those polled indicated that they had not engaged with government since the 2001 state election.

The *Voices & Votes* youth jury made four recommendations relevant to Government and young people’s engagement:

- Formation of an umbrella youth organisation, ‘Get Young People Involved’ (GYPI), to educate and engage young people on democracy. The organisation should ensure:
  - young people in rural and remote areas benefit from its activities;
  - Members of Parliament are involved in its activities; and
  - issues important to Indigenous young people are taken into account.
- A campaign to raise the awareness of adults who influence/have contact with young people about the value of young people engaging in democracy;
- The creation of more opportunities for young people to have a say, such as a time to 'Have Your Say' in the Queen Street Mall; and
- Indigenous Youth Ambassadors to assist the engagement of Indigenous young people in democracy.
At the **Voices & Votes workshops**, young people were asked to discuss: How should government/ the Parliament/ political parties/ candidates/ the media:
- involve you in decision-making and policy-making;
- ask you for your views?;

Young people’s advice to the committee was:

**Involve young people in decision-making** - via schools and the internet, face-to-face forums, phone, and see result of involvement, question in census that would allow us to be involved in decision and policy making

**Consultation** - listen to young people and give feedback, opportunities to tell the Parliament what you think, a special address for queries, a letter to the editor, a questions register at school that gets passed on to Parliament, workshops, meetings, big conferences with different aged people, also for regional Queensland, politicians tour Queensland, surveys, letterbox drop, letters to young people to hear their views, variety of options, government members should attend all schools to give direct information

**Incentives** - free download from i-tunes for first time voters, arm band similar to breast cancer, trading cards, games where you play different sides of political parties, Rock the Vote, competitions, prizes for being involved people, eg. ipods, concert tickets, movie tickets

**Provide youth spaces** - places for young people to go and talk about the issues that affect them and get information, disadvantaged youth camps

**Increase interaction** - become more actively involved with youth projects, feature on youth shows, attend rallies, greater links and flow of information to local-region-state-national levels

**Use youth-friendly representatives** - report to schools, knowledgeable people should explain the issues, celebrity role models to encourage people to take an interest, youth presenting the information (drug strategy)

**Use technology** - MSN Messenger, SMS, Internet, websites for candidates, youth culture websites mixed with politics, on-line forums, a computer hotline for schools to tell politicians what students want

**Offer encouragement** - encourage young people to join parties, Youth Council, leadership training

**Show acceptance** - stop the stereotyping of youth by authority figures (police, etc)

**Other relevant information and research**

In Queensland, the **Office for Youth, Department of Communities**, administers and distributes a number of one-off grants and funding for projects that promote the participation of young Queenslanders in their communities, and that support young people to achieve their full potential. Available grants include National Youth Week Grants, Youth Engagement Grants, Schoolies Grants and Youth Crime Prevention Grants (see **www.generate.qld.gov.au**).

Youth Engagement Grants are available for local governments and community organisations to help them fund innovative projects that increase young people’s engagement with their communities. Grants are available to community-based organisations for projects that provide opportunities for young people aged 12 to 25 to engage in decision-making processes and participate in their communities through community services, sports and skills development. Each year the Office of Youth provides $200,000 under the Youth Engagement Grants Program. The Office accepts applications for grants of up to $15,000.

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/TYPSbook3.pdf**).

The **Civics and Citizenship Unit, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia**, 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/**).
Committee conclusions

The Queensland Youth Charter envisages and provides for engagement with Government in the ways in which mirror the advice of young people to the committee about how they would like to engage with Government.

However, the Queensland Youth Charter does not appear to have become inherent in the ways in which Queensland Government departments and agencies engage with young people. The committee suggests that the Minister for Communities re-badge and relaunch the Queensland Youth Charter to ensure it is implemented and observed by all Queensland Government departments and agencies. The committee supports the wide adoption of ‘level 4’ engagement under the Queensland Youth Charter, under which:

- government employees encourage young people to have a real role in decision-making processes;
- a range of strategies and processes provide young people with a real role in decision-making processes; and
- accountability mechanisms and departmental policies require that young people have a role in decision-making processes and provide feedback.

At the same time, the committee suggests that there would be benefit in a review of the success of Youth Participation Grants and other resources being provided by the Department of Communities. In addition to economic resources, young people need a variety of resources to take action in their communities, including information, contacts, office facilities, opportunities, a sense of what can be achieved realistically, and feedback about what is achieved. By way of illustration, the committee has been impressed by the on-line resources for action being provided, with advice and expertise from young people, by the non-government organisation ActNow (see: www.actnow.com.au).

The committee suggests that the Minister for Communities employ young people to listen to/consult with other young people in their own spaces about issues relevant to or of concern to young people. The State Youth Council also provides a valuable mechanism for Government to engage with young people. Accordingly, the committee suggests that the Minister for Communities ensure that all State Youth Council members have sufficient resources to engage with a diversity of young people in their communities to ensure that young people in communities feel that their voices are being heard and incorporated in the policy development process.

Information about and to assist with engagement in democracy

Issues

The Voices & Votes response form asked young people to discuss and respond to the following issue:

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

Evidence to committee inquiry

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry indicated that factual, non-partisan information is essential to engagement:

UQ government students:

We want the message NOW and preferably with as little bullshit as possible. This means using technology. Young people love using the internet so it would be a good idea for political parties to send emails, set up nifty, colourful websites explaining the issues in easy to understand language and even use mobile phones to send text messages.

Inspire Foundation:

Young people make connections between the different areas of their lives, such as work, school, family, friends and popular culture. Linking awareness campaigns to other activities in which young people are involved can strengthen the message and legitimacy of enrolling to vote.

Be more relevant in their presentations to schools and young people in the sense of giving examples as to how voting and having your say does actually affect the way that politics and the state is run. Have postcards and stickers as well as the current school presentations that relate more to young people rather
than the middle aged person ho is often presenting it. Maybe even getting a young person to make the presentation so that the idea of voting is made more cool to young people these days.

Get young people directly involved with creating the message, don’t patronise young people, respect their intelligence and make it enjoyable.

Young people also report that accesses to relevant and engaging online resources would give them flexibility to interact with information about civic engagement outside of school hours.

Link [the] site to other popular sites ... that young people visit often and make it appealing to someone who doesn’t want to read an essay ...

Hon John Mickel MP, Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy:

It should also be borne in mind that Indigenous Queenslanders were, prior to the 1965 citizenship referendum, denied state voting rights. This has meant that many Indigenous youth do not have the benefit of, or received only limited, encouragement and advice on political matters for their parents and Elders.

Hon Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Child Safety:

Young people had also accessed youth web-sites such as Generate, developed by the Office of Youth. They thought the websites were useful, and in particular they mentioned a forum where young people could talk online with politicians. They suggested that there needed to be more opportunities to talk with politicians about a wide range of issues.

Legal Aid Queensland:

Young people gain their understanding of political and legal systems in a variety of ways. Many young people seek out their parents as a source of information about voting and political matters, and as they grow older are likely to be exposed to receiving information informally through public forums such as the media, and formally via teachers within the school environment. We submit that the school environment is the most consistent and appropriate place to learn about civics education and will complement all other sources of learning that young people have access to.

Accessibility could be boosted by ensuring that there is easier access to enrolment information on the ECQ and AEC websites. While there is information currently provided on both websites, it could be better presented and promoted to attract the attention of young people. Further, it is likely that many young people are unaware of the information provided on these websites. With this in mind, it would be beneficial for the ECQ and AEC to develop links with other websites that young people would frequently visit, such as radio and television websites. It is important to note, despite an overall shift in the increased use of technology, such as the internet, that some young people and members of the population still do not have ready access to the internet.

Additional strategies including targeted public awareness, education and media campaigns are necessary in order to reach a broad cross-section of the population of young people. In light of this, and in relation to servicing Queensland’s young Indigenous people, ECQ awareness campaigns should be culturally relevant and promoted in a variety of ways, including across remote areas of the State.

Vibewire Youth Services explained the difficulties young people encounter when accessing information as follows:

• they cannot find the information they are after; or
• they are presented with volumes of information; or
• the information is presented in a way which discourages them.

Young people engage with a multitude of mediums for transferral of information - the internet, magazines and newspapers, film, radio, television, telephonic digital content services ... These are the mediums young people utilise to express themselves, and therefore, these mediums should supply all information young people require, including political information.

There is no doubt that the internet has created new ways of creating and engaging with information, and young people are one of the fastest adapters to technological change. To deny the existence and weight of the information economy would not only be futile, but idiotic.

Ministerial Regional Community Forum, Ipswich, 17 October 2005:

No one sees information on the internet - an assumption is made that everyone has access to the internet or will visit that site.
Jarrod Dreise:
Show ads to notify the youth about a youth meeting.

Gemma, 17:
Introduce youth websites for those interested in politics.

Juanita Heena:
Send out packs telling youths information.

Ms Barbara Stone MP:
“Why you should give a hoot!” - Also the marketing method used to get the message across.

...most political marketing focuses on older people. The advertisements focus on families or issues that relate to people with houses and families. The same issues would have implications for young people yet not often identified.

E/Professor Colin Hughes:
When media coverage of the political process is at stake the gate-keepers’ preference will usually be to focus on scandal, sleaze, abuse of authority, denigration, and ignore systemic questions. There have been virtuous exceptions such as News Ltd’s posting of Madonna King to Brisbane to report post-Fitzgerald developments in depth. Yet telling media outlets how to report the news is a risky business, whilst the appearance of new media has merely meant that more scandals are more widely known faster than before and substantive reporting has been pushed even further into a corner.

At the Voices & Votes youth jury, expert evidence from Dr Peter Chen suggested to the jurors that it is a heresy to say that ‘the internet is a medium young people enjoy’. Dr Chen said that:

- young people do not run or influence companies that own the internet
- the internet is heavily mediated and controlled by people who do not represent young people’s views
- it is necessary to engage young people in the forums they are in - 80% will be reached in this way, but only 20% reach the government portal
- young people ask, ‘When were you in my space (eg, my forum, my chatroom) asking me questions relevant to me?’

Participants in the Voices & Votes workshops discussed: How should government/ the Parliament/ political parties/ candidates/ the media give you accurate and up-to-date information about current affairs, decision-making and policy making?

Their advice to the committee was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertising and promotions</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Provide information</th>
<th>Communicate at their level</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- involve celebrities, Australian Idol concept (no singing), publicity about the different political parties, advertise policies on TV, ads similar to ‘work choices’, community news board for local community, skywriting, relevant, ‘layman’s terms’, market through youth media (Cleo, Dirt Magazine, Cosmo, etc), advertise at school, advertising in youth timeslots,</td>
<td>- non-biased, radio, politically-based TV programs, youth-directed news, exciting attention-grabbing headlines, newspaper section about politics for young people to understand, political debates on a nightly basis</td>
<td>- accurate, unbiased, brochures, magazines with youth friendly information about relevant issues, questions and answers, student notices, information on how and where to vote and the relevant resources available</td>
<td>- make themselves understood, appropriate language, no jargon / political speak, appearance, image, be more personal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the Voices & Votes workshops, young people were asked:

- What practical assistance / resources do young people need to become more active in democracy?
- How should the media give you accurate and up-to-date information about current affairs, decision-making and policy making?
Young people’s advice to the committee relevant to media activities was:

- **Youth-oriented news and media** - election coverage, newspaper for youth, motivational style of presentation, non-patronising, program like *Behind the News*, live broadcasts like *Big Brother*, diversified media, other broadsheets besides Courier Mail, more publicity / advertising - sponsor TV programs, e.g., a local version of ‘West Wing’, non-biased, radio, politically-based TV programs, youth-directed news, exciting attention-grabbing headlines, newspaper section about politics for young people to understand, political debates on a nightly basis.

- **Advertising and promotions** - involve celebrities, Australian Idol concept (no singing), publicity about the different political parties, advertise policies on TV, ads similar to ‘work choices’, community news board for local community, skywriting, relevant, ‘layman’s terms’, market through youth media (Cleo, Dirt Magazine, Cosmo, etc), advertise at school, advertising in youth timeslots.

- **Provide information** - accurate, unbiased, brochures, magazines with youth friendly information about relevant issues, questions and answers, student notices, information on how and where to vote and the relevant resources available.

- **Communicate at their level** - make themselves understood, appropriate language, no jargon / political speak, appearance, image, be more personal.

- **Show acceptance** - stop the stereotyping of youth by authority figures (police, etc).

At the *Voices & Votes* youth jury, evidence regarding the media, young people and democracy was presented to the jurors by Mr. Joshua Green. A QUT lecturer who has completed a PhD in young people and media, Mr Green spoke about how the media provides young people with information, and the way in which young people can use the media to have a voice:

- as represented in the media, young people are the largest marginalised group in the world - they don’t possess the ability to make the most of their critical mass as they don’t know how and older people think they will grow out of ‘it’ (youth);
- the media likes young people because young people like the media;
- the mainstream media represents young people as either monsters or victims, each of which marginalises young people and leads people to the assumption that it’s not possible to give young people anything as it will be used against the giver;
- in terms of democracy, young people feel that they are perceived to be either too young to look after themselves or ‘seething’ and waiting to get out of control - this leads to them being labelled as apathetic;
- *Big Brother* proves young people like to vote (you pay to vote in *BB*) - and there are some things politicians can learn from *BB*;
- those on *BB* are perceived to be honest, able to get on with others, clever and witty - honesty in particular is a predictive quality that people value;
- the election process, too, could benefit from the drama of *BB*;
- it is necessary to think about the way young people listen, and to listen to the way young people speak (you can’t yet ‘listen’ to blogging);
- squeaky wheel concept - if young people are treated like any other marginalised group, you will end up listening only to those who speak loudest; and
- democracy should go to where young people are.

In *State and local government by-election exit polling* conducted for the committee by a parliamentary intern, young voters in the state by-election for the electorate of Chatsworth and the local government by-election for the Brisbane City Council ward of Chandler provided the following responses.

*When deciding which candidate you would vote for, which sources did you draw information from?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Chandler</th>
<th>Chatsworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Literature</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other relevant information and research - Australia

Youth Electoral Study

The first report of the Youth Electoral Study, a four-year study being conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission, the Australian National University and the University of Sydney, found that the following key points emerged from its survey of young people (page 15):

- Parents are regarded by the students as the most important source of information about voting, followed by TV and newspapers;
- Yet television and newspapers are regarded with scepticism;
- Church and other religious groups are the least important source of information about voting;
- School teachers are a moderate source of information about voting for the students; and
- The internet has little impact as an information source on voting for students.

Australian Democrats Youth Poll 2005

Respondents to the Youth Poll 2005 were asked, Who do you trust most about politics? The analysis of the responses received states:

One of the main sources of political information, the media, has proved to be the least trusted in this year’s Youth Poll, scoring just 3% of the vote. Politicians came in second bottom on 4%, confirming that young people remain sceptical about ‘official’ sources of political information.

At 46%, the family is considered the most trustworthy source of political information. Significantly, the new category ‘none’ received the second highest response, with 26%. Teachers and lecturers follow at 12% and friends at 9%. Comparing these results to 2004, all choices have lost a fraction of respondents to the ‘none’ category.

Heath

Gwendolyn Carpenter is quoted in Heath (2006, page 13) as saying:

I am part of a generation where the tools that I learn are immediately out of date. I never feel appropriately challenged. I have gotten used to being thrown in different situations constantly where I have to learn to use new tools. The difference between my expectations and my parents’ is that I will have to continuously update. Now, it’s much more important to know where to get information and how to verify it, and contextualise it, rather than to possess it. You must always be curious, and it’s tiring. If you have to be constantly curious how do you do all the rest of the things you are supposed to do to lead a stable life?

Other relevant information and research - overseas

United States

Based on research in the US, Bennett (2005) concludes that the information habits of ‘netizens’ suggest two promising trends:

- Young people increasingly prefer their information in on-line, interactive environments; and

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Source} & \text{102} & \text{102} \\
\hline
\text{Radio} & 1\% & 8\% \\
\text{Internet} & 0 & 6\% \\
\text{Parents} & 35\% & 5\% \\
\text{Friends} & 8\% & 5\% \\
\text{ECQ Letters} & \text{NA} & 1\% \\
\text{Teachers} & 0 & 1\% \\
\text{Other} & 3\% & 5\% \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

‘Other’ sources included:

- Face to face personal contact with candidates;
- dissected information from all the above sources; and
- handouts at voting booth.
• Long term internet users are among the most informed citizens.

**Bristol City Council (UK)**

The Bristol City Council report, *Democracy, what does that mean?* (2006) was commissioned as part of a United Kingdom Local E-Democracy National Project. The report found that:

*In terms of the possible channels of contact, young people feel direct face-to-face contact brings a number of benefits, and many feel that this would be the ideal form of contact as it does offer so much opportunity for interaction. However, face-to-face contact really is perceived as being very intimidating for many young people, may lead to their view being dismissed (because face-to-face reveals them as young, or tongue-tied), so this presents a real opportunity for e-democracy.*

Although young people are very comfortable with text messaging as a medium, they are concerned about the cost of SMS. Despite sending regular text messages, young people do think carefully about cost and prioritise which texts they send to whom.

*Friends and (to a lesser extent) family are the priority - meaning that many young people question whether or not they would really want to engage in text messaging as a means of participation in democracy.*

*This leads many young people to feel text messaging would only be appropriate for “one-off” contact, and/or for the council to send them information (rather than the other way around).*

*There are additional concerns over the safety and security aspects of both texting and online contact, based on experience and perception. There are also concerns over misuse of personal details for unsolicited contact.*

*Initial reactions to “e” channels of communication are positive. Young people say that e-initiatives are a natural way to communicate with them as their age group is particularly comfortable with technology. There is also a general perception that technology will become increasingly important for them and for future generations.*

*One of the key benefits that young people immediately associate with “e” initiatives is the opportunity for anonymity, enabling the engagement of those who would normally find it uncomfortable to engage in face-to-face discussions. It also has potential as a means of overcoming geographical distance and isolation in rural areas.*

**Committee conclusions**

Currently, few people take up opportunities to access Government information or to engage with Government on-line. The use of Generate (see: [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)), the Queensland Government’s portal for young people, for example, is at a relatively low level.

Young people told the committee that they prefer to access information by way of a third party as they either do not trust or cannot understand or easily access information disseminated by formal processes of Government, including Generate.

The committee heard from young people that information is far more accessible if it is ciphered through an intermediary which understands young people’s language and issues, and is able to present information in a ready, interactive way. In addition, the committee has learned that young people will rarely visit official or government spaces, unless they have a specific need for information or to access a service. It is important then that entities of representative government partner with young people’s spaces and communities to identify conceptual links between the interest that brings young people to that space and representative government; for example, young people accessing on-line music spaces for emerging artists could be provided with information and a link to Art’s Queensland’s grants for new artists.

The committee suggests that Queensland Government Ministers and others who disseminate information about the decisions and actions of Government, including about opportunities for engagement, utilise the multitude of mediums available for transferring information. One simple way this can be done is to ensure that young people’s spaces on-line include links to Government sites. Consideration should be given in particular to use of new ways in which young people create and engage with information, such as via on-line communities which facilitate and encourage engagement with representative government. Vibewire Youth Services (see: vibewire.net.au) is one such non-government organisations.

In addition, Government Departments, agencies and statutory officers should attempt to provide media with information to:

• encourage news and current affairs programs to include content on issues of importance to young people;
allow young people to create and engage with information about our system of representative democracy and opportunities for young people to engage with representative government.

An example is provided by the model of support the Australian Electoral Commission provided to Vibewire Youth Services to conduct ‘Electiontracker’ during the 2004 federal election. The committee suggests that the Electoral Commission Queensland support similar non-partisan, informative coverage by young people of state election campaigns and election nights, possibly based on the Electiontracker model.

Community

Issues

In the Voices & Votes response form, the committee asked young people to discuss and respond to these issues:

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

Evidence to committee inquiry

The Voices & Votes jury made four relevant recommendations. These were for:

- Formation of an umbrella youth organisation, ‘Get Young People Involved’ (GYPI), to educate and engage young people on democracy. The organisation should ensure:
  - young people in rural and remote areas benefit from its activities;
  - Members of Parliament are involved in its activities; and
  - issues important to Indigenous young people are taken into account.
- A campaign to raise the awareness of adults who influence/have contact with young people about the value of young people engaging in democracy;
- The creation of more opportunities for young people to have a say, such as a time to ‘Have Your Say’ in the Queen Street Mall; and
- Indigenous Youth Ambassadors to assist the engagement of Indigenous young people in democracy.

Submissions to the Voices & Votes inquiry contained relevant suggestions:

Inspire Foundation:

In addition more needs to be done to support evidence-based research on community-based initiatives and collaborative projects between government and community that seek to provide civic education and foster political engagement in young people.

The Inspire Foundation is a non-profit organisation that seeks to create opportunities for young people aged 16 to 25 to help themselves and others. ‘Act Now’ is an initiative of the Inspire Foundation which aims to provide practical advice to young people who are passionate to take action on issues that are important to them.

A service such as www.actnow.com.au run by the Inspire Foundation, will provide information for young people on a range of social issues and will enable them to explore the myriad of ways in which they can exercise their civic and social rights through taking action. Voting is an important form of civic engagement, and there is significant opportunity for the government to support partnerships between ECQ and similar services to enhance the civic literacy of young people around elections and voting.

Sites such as www.actnow.com.au will represent issues that young people care about, what they have to say and what they’d like to do about them. In supporting these services by providing funding, resources, networks, endorsements and through effective partnership, governments will enable young people to develop open spaces for discussion, debate and action.

YANQ:

One way of overcoming [cultural and linguistic diversity] is by supporting non-government organisations that can provide information about Queensland’s democracy in ways that young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds can understand. For example, prior to the last Federal Election,
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the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland conducted information seminars for people from CALD backgrounds that explained the processes of voting and voter registration as well as the policies of the major parties. Should they wish to, groups and organisations for people from CALD backgrounds could, with the support of Local, State and Federal Governments organise similar seminars in the lead up to future elections.

Jessika Vitnell, 14:

Put ads on TV asking young people to get involved with youth groups.

Other relevant information and research - Australia

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).

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).

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). Initiatives include ‘electionTracker’ (see 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.

Other relevant information and research - Overseas

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 cared about, volunteering and voting (see 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).

Committee conclusions

The role of community - family, friends, social and other collectives, non-government organisations, humanitarian organisations, etc - in providing opportunities or vehicles for engagement with the processes of representative government is receiving recognition. Engagement can be optimised when representative government engages with young people by way of these units and organisations within the community.

As recommended by the Voices & Votes youth jury, the committee suggests that the Minister for Communities engage young people who are active in their communities to establish an umbrella organisation to assist young people to engage with democracy to create change, either individually or collectively and within geographic or other communities. The umbrella organisation should promote:

- engagement by young people in regional, rural and remote communities;
- engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and regarding issues important to these young people; and

To complement the work of the umbrella organisation, the Minister for Communities could:
• advertise via appropriate media, and targeted at adults who influence and have contact with young Queenslanders, to create awareness of the benefits of young people's engagement with representative democracy; and

• fund young people’s organisations which take action about or create communities of collective action on issues relevant to representative democracy.

It is important that young people see that others in their cohort value engagement with representative government and receive recognition for such engagement. Accordingly, the Premier should establish a program under which Young Democracy Ambassadors reflecting the diversity of young Queenslanders promote the importance of young people’s engagement in representative democracy in Queensland, by way of school visits, media opportunities and having a role as a spokesperson about issues relevant to democracy.
9 - The way forward

Evidence to the Voices & Votes inquiry indicated that the disengagement of young people from formal democratic processes in Queensland is reflective of a wider disengagement within the Queensland population. The concerns about young people’s engagement in representative democracy in Queensland should not be viewed in isolation, but should be placed in the context of the wider phenomenon.

This Chapter concludes the Voices & Votes report by revisiting some of the strategies and experiences from other jurisdictions with similar systems of representative democracy. These initiatives from other jurisdictions are instructive about ways in which citizens might regain confidence in their representative government. They indicate a way forward towards stronger representative democracy in Queensland.

Evidence to committee inquiry

Legal Aid Queensland:

*It is worth also considering that it is not just young people disengaging from democracy. Indicators such as falling voter registrations, and low voter turnouts suggest that many of the challenges young people have in exercising their democratic rights and duties are not restricted to young people, but to all of us. If efforts and resources are invested into improving democracy generally, this may also flow through to young people.*

Vibewire Youth Services:

*Democracy is underpinned by the premise that classes of people will, where necessary, stand up for their own interests and their own rights, and that they should have the ability to do so without fear of persecution. Individuals are able to organise into groups for solidarity, and they may lobby their elected representatives as they see fit...*  

*In principle all people in a democracy have the opportunity to influence public policy - as lobbyists, commentators, professionals or politicians - but this is far from the reality of modern representative democracy. Few people have the opportunity to individually affect social change using the democratic political process.*

Other relevant information and research - Australia

Democratic Audit

Since 2002, the Political Science Program in the Australian National University's Research School of Social Sciences has been conducting an Audit, by way of publication of reports and discussion papers and analysis on its website (www.democratic.audit.anu.edu.au), to assess Australia's strengths and weaknesses as a democratic society.

The Democratic Audit presently adopts four core values of representative democracy: political equality, popular control of government, civil liberties/human rights, and the quality of public deliberation. It uses Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom as comparators to analyse how our Australian political institutions measure up.

On-going strategies to strengthen representative democracy in Queensland will gain valuable information and insight from the publications and analysis of the Democratic Audit.

Other relevant information and research - Overseas

Promoting democracy (Netherlands)

In 2006, the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Department of Constitutional Matters and Legislation published, *Promoting Democracy - An international exploration of policy and implementation practice*. The publication was the report on a comparative study undertaken of policy and legislative initiatives from 18 countries aimed at promoting constitutional democracy. The study was framed around two questions:

- What is needed to make a democracy robust and sustainable?
- What solutions found by other countries may also prove to be solutions for the Netherlands?
The study provided an overview of 58 initiatives from the 18 countries geared towards:

...a specific problem which is being experienced not only in the Netherlands but also in the other thriving, more established democracies. This problem relates to the decreasing confidence in public and political institutions. This problem is often referred to as ‘the gap between citizens and their government’ or ‘the gap between voters and elected representatives’.

General conclusions reached by the Netherlands study (pages 109 to 110) were that:

- ‘Democracy needs time’ - many policy practices and social initiatives have long-term objectives, and the effect of short-term solutions soon dies out, and it is important to have an idea of the causes of the problems and their symptoms;
- many countries provide incentives at various points in society with the aim of promoting democracy, and this is necessary in order to promote ‘something as multiform, complex and social as democracy; and
- ‘confidence’ in public institutions in affluent, established democracies is on the wane, but the concept of confidence and how it may be rebuilt is a problem with which many democracies are struggling.

**Power Commission (UK)**

Within the context of a changed society, the Power Commission made recommendations with the aim of creating:

a political system which allows citizens a more direct and focused influence on the political decisions that concern them. It is also an attempt to bring greater flexibility and responsiveness to politics so that new alliances can form and new ways of debating can be generated. There have to be real opportunities and spaces where the changing values in our society can be fed into politics (2006, page 20).

Power recommendations involve three major shifts in democratic practice in Britain:

- a rebalancing of power away from the Executive and unaccountable bodies towards Parliament and local government;
- the introduction of greater responsiveness and choice into the electoral and party systems; and
- allowing citizens a much more direct and focused say over collective decisions and policies.

In relation to engagement, Power said (at page 104) the changed nature of British society in the post-industrial era meant a system of democracy, with its ‘roots and design in an era that predates such profound changes’ was presented with two challenges:

- The British parliamentary system of elected representation and considerable executive power was built and designed in an era of very limited educational provision and in which deference and rigid hierarchy, and static social relations were taken for granted... However, many citizens, if not all, now exist in an era of increasing educational attainment, popular scepticism and fluid social bonds based around individual choice and self-determination. Many people now expect respect and an adequate response from the very professionals, businesses and public services who once expected the same from ordinary people. There is no obvious reason why the state and elected representatives should be any different.
- The British party system is based on the dominance of two parties constructed around the interests of two dominant classes of the industrial era. Yet, as has been made clear already, these two dominant classes and their values and interests have significantly diminished. Instead, we have a far more complex society in which individuals construct their identities and values in a far more fluid and eclectic fashion in tune with a world where social, geographic and institutional bonds are far more open to personal choice.

In relation to the second challenge, the Power Commission noted (at page 105) that the industrial working class had for most of the twentieth century had its interests represented at the heart of formal democratic processes by the British Labor Party, but that the section of twenty-first century British society suffering persistent poverty were the most marginalised and disengaged.

As a result, this is a social group that has found even less purchase on formal democratic institutions than the newly confident individuals of post-industrial era. Their alienation is, in effect, doubled. Not only do they have no strong organisational link to formal politics but the stubborn persistence of their disadvantage has created a sense that politics has nothing to offer them anyway.

The Power Commission contrasted this situation with ‘the success of other forms of participation outside the formal democratic processes’. Many of these have developed during the shift to post-industrial economy and society that have grown organically out of the demands and expectations of today’s citizens.
Evidence received by the Power Commission suggested overwhelmingly that ‘many members of the public value the opportunity to support change in a specific area of policy they care about’.

The Hansard Society (UK)

The authors contend that the future of democracy lies in people being asked to engage with democratic institutions, rather than in replacing the institutions with a more ‘direct’ democracy (at page 4):

*The dominant view is that the key to resolving social and political exclusion is to place decision making power more firmly in the hands of the people as a whole. The problem with this is that, in so doing, you may well make the plight of the excluded, the poor and the marginalised worse.*

*We argue instead for the widening and enrichment of democratic debates among citizens, but the consolidation of decision making power within reflective, responsible and legitimate representative institutions. A thriving civic life can empower representatives to do their jobs more effectively and can make them more informed about the issues at stake... [I]mproving and renewing existing representative institutions offers the best chance of stimulating wider political participation while protecting the rights of marginalised and excluded groups.*

Committee conclusions

As suggested by *Promoting Democracy* in the Netherlands, re-engagement of young people, and the wider re-engagement of all Queenslanders in our system of representative democracy will take time and requires the implementation of strategies at various points in that system.

Over time, it will be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies. This will require rigorous and longitudinal data about the ways in which all Queenslanders, including those aged 12 to 25, engage in processes of representative democracy.

The committee recommends that the Premier should, through the Office of Economic and Statistical Research, conduct an annual audit of democratic engagement. The audit should be based on the annual poll conducted on behalf of the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in the United Kingdom. This poll utilises the following 16 indicators of political engagement:

**Knowledge and interest**

Percentage of people who:
- feel they know about politics
- are interested in politics
- know their MP’s name
- ‘passed’ a political knowledge quiz
- feel they know about the role of MPs

**Action and participation**

Percentage of people who:
- are ‘absolutely certain’ to vote at an immediate general election
- have discussed politics
- have contacted their MP or councillor
- are classified as electoral activists
- are classified as non-electoral activists
- paid money to or joined a political party

**Efficacy and satisfaction**

Percentage of people who:
- believe that ‘getting involved works’
- think that the present system of governing works well
- trust politicians generally
- are satisfied with Parliament
• are satisfied with their own MP

Use of indicators similar to those used in the UK annual Political Engagement Poll would enable use of comparative data from another system of representative democracy. However, the committee recommends that in Queensland indicators should also ensure the capture of data regarding young people aged 12 to 25. In addition, data regarding knowledge about democracy would assist in evaluation of civics education reforms recommended in this report, as well as evaluation of the impact of education upon disengagement from processes of representative democracy.

The committee notes that in Queensland there is no body undertaking work similar to UK Electoral Commission/Hansard Society, or indeed the Power Commission. The most comparable work undertaken in Australia has been by the Democratic Audit of Australia project undertaken by the Australian National University. The focus of the Democratic Audit has, however, been Australian political institutions. Accordingly, the work does not directly inform about engagement in representative democracy in Queensland. The committee urges universities and/or non-government organisations to consider meeting this need, to provide information about and analyse strategies to strengthen democracy in this State.

Also in relation to evaluation, the committee recommends that the Minister for Education conduct a longitudinal study of the effects of the implementation of the Active Democracy educational reforms recommended in this report. The longitudinal study should be based on the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study undertaken in the United Kingdom by the National Foundation for Educational Research.

The success of the Active Democracy program and strategies to strengthen democracy could also be measured against the three essential elements of civil renewal as defined by former United Kingdom Home Secretary, David Blunkett (2004):

• **active citizenship** - people who take responsibility for tackling the problems they can see in their own communities;

• **strengthened communities** - communities who form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns; and

• **partnership in meeting public needs** - public bodies who involve local people in improving the planning and delivery of public services.

Working towards achieving these goals and other reforms identified in this *Voices & Votes* report will strengthen and regenerate representative democracy well into the future.
10 - Committee Recommendations

The committee recommends that the Queensland Government, the Queensland Parliament and the Electoral Commission Queensland consider, as a package, the multi-stranded and complementary recommendations in this report which aim to:

- empower young people to participate in government decision-making and policy-making processes, to be involved in their communities, and to be ‘literate’ about democracy
- empower young people to:
  - be informed citizens
  - enquire and communicate
  - engage and take responsible action
- ensure our system of representative democracy values the diversity of young Queenslanders and values their engagement in decisions and action.

Active learning about democracy

1. The Minister for Education should:

   - provide all students in Queensland (P-12, and equivalent) with an entitlement to learn about democracy, including their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how to take action on local community issues - this civics program, to be known as Active Democracy, should be mandatory for the middle and senior phases of schooling (years 6-12), and could be delivered as a separate subject or integrated into existing subjects taken by all students;
   - require schools to practise greater democracy to model the principles described in the Active Democracy curriculum and enable students to experience democracy in their school life;
   - give consideration to providing subsidies to students from rural and regional parts of Queensland to visit Brisbane - to visit the Queensland Parliament, Law Courts the proposed new Democracy Centre and other places relevant to learning about democracy in Queensland.

2. The Premier should coordinate the creation and on-going resourcing of a Democracy Centre in Brisbane to support the Active Democracy program in schools, with the Democracy Centre:

   - to be established by way of a joint arrangement with the Minister for Education, the Attorney-General, the Speaker of the Queensland Parliament, Electoral Commission Queensland and the Australian Electoral Commission and located at Parliament House and/or incorporated into the redevelopment of Old Government House on the QUT campus; and
   - to provide a major outreach program delivered via a ‘democracy bus’ to continually tour communities in rural, regional and remote Queensland.

3. The Government should provide to the Parliament additional funding, by way of the Appropriations Bill, for Parliamentary Education services to provide:

   - a co-ordinated outreach program to provide ‘Active Democracy in a Box’ kits with information, discussion and ideas for action for schools;
   - increased opportunities at Parliament House for young people aged 16 to 25, including those at secondary schools and universities, to actively learn about democracy; and
   - relevant resources to assist Members of Parliament to speak to primary, middle and senior school and TAFE students, as well as community groups; and
   - a ‘toolkit’ for Members of Parliament to listen and consult with young people.

4. The Electoral Commission Queensland should:

   - sponsor a program of grants to schools for innovative electoral education programs under a joint agreement with the Australian Electoral Commission;
   - introduce a program for upper secondary students of mock elections for the 2010 general state election, using the model developed by the United Kingdom or Canadian Electoral Commissions - this should be a joint initiative with the Minister for Education;
   - evaluate awareness and information activities, with consideration given to:
- upgrading the Electoral Commission Queensland website to provide more accessible, interactive information for young people about enrolment and voting;
- using young people to liaise with schools, universities and TAFEs, workplaces and young people in Indigenous communities about enrolment and voting;
- providing, with confirmation of enrolment, an information pack about representative democracy in Queensland and how they can be engaged; and
- support of non-partisan, informative coverage of state election campaigns and election nights, by and for young people, possibly based on the model of support provided to by the AEC to Vibewire (Vibewire.com.au) to conduct ‘Electiontracker’ during the 2004 federal election or the ‘JTV’ program on ABC2.

Electoral reform

5. In Queensland, at this time, the voting age should remain at 18.

6. The Attorney-General should consider amendment of the Electoral Act 1992 (Qld) to provide for the direct (automatic) provisional enrolment of all eligible electors once they reach 17 years of age.

In the interim:
- The Minister for Transport should include on all drivers' licence application, renewal and change of address forms, a box which may be ticked to indicate consent for the applicant's details to be forwarded to the Electoral Commission Queensland which will then send the applicant an electoral enrolment form;
- The Minister for Education should require provisional or full enrolment of all students who are eligible to enrol as a prerequisite for a Senior Certificate, QTAC and TAFE results; and
- The Attorney-General and Minister for Justice should request of the Federal Special Minister of State that provisional or full enrolment of all students who are eligible to enrol be a prerequisite to the issue of a taxfile number and to Centrelink payments.

7. In relation to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006 (Cth), the Attorney-General should:

- advise the federal Special Minister of State about the difficulty many young people may have in producing sufficient proof of identity to enrol and request that the federal Special Minister of State consult with State Attorneys-General regarding the drafting of regulations under the Act; and
- request that the federal Special Minister of State monitor the impact of the Act, and conduct a review of the Act after two federal elections.

8. To maximise opportunities to vote:

- the Attorney-General should amend the Electoral Act 1992 (Qld) to make unconditional pre-poll voting available to all electors; and
- the Electoral Commissioner Queensland should trial new locations for polling stations.

Representative Government engaging with young people

9. Members of the Queensland Parliament should:

- play an active role in the proposed Active Democracy program in schools; and
- create opportunities for young people to be involved in their work activities and to advise them on issues; for example, by providing work experience in electorate offices, inviting young people to attend functions, and to provide feedback on policy and legislative proposals.

10. Members of the Queensland Parliament should use youth media opportunities, especially those created by young people.

11. Committees of the Queensland Parliament should, where possible, use innovative engagement methods including interactive technologies, so as to maximise engagement by a diversity of Queensland people in committee activities.

12. The annual budgetary allocation to each committee of the Queensland Parliament should, where appropriate and with regard to the areas of responsibility of the relevant committee, allow for
engagement methods designed to facilitate engagement between the committee and the diversity of Queensland people.

13. The Minister for Communities should re-badge and relaunch the Queensland Youth Charter to ensure it is implemented and observed by all Queensland Government departments and agencies so that:
   • employees encourage young people to have a real role in decision-making processes;
   • a range of strategies and processes provide young people with a real role in decision-making processes; and
   • accountability mechanisms and departmental policies require that young people have a role in decision-making processes and provide feedback.

14. The Minister for Communities should evaluate the success of the Youth Participation Grants program and explore additional means of resourcing young people to take action in their communities, similar to the on-line resources being produced by ActNow (see www.actnow.com.au).

15. The Minister for Communities should employ young people to listen to/consult with young people in their own spaces about issues relevant to or of concern to young people.

16. The Minister for Communities should ensure that all State Youth Council members have sufficient resources to engage with a diversity of young people in their communities to ensure that young people in communities feel that their voices are contributing to deliberations and outcomes of the State Youth Council.

17. The Minister for Local Government should:
   • in a joint arrangement with the Local Government Association of Queensland, evaluate youth councils; and
   • develop for local governments a best practice manual about engaging with young people, including creating opportunities for young people to have a voice within local communities, such as regular ‘Have Your Say’ sessions in a central, public space.

18. Registered political parties in Queensland should provide, for distribution, a short, accessible document setting out the party’s history, philosophy and policies.

Community

19. The Minister for Communities should seek the views of the State Youth Council regarding a strategy proposed by the Voices & Votes youth jury to establish an umbrella organisation (‘GYPI’ - Get Young People Involved) to assist young people to engage with democracy to create change, either individually or collectively and within geographic or other communities. The umbrella organisation should promote:
   • engagement by young people in regional, rural and remote communities;
   • engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and regarding issues important to these young people; and
   • involvement of Members of Parliament and local government representatives.

20. The Minister for Communities should undertake an advertising campaign via appropriate media, targeted at adults who influence and have contact with young Queenslanders, to create awareness of the benefits of young people’s engagement with democracy.

21. The Minister for Communities should make sure that the ‘Generate’ website, and all Queensland Government websites, facilitate active engagement in democracy by young people.

22. The Minister for Communities should fund existing young people’s organisations and networks, including those online and those which provide information, to inform young people about democracy and opportunities to take action; examples of these organisations include ActNow (see: www.actnow.com.au) and Blast Off (see: www. ).

23. The Premier should establish a program under which Young Democracy Ambassadors reflecting the diversity of young Queenslanders promote the importance of young people’s engagement in representative democracy in Queensland, by way of school visits, media opportunities and having a role as a spokesperson about issues relevant to democracy.

24. Media organisations should ensure that:
   • news and current affairs programs include content on issues of importance to young people;
• they produce and air programs made by and for young people regarding matters relevant to our system of representative democracy, such as ‘JTV’ on ABC2.

Evaluation

25. The Premier should, through the Office of Economic and Statistical Research, conduct an annual audit of democratic engagement. The audit should be based on the annual poll conducted on behalf of the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in the United Kingdom and should include the capture of data regarding:

• the engagement of Queenslanders, including people aged 12 to 25; and
• extent of knowledge about our system of representative democracy.

26. The Minister for Education should conduct a longitudinal study of the effects of the implementation of the Active Democracy educational reforms recommended in this report. The longitudinal study should be based on the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study undertaken in the United Kingdom by the National Foundation for Educational Research.
List of References


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# Committee Publications

## Reports

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A parliamentary committee inquiry into young people engaging in democracy in Queensland

Through its Voices and Votes inquiry, the Legal and Constitutional Committee of the Queensland Parliament aims to recommend practical ways to increase young people’s interest and meaningful engagement in democracy in Queensland.

The committee wants to hear the views of the people of Queensland, particularly those aged 12 to 25 years. In coming months, the committee will talk to young people throughout Queensland and will hold a youth jury.

The committee has produced a range of publications, including a multi-media CD Rom. These provide information about young people engaging in democracy in Queensland, with the aim of encouraging discussion, public debate and submissions to the committee’s inquiry.

Information, including the publications, is available from: www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC. The closing date for submissions is Wednesday, 30 November 2005.

The committee’s contact details are:

Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE  Q 4000

Telephone: 07 – 3406 7307; fax: 07 – 3406 7070; email: lcarc@parliament.qld.gov.au
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee

SUBMISSIONS TABLED ON 9 MARCH 2006

Voices and Votes: an inquiry into young people engaging in democracy in Queensland

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<td>Charlie (Student, Bentley Park College)</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Penny Laws (Student, Bentley Park College)</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Ms Rachel Plant (Redcliffe Neighbourhood Centre)</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Ms Anna Wells</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Hon John Mickel (Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy)</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Joel Bateman (Tutorial Coordinator) and Rae Wear (Course Coordinator and lecturer, University of Queensland, School of Political Science and International Studies)</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Cr Aidan McLindon (Logan City Council)</td>
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<td>David Powell (Network Development Officer, Youth Affairs Network of Queensland)</td>
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<td>Hon Mike Reynolds AM MP (Minister for Child Safety)</td>
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<td>Vibewire Youth Services</td>
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<td>Kate Glenford (tabled 14 June 2006)</td>
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Youth Jury – Program

SUNDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2006 – 12 NOON – 4 PM
Introductory / preparatory activities
Venue: Undumbi Room (level 5, Parliamentary Annexe) (including working lunch)
- Introduction to process.
- Guidelines for participation.
- Skill development in listening, questing and integrating information.
- Information on final presentation.
Experts – Ms Natasha Wright (co-ordinator, NRM/SEQ Citizens’ Senate).

Break out activity – Capoeira lesson
Venue: City Botanic Gardens (with snack)

SUNDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2006 – 11.00 AM – 3.30 PM
Session 1 – ‘What is democracy?’ (11.15 am – 12.45 pm)
(Theme: Informed citizens)
Venue: Red Chamber
Experts – Mr Neil Laurie (The Clerk of the Parliament), Ms Tina Hunter (Bond University).
Lunch (12.45 pm – 1.45 pm) – picnic lunch on colonnade near Speaker’s Green, free time

Session 2 – The information young people need to meaningfully participate in democracy
(1.45 pm – 3.15 pm)
(Theme: Informed citizens)
Venue: Red Chamber
- What are the best means of young people acquiring the information that they need to meaningfully engage with government. The when? where? how?
Experts:
- Ms Renee Giskes (LCARC);
- Mr Terry Gallagher (Queensland Studies Authority);
- Mr Joshua Green (QUT, media expert);
- Dr Peter Chen (consultant for Victorian Parliament’s inquiry into electronic democracy); and
- Ms Jayde Fuller (National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group)

TUESDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2006 – 9.00 AM – 3.30 PM
Session 3 – Group action (9.15 am – 10.45 am)
(Theme: Active citizens)
Venue: Undumbi Room (level 5, Parliamentary Annexe)
- Joining a group that has a major role to play in influencing government.
Experts - will describe the way in which they influence government and reflect on advantages and disadvantages of their choice:
- Mr Ronan Lee MP (committee member, ALP Member for Indooroopilly);
- Ms Amy Virdi (Amnesty International);
- Ms Kate Morioka (Youth for a Sustainable Future); and
- Mr Brenton Higgins (Queensland Youth Council).

**Morning tea (10.45 am – 11.15 am) – colonnade, Level 5, Parliamentary Annexe**

- Queensland Parliament – Question Time and Matters of Public Interest (11.15 am – 11.45 am)

**Session 4 – Take action as an individual either alone or with friends around a specific issue (11.45 am – 1.15 pm)**

*(Theme: Active citizens)*

**Venue: Undumbi Room**

**Experts:**

- Ms Kelly Betts (Inspire Foundation, Act Now);
- Mrs Liz Cunningham MP (Independent Member for Gladstone);
- Ms Ruth Link (Associate, Judge Dick); and
- Ms Lauretta Rogers (Brisbane City Council – Visible Ink).

**Lunch (1.15 pm – 2.00 pm) – level 7 – barbeque lunch**

**Session 5 – Enrolling and voting at elections (2.00 pm – 3.30 pm)**

*(Theme: Active citizens)*

**Venue: Undumbi Room (level 5, Parliamentary Annexe)**

**Experts:**

- Mr Bob Longland (retired Queensland Electoral Commissioner);
- Ms Rosemary Matheson, Manager Public Awareness and Mr Joe Beath, Divisional Returning Officer for Brisbane (Australian Electoral Commission);
- Dr Graham Orr (Griffith University); and
- Ms Rebecca Leeks (President, QUT Student Guild).

**Optional tour of Parliament House (3.30 pm, for approximately 30 minutes)**

**WEDNESDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2006 - (9.00 AM – 1.45 PM)**

**Deliberation on recommendations (9.15 am – 11.15 am), with working morning tea**

**Venue: Room A.35 Old House**

**Practice of presentation of recommendations (11.15 am – 12.45 pm), with working lunch**

**Venue: Room A.35 Old House**

**Presentation of recommendations/ Media conference (1.00 pm – 1.45 pm)**

**Venue: Red Chamber**

**Optional wrap up session to celebrate and reflect on the youth jury’s achievements (1.45 pm – 2.30pm)**
RECOMMENDATIONS OF JURORS

1. Regular youth juries to inform Members of Parliament about issues important to young people.

2. Distribution to first-time voters at election time of an A4 sheet outlining the beliefs and policies of all political parties, in language accessible to young people.

3. Formation of an umbrella youth organisation, ‘Get Young People Involved’ - "GYPI", to educate and engage young people on democracy. The organisation should ensure:
   - young people in rural and remote areas benefit from its activities;
   - Members of Parliament are involved in its activities; and
   - issues important to Indigenous young people are taken into account.

4. A compulsory unit, taught in Years 10 and 12 English, on the basics of democracy and politics in Australia.

5. A campaign to raise the awareness of adults who influence/have contact with young people about the value of young people engaging in democracy.

6. Enrolment, via ticking a box, on forms such as those for a drivers’ licence, 18+ card, Australian citizenship, tax file number or Centrelink benefit.

7. An information pack for young people on enrolment.

8. The creation of more opportunities for young people to have a say, such as a time to ‘Have Your Say’ in the Queen Street Mall.

9. An enrolment and democracy van to visit schools and other places where young people are, including Schoolies’ Week, possibly with incentives to enrol.

10. Non-partisan advertising campaigns targeted at young people to encourage them to vote.

11. Indigenous Youth Ambassadors to assist the engagement of Indigenous young people in democracy.

A further issue on which the jury was unable to reach consensus – whether the voting age should be lowered to 17.
Lessons for the future

An Evaluation of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee’s Voices and Votes Youth Jury

Lyndel Bates
Committee Office
Queensland Parliament

May 2006
Executive Summary

The Voices and Votes Youth Jury was the first youth jury to be held in Queensland and only the second to be held in Australia. This innovative consultation method enabled young people to consider youth participation issues over several days with the assistance of written and oral advice from experts in the field. The purpose of this consultation method was to ascertain young people’s opinions about the issues under consideration by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee in their Voices and Votes inquiry. The youth jury was designed to help inform the committee’s recommendations to the Queensland Parliament.

This evaluation uses five criteria to assess if this process was successful. The evaluation discusses participant representatives, promotion of effective decision making, fair proceedings, cost-effectiveness and the likelihood that the recommendations will be followed. It also considers the impact of transport and the future activities that the youth jurors plan to undertake.

The evaluator considered information from Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee staff, personal observation and feedback from the youth jurors when writing this report. The evaluation identifies that the Voices and Votes Youth Jury was a successful consultation process. However, the evaluator makes several recommendations in order to help finetune future youth juries.

Summary of recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:...................................................................................7

That future youth juries consider using a quota sampling or snowball sampling technique to ensure a more equal representation of sub-groups such as males and multi-cultural participants.

RECOMMENDATION 2:...................................................................................8

That future youth juries allow more time for the youth jury process in its entirety. Consideration should be given to running the youth jury on consecutive days.

RECOMMENDATION 3:...................................................................................8

That future youth juries allow more time for deliberations.

RECOMMENDATION 4:...................................................................................9

That future youth juries use small group techniques as part of the facilitation process during the expert sessions.

RECOMMENDATION 5:...................................................................................9

That future juries consider using a ‘foreperson’ and ‘bailiff’ instead of a facilitator at the end of the expert sessions to formulate questions for the experts.

RECOMMENDATION 6:................................................................................. 11

That future youth juries consider providing their recommendations in written format to the audience when presenting them.
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Introduction

A youth jury is a special type of citizens’ jury made up of young people generally aged between 12 and 25 (Carson, Sargant & Blackadder, 2004). As far as the organisers are aware, the Voices and Votes Youth Jury is the first youth jury to be held in Queensland and only the second in Australia. The first youth jury in Australia was the Parra Youth Matters jury held in New South Wales, Australia (Carson, Sargant & Blackadder, 2004).

A citizens’ jury involves a selected and representative group of ordinary people in solving a problem. The group consider their problem with the help of a facilitator and with written and oral evidence. The jury occurs over a number of days (generally four) to enable jurors to reach a conclusion. During the jury process, participants attend group sessions, plenary sessions and meetings with experts. The jurors are able to cross examine the experts. The results of the process are submitted to the sponsoring organisation. This sponsoring organisation agrees to take the jury’s findings seriously in advance (Brown, 1997).

Six criteria can be used to identify if a citizen participation method is successful. These are:

1. Participant representativeness;
2. Promotion of effective decision making;
3. Fair proceedings;
4. Cost-effectiveness;
5. Flexible process; and
6. Likelihood that recommendations will be followed (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986).

This evaluation of the Voices and Votes Youth Jury will consider five of these criteria in turn. The evaluation will not consider flexible process. Flexible process refers to whether a citizen participation method, such as a youth jury, is adaptable across a number of different tasks and settings (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986). This evaluation is only assessing one youth jury in one context and therefore will not consider if youth juries, as a whole, are a flexible process.

The evaluation will also consider a number of further aspects that could have affected the proceedings. These include transport concerns and the future activities that the youth jurors plan to undertake.

Methodology

Three mechanisms were used to evaluate the Voices and Votes Youth Jury. The first method was a discussion with the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee (LCARC) staff who provided background information on a number of issues.

The second mechanism was observing the process. The evaluator attended several (but not all) sessions throughout the youth jury. The evaluator attended the following sessions:

- Sunday, 12 February 2006, 11.00am - 3.30pm
  - Session 1: What is democracy?
  - Session 2: The information young people need to meaningfully participate in democracy
- Tuesday, 14 February 2006, 9.00am - 3.30pm
  - Session 3: Group action
- Wednesday, 15 February 2006, 11.15am - 2.30pm
  - Final part of deliberation on recommendations
  - Practice of presentation of recommendations
  - Presentation of recommendations
  - Discussion regarding conclusions about the youth jury process

The evaluator did not attend the first day which involved introductory and preparatory activities.

The third method of evaluating involved feedback from the participants. A form was distributed to enable jurors to provide written feedback regarding the process. The form asked both open and closed questions. A copy of the form is attached as Appendix A. Ten of the 12 participants completed the form. Nine completed the form at the conclusion of the youth jury process and provided them back immediately. The tenth was posted to the evaluator within a week of the youth jury process concluding.

Youth jurors were also able to provide their feedback during a debriefing session. This was an informal session conducted by the youth jury facilitator at the end of the process. The facilitator encouraged all
Participants to name the aspects of the youth jury that they liked and aspects that could have been improved.

**Participant representativeness**

Participants were initially made aware of the youth jury process in the Queen Street Mall. Committee staff and other Parliamentary Service staff handed out flyers to interested young people. A copy of this flyer is in Appendix B. When distributing flyers, committee staff provided background information and encouraged people to get involved in a unique opportunity to impact on Queensland Government policy. Committee staff also highlighted that participants would be paid a jury fee to participate.

Staff erected signs to raise awareness and attract attention to the fact that LCARC were recruiting for a youth jury. This process was approved by both the Speaker of the Queensland Parliament and the Brisbane City Council.

Individuals who were interested in participating completed a form that was attached to the flyer and then returned this form to the committee. They provided information regarding their gender, employment status, place of birth, whether they were enrolled to vote, studying, spoke a language other than English at home and whether they were an indigenous Australian. Twenty-six people returned a form.

The committee sought to have a representative group for their youth jury based on the available social and demographic census data. As a result, they selected jurors based on their gender, age, employment and study status and whether or not they were born overseas to ensure that all groups were represented. The committee also sourced an indigenous juror.

Despite flyers being distributed to indigenous people, no indigenous people indicated their interest in participating as a result of the flyers being handed out in the Queen Street Mall. The committee therefore took a more active approach to ensure that this group was represented on the youth jury.

The committee had previously considered other methods of recruiting participants. This included using the electoral role. However, the committee decided not to recruit participants in this way. Using the electoral roll as a recruitment tool would have limited the youth jury membership to individuals 17 years and above who were enrolled to vote and excluded those who were younger than 17 years or not enrolled. In Queensland, individuals must be 17 years or older to be placed on the electoral role.

Thirteen people were selected by the committee to participate as youth jurors. Of these, 12 actually participated. The thirteenth person selected did not participate.

Twenty-five per cent (three people) of the jurors were male and 75 per cent (nine people) were female. The average age of participants was just over 17 and a half. The youngest jurors were 16 and the oldest were 20. Six of the participants were employed and eight were full time students. One was in the process of applying to university. One juror was indigenous. Five participants were enrolled to vote.

The youth jurors believed that more males, more rural participants and more multi-cultural jurors were required. The evaluator believes that in order to obtain a sample that contained more of particular subgroups, the committee would need to use a quota sampling method in future. Quota sampling uses population demographics to ensure that the sample is representative of these demographics (Griffiths, Stirling & Weldon, 1998). The committee would have needed to continue to recruit participants until the quota for each sub-group was filled. For instance, if the committee wanted equal numbers of males and females, they would have needed to continue to recruit males until there were equal numbers.

While quota sampling ensures that there are representative numbers of identified demographics the sample may not be representative in other ways (Griffiths, Stirling & Weldon, 1998). For instance, while a quota sample may contain equal numbers of males and females, it may not be representative in terms of income or occupational groups.

Although quota sampling may help obtain a sample that is more representative of gender, it may be more difficult to use this technique with other demographic variables such as ethnicity. This is because males and females are represented comparatively widely in the community while those with a multi-cultural background are less common.
An alternative would be to use snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a technique used to recruit individuals with specific characteristics when they are difficult to locate (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001). Using this technique, initial individuals would be recruited using the original method chosen. Individuals who then exhibited a particular characteristic such as a multi-cultural background would then be asked to refer people for inclusion in the study (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001).

While snowball sampling increases the involvement of individuals with characteristics that are difficult to find, it limits the chance that the sample is representative of the wider population. This is because people may refer others who hold similar views to themselves (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001).

The evaluator concludes that the recruitment of participants was the best possible method under the circumstances using the information known at the time. Although, using the electoral role would have allowed a random selection of participants, it would have excluded those aged 16 years or younger and those who had never enrolled.

By handing out flyers in the Queen Street Mall, the committee was able to ensure that a wide range of young people knew about the project. However, young people who did not visit the mall on that day would have been excluded from the process. This would have been moderated to a slight extent by individuals passing on the flyer to people they knew, which was also encouraged by staff who distributed the flyers.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

That future youth juries consider using a quota sampling or snowball sampling technique to ensure a more equal representation of sub-groups such as males and multi-cultural participants.

**Promotion of effective decision making**

The jury process embodies the idea that all individuals are capable of contributing relevant and important information to a debate. However, in order to promote the effective decision making amongst the jurors, they need to receive accurate and meaningful information (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986). The participants also need enough time to learn and reflect upon the information that is provided to them; the agenda must enable the material to be discussed in an orderly way; the facilitator must be effective and the views of participants must receive adequate recognition (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986).

**Accurate and meaningful information**

The Voices and Votes Youth Jury provided information to jurors through a range of methods. Jurors received an information pack before the youth jury process commenced. This pack contained:

- Short biographical information on each potential expert;
- The proposed program;
- Some answers to frequently asked questions;
- List of participants involved as jurors;
- List of juror responsibilities;
- Article on youth, political engagement and voting; and
- Article on young people’s views of democracy on and offline.

The preliminary information provided to the youth jurors was sufficient. Nine of the 10 jurors who completed evaluation forms stated that they found the information pack they received prior to starting the youth jury was useful or very useful. The remaining one was uncertain.

The youth jury process increased their awareness of the democratic process in Queensland. Nine of the 10 jurors who provided written feedback reported that they had learnt a lot about democracy in Queensland as a result of being a youth juror. The remaining one was uncertain.

**Time to learn and reflect**

The Voices and Votes youth jury took place over four days. The first day (Sunday 5 February 2006, 12noon to 4.00pm) was for introductory and preparatory activities. The second day (Sunday 12 February 2006, 11.00am to 3.30pm) and third day (Tuesday, 14 February 2006, 9.00am to 3.30pm) were allocated for sessions with experts. The final day (Wednesday 15 February 2006, 9.00am to 1.45pm) allowed time for deliberations and
presentation of the recommendations. Eight jurors stated that the youth jury process was too short in their evaluation form. The remaining two indicated that the youth jury process was about right or too short.

The youth jury was structured with breaks between several days to allow jurors time to rest and recover and also to try to take into account their other commitments. Allowing time between the days was a recommendation from the Parra Youth Matters jury (Carson, Sargant and Blackadder, 2004). This was supported by the feedback from six jurors in the evaluation forms who found the break between the second Sunday and the Tuesday sessions refreshing. One person said it was not refreshing while the remaining three respondents were uncertain.

However, verbal feedback from participants at the conclusion of the youth jury indicated that running the process run across four consecutive days would be more useful for the jurors. This was supported by the information collected on the evaluation forms. All but one juror who provided written feedback found that the youth jury process was not tiring. This one person found it tiring in a positive manner - ‘tiring but fun - good tiring.’

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

That future youth juries allow more time for the youth jury process in its entirety. Consideration should be given to running the youth jury on consecutive days.

Each session with experts was 1 ½ hours long. At the start of each session, experts would provide a short presentation. The length of the presentation varied according to how many experts were participating in each session. As a general guide, each presentation was approximately 10 minutes long.

After the presentations, the experts would leave the room while the jury developed questions as a group for the experts. This process generally took about 15 minutes.

The experts would then return to the room. For the remainder of the session, the jurors would question the experts.

All respondents found the sessions with experts either useful or very useful. Most respondents (8 of 10) found that the experts provided them with the information that they needed in order to understand ideas and formulate recommendations. The remaining two were uncertain.

Nine of the respondents indicated that the length of each session was about right. The remaining person believed that they were about right or too short (they responded twice).

The evaluator concludes that the length of the session was generally sufficient. However, as there were several experts involved in one session it sometimes became difficult for the jurors to ask all the experts all their questions within the allocated time.

Some youth jurors believed that more time was needed for deliberations prior to making their recommendations. The evaluator agrees with this. Observations indicated that it was difficult for the group to reach a consensus on some issues due to the lack of time available. Reaching a consensus on all their recommendations was a rule that the jury made for themselves on their first day. Although, a consensus may never have been reached, due to different viewpoints, more time would have enabled the group to discuss and argue their differences constructively.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

That future youth juries allow more time for deliberations.

**Orderly agenda**

The committee planned the youth jury’s agenda. However, the committee consulted with accessible young people employed by the Queensland Parliamentary Service in order to ensure that it was youth friendly. The jury selected their own experts from those that the committee had placed on the agenda. The agenda was designed to allow orderly progression through the issues, particularly whether democracy could better serve young people in Queensland.
The youth jurors seemed to enjoy each aspect of the process. Eight jurors stated in their evaluation forms that they found the introductory/preparatory activities enjoyable or very enjoyable. One person believed they could have been shorter while another was not there for the entire time.

Similarly, eight respondents found the introductory/preparatory activities useful or very useful. One was uncertain while one believed that it was not useful to uncertain. All respondents enjoyed the sessions with experts.

Seven respondents either found the break out activity of Capoeira enjoyable or very enjoyable. Two respondents were uncertain and one did not attend.

**Effectiveness of the facilitator and recognition of participant views**

The Chair of LCARC provided a chairing role throughout the youth jury process. This involved, amongst other tasks, introducing experts and ensuring that the process was kept to time.

This youth jury had a facilitator and two co-facilitators. The co-facilitators were young people employed by the Queensland Parliamentary Service. The facilitator helped the youth jurors manage their group discussions in order to formulate their questions and recommendations. The facilitator also aimed to ensure that all jurors have the opportunity to participate.

Within the sessions with the experts, the facilitators did not divide the group. The entire group was kept together in order to formulate the questions. In the evaluator’s opinion, this restricted the participation of some of the shyer members of the group. It also made it more difficult to create within-group interaction.

The evaluator suggests that there may be value in using small group techniques while facilitating the expert sessions. The facilitator used this type of technique on the last day of the jury, during the deliberation session, where the larger group divided into three small groups. This encouraged discussion amongst jury members. Using similar techniques during the expert sessions may have encouraged this type of discussion earlier in the process.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

That future youth juries use small group techniques as part of the facilitation process during the expert sessions.

All jurors who completed the evaluation form believed that their views were heard in the group. They also believed that all jurors had the opportunity to express their views. All jurors who provided written feedback found the facilitators extremely helpful. They all believed that they had the opportunity to formulate and ask the experts questions.

Future youth juries could consider moving closer to a jury concept by limiting facilitator involvement. Instead of a facilitator managing the discussion after each expert session, the jury could elect a ‘foreperson’ during their preparatory activities. This person would then have the responsibility of ensuring equal participation by all members. A ‘bailiff’ would take notes on behalf of the jury, ensure the jury kept to time and help maintain order if required. The facilitator would still conduct the introductory activities to ensure group cohesion.

Although the evaluator believes this idea has merit, there are also some drawbacks. For instance, the foreperson would need to possess people management and leadership skills. There is also the danger that the foreperson would have a greater input into the ideas generated by the committee than the other jury members. However, future youth juries should consider this idea.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

That future juries consider using a ‘foreperson’ and ‘bailiff’ instead of a facilitator at the end of the expert sessions to formulate questions for the experts.
Fair proceedings

For a youth jury to be successful, the proceedings must be fair. If it appears as though the procedures are biased in any way then the entire process loses credibility (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986). This means that the jurors must be involved in decision making in order to limit the biases of the organisers. This independent decision making needs to be balanced with the need to set an orderly agenda (see page 11).

The Voices and Votes youth jury provided the jurors with the opportunity to select their own experts. Each juror was provided with a list of potential experts selected by LCARC with a background on the topic. LCARC selected the potential witnesses based on their knowledge of the area, their contacts, ensuring a range of issues were covered and budgetary considerations (the committee had approval to organise and pay travel costs for two witnesses). The jurors then selected the experts that they wished to listen to and question from this list. This enabled the jurors to have a greater say in the process.

Eight jurors who provided feedback on their evaluation form felt that it was either useful or very useful to select their own experts for questioning. One person was not present at the selection time. The last person suggested that the jurors did not receive enough information to make a useful selection. This person suggested that all of the possible experts would have been great.

The evaluator considers that the youth jury deliberations also impact on whether the proceedings are fair. The deliberations must not be dominated by one or two jurors. All jurors who provide written feedback believed that they had the opportunity to fully participate in the jury deliberations. They all believed that this process was useful. Nine found the jury deliberations enjoyable or very enjoyable.

The youth jury eliminated all potential political bias by having an independent facilitator. The youth jurors also heard speakers from the government and opposition sides of Parliament as well as an independent Member of Parliament.

The evaluator considers the proceedings were fair.

Cost-effectiveness

It is difficult to make an assessment about the cost effectiveness of a citizen participation project because the value placed upon it by others varies greatly (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986).

LCARC spent $10,202 on the youth jury process. This included the following costs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultant and facilitator</td>
<td>$4200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees paid to jurors</td>
<td>$3240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>$1857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airfares for witnesses</td>
<td>$785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capoeira processes</td>
<td>$120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$10,202</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evaluator considers that the youth jury process was cost effective. The financial costs of holding the jury were small when compared to similar activities by other organisations. For instance, the recruitment of some citizen jury panels alone could cost $10,000 depending on the technique chosen.

Another reason for the youth jury was cost-effective was that it was critical for the committee’s current inquiry, Voices and Votes. The primary reason for holding the youth jury was to enhance the quality and usefulness of the committee’s inquiry. The evaluator considers that greater value for money was achieved for this inquiry using the youth jury process than other, more traditional, consultation techniques such as a public hearing. As the youth jury was designed for young people, it was a friendlier environment for them when compared to a public hearing. This would encourage stronger and more relevant participation from the jurors. The ability for them to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues also assisted them to develop meaningful recommendations.

When considering whether or not the young jury was cost effective, it is important to consider the innovative nature of this consultation technique. By holding this youth jury, the committee was able to demonstrate that theoretical participation processes can be applied in a practical way within Queensland. The cost-
effectiveness of this technique is likely to improve as more youth juries are held. This is because organisers will learn from the experience of holding previous youth juries.

Likelihood that recommendations will be followed

An effective jury process should ensure that there is a strong likelihood that the recommendations will be considered and followed (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986). This includes the perceptions by jurors that they will be followed.

The majority of jurors believed that LCARC would consider their recommendations seriously. They were less certain about the Queensland Government and the general public. Eight jurors that provided written feedback believed that LCARC would pay either some attention or a lot of attention to their recommendations. The remaining two were uncertain. Six jurors believed that the Queensland Government would pay some attention to their recommendations. Three were uncertain and one said both uncertain and some attention. Four jurors believed that the general public would pay either some attention or a lot of attention to their recommendations. The remaining six were uncertain.

The Youth Jury presented their recommendations to LCARC and other invited guests in the Legislative Council Chamber of Parliament House. Apart from the members of the committee, there were also Ministers, senior Parliamentary Service staff and young people present.

The presentation commenced with a Welcome to Country by the indigenous juror. Each juror then presented at least one recommendation. The recommendations were written on cardboard and held up as each person spoke. The committee Chair and Deputy Chair also spoke briefly on the jury process and recommendations.

The jurors enjoyed the presentation of their recommendations. All 10 jurors that completed the evaluation form found the presentation of recommendations either enjoyable or very enjoyable. They also found the presentation of recommendations either useful or very useful. The jurors believed that they had the opportunity to decide the way the presentation occurred.

Some jurors believed that making the youth jury recommendations available in written format to the audience would have enhanced their presentation. Time constraints inhibited this occurring during the current jury. However, the evaluator considers that this is useful feedback that should be considered for future youth juries.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

That future youth juries consider providing their recommendations in written format to the audience when presenting them.

Other issues

Transport issues

The evaluation form asked individuals if they experienced difficulties accessing the youth jury either because of transport concerns or timing difficulties. The responses indicated that there were limited difficulties with transport during the youth jury process. Nine of the 10 jurors who completed the evaluation form did not have transport difficulties. The last person was uncertain.

One person found it difficult to attend the youth jury sessions that were held on the Sunday. Another person found it difficult to attend during the week because of work commitments.

The evaluator concludes that transport issues and timing difficulties had a minimal impact on the youth jury process.

Future activities

The evaluator asked the participants if they would use what they had learnt at the youth jury in their future activities. All jurors who completed the evaluation form claimed that they would use the information they had learnt as a result of participating in the youth jury in their future activities.
Some jurors indicated the ways in which the youth jury had inspired their future activities. The comments were wide-ranging. One discussed the possibility of becoming a Member of Parliament:

It was very inspirational meeting female MP’s. Maybe one day I would like to be one myself.

Some people indicated that it had helped to motivate them:

Participating in the Youth Jury has shown me that there is so much opportunity to get involved in democracy. I am now excited about having a say and I want to help get other young people excited too about voting and just getting involved. I am interested in joining future youth juries and possibly becoming involved in the Youth Council.

And

I think primarily it has given me the knowledge and experience I needed to boost my confidence and fuel my desire to make a positive change in my community. It has also given me a stack load of information and experience that I can hopefully use to inspire and inform people I know.

All jurors who provided written feedback believed that they had gained the ability to inspire their family and friends to become involved in democracy. All would advise other young people to participate in the youth jury process. They would do this because:

• It was a chance to make a positive and real difference;
• Useful, informative and inspiring;
• Allows people to learn about an issue, meet like-minded people and participate in the political system;
• Learnt a lot and felt that they had the power to change things for the better;
• Opportunity for leadership to be developed and to realise the difference young Australians can make;
• Fantastic experience which provided so much knowledge;
• Informative and fun;
• Informative time to become more involved; and
• It was a beneficial process for any young person to see how their voice does actually get listened to. They learned so much about democracy and how the Parliamentary system works.

Overall

Feedback from the jurors indicated that they enjoyed the youth jury process and found it useful. All responses on the evaluation form indicated that the jury process was very enjoyable as well as either useful or very useful overall.

All jurors who provided written feedback on the evaluation form believed that the youth jury achieved its aims. However, one person made their response conditional. They believed that the aims would only have been achieved after they had heard the responses to their recommendations from the Queensland Parliament.

The evaluator concludes that the overall youth jury process was successful. Future youth juries should consider applying the recommendations mentioned previously in order to improve the process.
Appendix A  
*Copy of the evaluation form for the Voices and Votes Youth Jury*

The Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee is interested in finding out how the youth jury process worked for you. This was one of the first youth juries held in Australia. The committee is interested in continually improving the way that they consult with young people and the community in general. Please take the time to complete this evaluation form so we can continue to improve our consultation methods.

*Please note that this is an anonymous process.*

**How enjoyable did you find the youth jury process overall?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all enjoyable</th>
<th>Not enjoyable</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Enjoyable</th>
<th>Very enjoyable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How useful did you find the youth jury process overall?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all useful</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How enjoyable did you find the introductory/preparatory activities?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all enjoyable</th>
<th>Not enjoyable</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Enjoyable</th>
<th>Very enjoyable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How useful did you find the introductory/preparatory activities?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How enjoyable did you find the sessions with experts?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all enjoyable</th>
<th>Not enjoyable</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Enjoyable</th>
<th>Very enjoyable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How useful did you find the sessions with experts?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all useful</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How useful was it to select your own experts for questioning?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all useful</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Did you the range of experts provide you with the information you needed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Did you feel that you had an opportunity to fully participate in asking the experts questions?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Did you feel that you had an opportunity to fully participate in the formulation of questions for the experts?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How enjoyable did you find the deliberations?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all enjoyable</th>
<th>Not enjoyable</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Enjoyable</th>
<th>Very enjoyable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
How useful were the jury deliberations for you?

| Not at all useful | Not useful | Uncertain | Useful | Very useful |

Did you feel that you had the opportunity to fully participate in the deliberations?

| Not at all | No | Uncertain | Yes | Absolutely |

How enjoyable did you find the presentation of recommendations?

| Not at all enjoyable | Not enjoyable | Uncertain | Enjoyable | Very enjoyable |

How useful did you find the presentation of recommendations?

| Not at all useful | Not useful | Uncertain | Useful | Very useful |

Did you feel that you had an opportunity in deciding the way the presentation occurred?

| Not at all | No | Uncertain | Yes | Absolutely |

How enjoyable did you find the Capoeira?

| Not at all enjoyable | Not enjoyable | Uncertain | Enjoyable | Very enjoyable |

How useful was the information pack you received prior to starting the Youth Jury?

| Not at all useful | Not useful | Uncertain | Useful | Very useful |

How much did you learn about democracy in Queensland as a result of being a youth juror?

| Not very much | Not much | Uncertain | A little bit | A lot |

Will you use what you learnt at the Youth Jury in future activities?

| Yes | No |

How has the youth jury inspired you, personally, to engage in democracy?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Do you feel that you now have the ability to inspire your friends and family to be involved in democracy?

| Yes | No |

Do you think that the entire youth jury process was too long or too short?

| Far too long | Too long | About right | Too short | Far too short |

Do you think that the sessions were too long or too short?

| Far too long | Too long | About right | Too short | Far too short |
How tiring did you find being a youth juror?

Very tiring  Tiring  Uncertain  Not tiring  Not at all tiring

Did you have transport difficulties?

Yes  No

Did you find it difficult to attend the Youth Jury on a Sunday?

Yes  No

Did you find it difficult to attend the Youth Jury during the week?

Yes  No

Did you find the break between the second Sunday and the Tuesday sessions refreshing?

Not at all refreshing  Not refreshing  Uncertain  Refreshing  Very refreshing

Do you feel that your views were heard in the group?

Yes  No

Do you believe that all jurors had the opportunity to express their views?

Yes  No

How helpful were the facilitators?

Not at all helpful  Not helpful  Uncertain  Helpful  Extremely helpful

Was there anything else you would have liked to find out? What was this?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Do you think the youth jury achieved its aims?

Yes  No

How much attention do you think the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee will pay to your recommendations?

No attention at all  Not much attention  Uncertain  Some attention  A lot of attention

How much attention do you think the Queensland Government will pay to your recommendations?

No attention at all  Not much attention  Uncertain  Some attention  A lot of attention

How much attention do you think the general public will pay to your recommendations?

No attention at all  Not much attention  Uncertain  Some attention  A lot of attention
What suggestions do you have for the way any future youth jury could be improved?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Would you advise other young people to participate in the youth jury process?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

Why?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Do you have any further comments?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Thank you for providing this feedback.

Please hand this form to Lyndel Bates

OR

Post it to:

Lyndel Bates
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

OR

fax it to Lyndel on 3406 7070
How can democracy better serve young people in Queensland?

Your life is affected by decisions made by government, and the laws governing our society affect the lives of all young people. But some young people say they don’t know how to influence government decision-making. Sometimes they try, and feel they’re not listened to. This has to change. With your help, the Legal and Constitutional Committee of the Queensland Parliament will recommend ways to ensure that your voice is heard, and that you feel confident your vote counts.

The committee invites you to join fourteen other young people in a “youth jury” at Parliament House in February 2006. The youth jury will deliberate on how democracy can better serve young people in Queensland.

A youth jury is democracy in action. The jurors are a small representative group of ordinary but diverse young people. They hear evidence from expert witnesses about an issue and then work, by consensus, towards recommendations on that issue. A youth jury shows what the wider views of young people might be if young people were fully informed about an issue.

About the youth jury:

Dates: Sunday, 5 February 2006 (part-day only)
(approximately 10.00 am to 4.00 pm each day)
Sunday, 12 February 2006
Tuesday, 14 February 2006
Wednesday, 15 February 2006

Venue: Parliament House, cnr George and Alice Streets, Brisbane

Fees paid to youth jurors: $90.00 per day (for 12, 14, 15 February 2006)

What else will be provided: Morning tea / Lunch / Afternoon tea
Valuable contacts with other young people, Members of Parliament, academics and people with an expertise in democracy.
Certificate of participation

We’ll be selecting jurors in early January 2006. We hope for a group that will represent the young people of Queensland.

If you:

- are aged 16 to 21;
- can get to Parliament House on the dates for the youth jury;
- want to have your voice heard;
- want to earn some money; and
- would like to take part in Queensland’s first youth jury;

please return this form by Friday, 30 December 2005.

If you have any questions, please contact the Legal and Constitutional committee on Telephone: 3406 7307 or email: lcerc@parliament.qld.gov.au

About you:

Name: ________________________________
Address: ________________________________
Telephone number: ________________________________
Email: ________________________________
Age: ________________________________

Please tick the boxes that apply to you:

- Female / Male
- Full-time student / Part-time student
- Employed / Unemployed
- Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander
- Born overseas (country____________________)
- Speak language other than English at home
- Enrolled to vote / Not enrolled to vote

Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Legislative Assembly of Queensland
References


