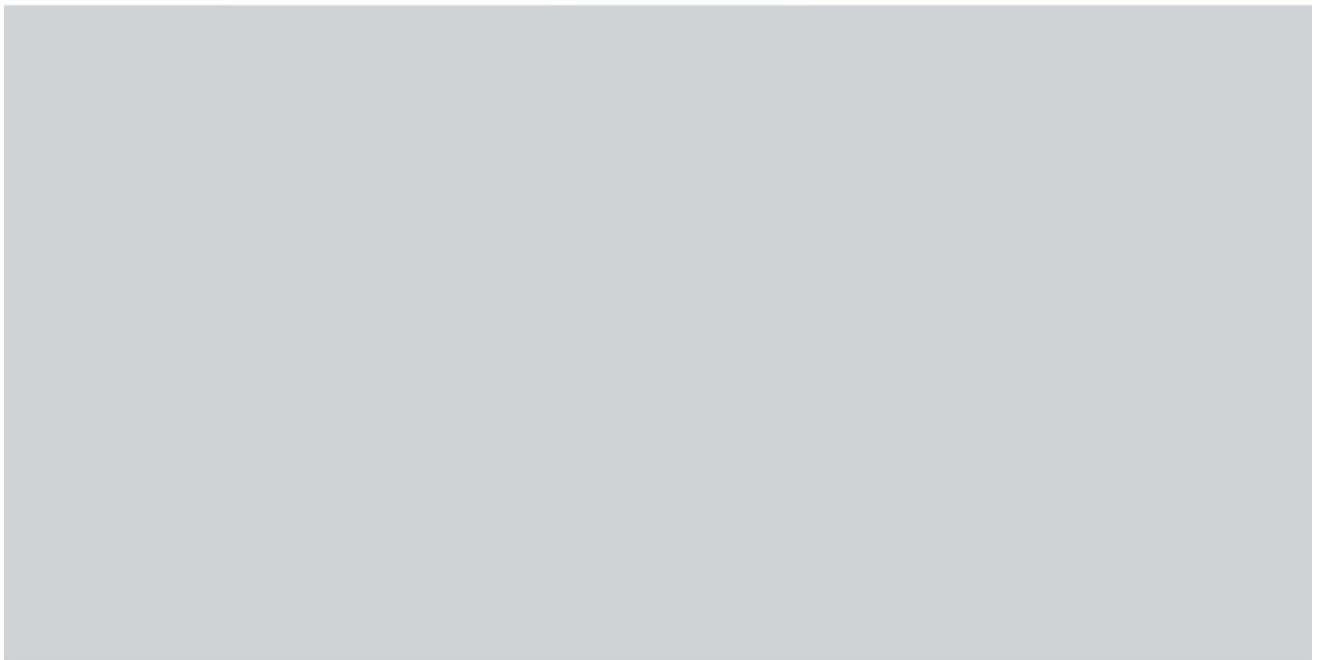


Draft *Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship*

Response from the Australian Electoral
Commission



AEC

Australian Electoral Commission

The purpose of this response is to provide feedback on the draft curriculum from the perspective of the AEC, a civic institution with a long history of involvement in civics and citizenship education. As part of our ongoing role to *'inform and educate the Australian community about electoral rights and responsibilities'* the AEC provides electoral education resources and services to schools across Australia as well as operating the National Electoral Education Centre in Canberra. The AEC has taken an active interest in the development of the Australian Curriculum - Civics and Citizenship and welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback to ACARA.

Structure of Curriculum

The rationale and aims of the curriculum provide a sound basis for teachers to understand the importance of civics and citizenship and the goals of the curriculum. The emphasis on active and informed participation is vital to ensure that students not only understand Australia's democracy but also their essential role in it.

Key comments

- The curriculum sets out a broad scope for civics and citizenship, which may be ambitious given the small amount of teaching time available for its delivery. The AEC is encouraged that within this there is a strong focus on *'Australia's federal system of government based on liberal democratic values such as freedom, equality, and rule of law; how the people, as citizens, choose their government; and how the system safeguards democracy by vesting the people with civic rights and responsibilities'*. The AEC hopes that this remains firmly at the core of the final curriculum.
- Given the density of the curriculum, the AEC suggests that the curriculum should emphasise that civics learning should be embedded in school culture through 'informal curriculum' activities such as student government and school elections. The AEC asserts that this *'active participation'* not only increases *"students interest and enjoyment of civics and citizenship ..."* it is also fundamental to students developing the skills and values required to be active citizens during adult life.
- The curriculum ceasing at Year 10 presents challenges for the AEC and other democratic institutions. Senior secondary students (years 11-12) are entering the age of active participation, for example by becoming eligible to enrol and to vote. These years offer the greatest opportunity for students to apply the knowledge and skills developed through the curriculum in the real world. Therefore, the AEC would strongly support the extension of the curriculum into years 11 and 12.

AEC research estimates that almost half-a-million young Australians (aged 18-24) are not enrolled to vote. From the age of 16 young Australians can enrol to vote to ensure they are ready to participate once they turn 18. As such, this age group is a key audience for the AEC. The AEC will continue to offer education services and targeted public awareness campaigns to senior secondary schools.

Content (descriptions/ elaborations and achievement standards)

The content is comprehensive and sequenced to ensure that each year students build their knowledge and skills. The AEC is encouraged by numerous references to voting across the years. Experience of real decision-making at school, for example school elections, are a precursor for adult participation. The AEC suggests that the curriculum should make clear that these practical opportunities must model the fairness and

accountability on which Australia's democracy is based, in order for students to develop trust in democratic processes. To separate democratic principles from actions in school governance, or to allow 'sham' democratic processes like unfair elections, causes confusion and is a disservice to students.

Key Comments

- The AEC strongly suggests the removal of the word '*mock*' election in the elaboration of Year 5 Knowledge and Understanding. While simulated elections are effective at demonstrating the voting process, there are also many opportunities for genuine decision-making at the school level. For example, student elections and governments are a meaningful and practical opportunity for students to exercise democratic decision making at school. The AEC national outreach education program '*Get Voting*' provides support for authentic school elections. As such, the AEC would like to see the curriculum encourage schools to use real voting exercises wherever possible.
- Year 5 content elaborations identify the importance of "*in school decision making process, relating to its democratic structures and processes such as councils, parliaments, and government and voting*". The AEC fully supports this approach and suggests that this notion is reinforced in all years. The school environment itself should reflect the principles of democracy and provide real opportunities for students to experience democratic principles in their day-to-day life in the classroom and the school setting across all years.

Final comments

The AEC commends ACARA on the development of a detailed and clear curriculum that covers a wide range of civics and citizenship knowledge and skills. The draft curriculum is ambitious in its scope given the teaching time dedicated to it. This reinforces the need to encourage schools to embed democratic learning through the 'informal curriculum' by making democratic practices and values a part of every day school life. The AEC suggests that this could be more clearly articulated in the curriculum document. Furthermore, in-school experiences of democratic processes such as voting need to be based on the same principles that apply in the real world, ensuring that students experiences at school build their trust in and commitment to democratic values.

One of the AEC's objectives, in collaboration with the education sector, is to educate and inform the Australian community about electoral rights and responsibilities. Civics and Citizenship is an area of the curriculum in which the AEC has an active interest and considers itself to have expertise in providing services and learning materials for educators. We appreciate this opportunity to contribute to the development of the Australian Curriculum – Civics and Citizenship.