

# Cabinet Submission

**Title** Civics and citizenship education in schools

**Minister** The Hon Jason Clare MP  
Federal Minister for Education

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**Priority** B

**Financial impact** Yes

**Legislative change** No

**Regulatory impact** Increased

**Submission type** Government position or response to an inquiry

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## 1 Recommendation(s)

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It is recommended that Cabinet Approve the following recommendations:

- 1.1 Establish Civics and Citizenship as a mandatory subject under the Senior Secondary Curriculum and general capability area under the Primary Education Curriculum of Version 10.0 of the Australian F-10 Curriculum.
- 1.2 Ensure the Department of Education (the Department) collaborates with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) as well as academics in the field of electoral education to establish a new and updated non-political Civics and Citizenship subject as part of the curriculum, with experiential learning as a key component of its delivery.
- 1.3 Expand the National Assessment Program (2024) Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC) key content areas to include electoral knowledge, such as knowledge on how to vote, and how voting procedures function.

## 2 Purpose of the Submission

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- 2.1 Australian students consistently do not meet the benchmarks of civics and citizenship assessment, defined by the NAP-CC benchmarks, hindering their ability to participate in, and contribute to society upon leaving school. This is in large part due to the fragmented and lacking delivery of civics and citizenship education in school. This submission therefore proposes a new model of compulsory civics and citizenship education and benchmarking to remedy this issue.

## 3 Issue Background

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### 3.1 Scale

- 3.1.1. The 2009 Youth Electoral Study found that nearly 400,000 Australians aged 18–25 were not enrolled to vote, with 18-year-olds recording the lowest electoral participation rate at 58.29%, thus illustrating a persistent generational enrolment gap (Saha & Print, 2009, pp. 2–3).
- 3.1.2. A recent national survey reinforced this, revealing that one in three unregistered young people did not know they had to register or how to do so, thus underscoring the role of civic knowledge deficits in low youth participation (Ammassari et al., 2025, p. 3)

### 3.2 Causes

- 3.2.1. Whilst Civics and Citizenship Education (Years 3–10) exists within the Australian Curriculum, its delivery and assessment are not mandated nationally, and both its time allocation and depth vary markedly between jurisdictions and schools (Print, 2025). This inconsistency was highlighted in the 2015 Inquiry into Electoral Education, where a Victorian student described their civics education experience as being “one class, one year, one time,” noting that most of their understanding of electoral systems was “self-taught,” thus demonstrating the education system’s failing in preparing young people to become informed Australian citizens (Forster et al., 2018, p. 13).
- 3.2.2. The absence of experiential civics and citizenship instruction further weakens civic engagement. Evidence demonstrates that exposure to election-period information environments enhances both political knowledge and voter turnout in young people (McAllister, 2016, p. 1222). However, unlike many OECD nations, Australian schools rarely conduct mock elections, enrolment simulations, or structured political debates, which are proven to embed long-term civic competence (Forster et al., 2018, p. 14; OECD, 2024).
- 3.2.3. Although the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) does offer strong external education programs, their uptake remains voluntary and inconsistent, meaning that participation in electoral education depends heavily on individual schools’ initiative, reinforcing uneven national access to quality electoral learning (Mita, 2025).

### 3.3 Consequences

- 3.3.1. Given that the political knowledge of individuals predicts their turnout, insufficient civic instruction translates directly into lower registration and participation rates amongst young voters (McAllister, 2016, p. 1221; Print, 2007, p. 336; Saha & Print, 2009, p. 3).
- 3.3.2. As a result of a lack of education, first-time voter turnout amongst young people in Australia oftentimes reflects compliance rather than conviction, with many young people reporting that they vote solely to avoid a fine. This indicates that voting is perceived as a bureaucratic chore rather than a democratic responsibility, thus reflecting a fragile sense of civic attachment (Ammassari et al., 2025, p. 3).
- 3.3.3. The optional nature of civics provision also amplifies socio-economic inequalities. Typically, well-resourced independent schools are better placed to deliver civics programs, whilst students in under-resourced public schools face limited access, reinforcing existing socio-economic disparities in procedural and political literacy (Act, 2023; Ammassari et al., 2025, p. 3).
- 3.3.4. Likewise, by failing to embed experiential, whole-school civic education, Australia surrenders the opportunity to experience the positive outcomes delivered by civics education, as demonstrated internationally (OECD, 2024).
- 3.3.5. Importantly, continued youth disengagement risks weakening democratic legitimacy. As young people perceive voting as meaningless or burdensome, trust and representation in democratic institutions may decline, thus threatening the vitality of Australia's democracy (Print, 2007, p. 326).

## 4 Proposal

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### 4.1 The Establishment of mandatory Civics and Citizenship Education under the coming Version 10.0 of the Australian Curriculum

- 4.1.1. Whilst Civics and Citizenship was introduced as a subject in February 2014, as apart of the Australian Curriculum 6.0, its delivery remains optional (Australian Curriculum, 2022). This serves as the primary obstacle to the instruction of civics and electoral education, for its non-compulsory nature sees many primary schools focus their resources on fulfilling the mandatory subjects and general capabilities set out by the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2025a). Likewise, the complete absence of civics and citizenship education in the Senior Secondary Curriculum (ACARA, 2025b), sees schools fail to prepare their students for participation in civic society, for the subject material does not exist, instead obliging students to self-educate (Forster et al., 2018, p. 13).
- 4.1.2. And, to remain current with the requirements of current students, the Australian Curriculum is typically updated every 3-4 years. This last occurred in 2022, where version 9.0 of the curriculum was introduced, meaning that the Curriculum is now in its renewal cycle (ACARA, 2022). This creates the opportunity for changes to be introduced to the curriculum by the Department

without the introduction of new legislation during this cycle of change, to be introduced as part of the upcoming version 10.0 of the curriculum.

4.1.3. Therefore, this submission proposes that the Minister for Education asks the Department to include the establishment of Civics and Citizenship as a mandatory subject under the Senior Secondary Curriculum (ACARA, 2025b) and a general capability area under the Primary Education Curriculum (ACARA, 2025a) of Version 10.0 of the F-10 Curriculum.

#### 4.2 The Collaboration with relevant stakeholders and academics in the re-establishment and broadening of the Civics and Citizenship subject

4.2.1. In line with the development of the Australian Curriculum, which included the consultation of key stakeholders in its creation (ACARA, 2016a), the Department should work with academics in the field of electoral education, as well as the Australian Electoral Commission, to establish the new Civics and Citizenship component of the curriculum, thus ensuring it remains current with the evolving knowledge requirements to be an active citizen.

4.2.2. Further to this, in order to accord with international best practice (OECD, 2024), the Minister for Education should ensure the Department prioritises experiential learning as the hearth of this new mandatory subject under the Senior Secondary Curriculum and general capability area under the Primary Education Curriculum. This would involve the inclusion of learning tasks such as mock elections, structured political debates, or enrolment simulations, which are all proven to impart young people with the competences required to adequately participate in civic life (Forster et al., 2018, p. 14; OECD, 2024).

#### 4.3 The redevelopment of the NAP-CC key content areas to meet the new requirements of electoral education as set out by this proposal

4.3.1. Whilst the National Assessment Program has collected data on Civics and Citizenship, known as the NAP-CC, since 2004 (National Assessment Program, 2019), this assesses the theoretical civic knowledge of young people, such as knowledge of key events in Australian political history, or the functions of government, rather than practical knowledge on how to participate in democracy (National Assessment Program, 2024).

4.3.2. Therefore, the Minister for Education, directing the NAP at the Education Ministers Meeting (ACARA, 2016b), should expand the NAP-CC key content areas (National Assessment Program, 2024) to include electoral knowledge, such as knowledge on how to vote, and how voting procedures function in order to gauge the success of the delivery of this new subject area, and the procedural, rather than theoretical, know-how of young people.

## 5 Strategic merit

<p>Will the proposal contribute to a stated Government Policy?</p>	<p>This policy would be in line with the Department's 2022 National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education in response to the SDG goal 4, which calls for Lifelong learning to support all learners to become informed and active global citizens (Department of Education, 2021).</p>
<p>Will the proposal help to deliver on another Government objective, election commitment or statutory requirement?</p>	<p>Whilst this policy will not build upon a specific government objective, it will aid in fulfilling the Key Activity 3 of the Australian Electoral Commission, being to engage with their stakeholders through education and public awareness activities (Transparency Australia, 2025).</p>

## 6 Consultation

### External stakeholders

- 6.1 Young people represent the primary beneficiaries of this reform and therefore should be consulted. They are expected to be strongly supportive, with youth organisations such as Make It 16 (n.d.) and AYAC (through their submission to the JSCEM Inquiry (2025)) demonstrating consistent advocacy for enhanced electoral and civics education. Notwithstanding, to ensure adequate delivery and broad support amongst young people, in line with the Curriculum Review process (ACARA, 2022), young people should be consulted with throughout the implementation process of the new Civics and Citizenship subject through surveys and focus groups.
- 6.2 Teachers, principals, and the Australian Education Union (AEU) will be central to the delivery of this program, potentially facing a greater workload as a result of its implementation. And, whilst broadly supportive of a refined Curriculum, they will likely raise concerns about potential increased workloads and insufficient resourcing because of this change, given that 70% of teachers already consider their workload unmanageable (Dunn, 2025), with budgetary limitations further constraining capacity (Hunter & Haywood, 2023). Therefore, this change should include early consultation to ensure its feasibility with the AEU, teachers, and school principals through surveys and 1-on-1 meetings, coupled with phased implementation, targeted professional development, and additional funding to ensure its adequate delivery.
- 6.3 Whilst parents and carers are expected to be broadly supportive, valuing reforms that enhance educational and civic outcomes (Benta Abuya, 2024), the government should consult with them given prior to introducing these changes, given the affects it could have on their children's education. To do so, the government should develop this new component of the curriculum in consultation with school councils and parent associations, utilising forums to do so, in order to ensure that the curriculum remains balanced and prioritises student wellbeing.

### Government agencies

- 6.4 The Department of Education will oversee the implementation of all three recommendations of the policy and will need to contribute significant resources to ensure its successful delivery. Therefore, members of the Department should be consulted with utilising 1-on-1 interviews before completing these policy changes in order to ensure that there are adequate resources available to guarantee its on-time delivery, and that the scope of these policy changes is not untenable in nature.

6.5 The Australian Electoral Commission will also need to contribute time and resources to assist in the creation of the new Civics and Citizenship subject as part of the curriculum. They should therefore be consulted with, through the organisation's management utilising 1-on-1 interviews, before the introduction of this new policy, in order to ensure that they possess adequate staffing to assist with its delivery.

## 7 Risks and mitigation

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### 7.1 Stakeholder risk

7.1.1. This policy faces a risk of potential backlash from teachers as well as the Australian Education Union (AEU), who may potentially perceive this reform as adding to already burdensome workload pressures (Dunn, 2025). In order to mitigate this risk, the Minister should engage with both the AEU and the Department, ensuring that the implementation of this policy is phased, funded adequately, and well supported by professional learning resources, maximising its delivery.

7.1.2. Likewise, Parents, who serve as the other key stakeholder, may raise concerns about curriculum crowding. However, these can be easily addressed through transparent communication from the Department, highlighting the complementarity of civics education with the literacy and critical thinking skills of students.

### 7.2 Political risk

7.2.1. Given the politicised nature of civics and electoral reform (Heller, 2021), there is a moderate risk of criticism from either the public or Parliament, framing this policy change as partisan or ideological. To mitigate this, the Government should position this policy along the narrative of democratic renewal and rights-based education, aligning with recommendations given to the JSCEM inquiry by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2024), thus framing it as a non-partisan issue.

### 7.3 Administrative and Financial Risk

7.3.1. Although this policy change does not entail any structural change, the strain on resources which its implementation may cause to the Department may require a temporary uplift in its overall FTE. To mitigate this risk, the Department must leverage existing civics programs to avoid duplication and maximise its current resources, and temporarily redeploy staff to the creation of this new program where possible.

## 8 Financial impact on government resources

Is the financial impact of the proposal on government resources likely to be: High; Medium or Low?	Low
Are new revenue-raising measures part of the proposal?	No
Are cost-cutting measures part of the proposal?	No

Does the proposal require ongoing funding?	Yes
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Whilst this new policy does not carry high costs in terms of structural change to the Department or the AEC, due to the increased resources required for its successful implementation, there may be a need for an increased overall FTE within the department, which can be mitigated through a targeted redeployment of existing staff. Within schools, its delivery will likely have little to no financial impact, for it can be taught by existing teachers, similar to new areas of the Curriculum such as Digital Literacy (ACARA, 2025a).

## 9 Other impacts

### Impact on human rights

9.1 This proposal accords positively with Australia’s obligations to human rights under both Article 25 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1966) and Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), enhancing the capacity of young people to exercise their participatory rights (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024, p. 5, 21–22).

### Regulatory impact

9.2 Whilst this proposal does not call for the formation of new legislation or the creation of new agencies, it will pose a regulatory impact to the Department of Education, as it will require significant resources to be put toward the creation of this new component of the curriculum, as well as the updated NAP-CC benchmark. This will also extend to the Australian Electoral Commission, who will face a mildly increased regulatory burden in supporting the creation of this new aspect of the Curriculum.

9.3 However, noting that the Curriculum is in its renewal cycle (ACARA, 2022) the overall impact of this policy should be low to moderate in the context of the work which would be required to be conducted during the creation of Version 10.0 of the Curriculum

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