

**Submission
No 3**

**PROPOSALS TO INCREASE VOTER ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND
CONFIDENCE**

Organisation: Australian Council for Student Voice

Date Received: 5 August 2024

05 August 2024

The Hon. Peter Primrose MLC
Committee Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament of New South Wales
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Primrose,

The Australian Council for Student Voice (ACSV) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into proposals to increase voter engagement, participation and confidence.

Our submission reflects the perspectives of our members: secondary school students, educators, school leaders, teacher-educators, academics, and other support organisations across various educational environments in Australia.

Young Australians have demonstrated a strong interest in participatory democracy, as evidenced by movements such as the School Strike 4 Climate. To improve electoral participation and engagement, there must be an improvement in the current civics and citizenship education curriculum, which is not adequately fostering active and informed citizens as outlined in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration (COAG Education Council 2019).

Our discussions revealed that while students learn about civic processes, such as voting and parliamentary structures, there is a gap in translating this knowledge into a belief that they can make a meaningful impact. The National Assessment Program – Civics & Citizenship (NAP-CC) report highlights that only 38% of Year 10 students attained a proficient standard in civics education, with declining interest and confidence in civic engagement (ACARA 2020).

To build greater civic engagement, the education system must provide foundational knowledge of civic history, institutions, and processes alongside opportunities for students to develop the skills and confidence needed for active citizenship. Practical experiences, such as visits to state parliament and engagement with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), have proven to enhance student engagement.

We strongly believe in the power of student voice, agency, and partnerships in shaping a more inclusive and participatory democracy. It is vital to create genuine opportunities for young people to express their views, take initiative, and collaborate with various stakeholders in the democratic process. By fostering environments where students can actively participate and influence decision-making, we can build a more engaged and empowered youth population.

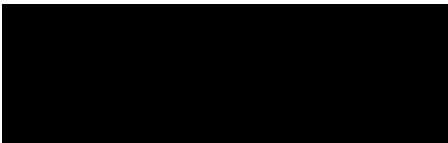
The ACSV recommends that:

1. For a stronger civic engagement, civics and citizenship education should be consistently taught across schools, including being adopted as a stand-alone subject area.
2. Civics and citizenship education should focus not only on student acquisition of content knowledge, but also on students having opportunities to develop the skills and capabilities of active citizenship, through processes such as democratic decision making and other methods that encourage greater voice and agency.
3. Any approach to strengthening civics and citizenship education must be accompanied by broader efforts to engage young people through opportunities for involvement and representation in the wider community, including lowering the voting age.

To build a robust and participatory democracy, it is crucial to engage young Australians and provide them with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to participate actively in civic life. The ACSV supports a consistent and comprehensive approach to civics and citizenship education, alongside reforms to the electoral system that enhance transparency, security, and accessibility. By prioritising student voice, agency, and partnerships as part of this reform, we can ensure a more inclusive and representative democratic process.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission, and please let us know if we can be of any further assistance to the Committee.

Kind Regards,



Mr Mitchell Sprague

Executive Director, Australian Council for Student Voice

References

ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority) (2020) NAP Civics and Citizenship 2019 National Report, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra:

<https://nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/20210121-nap-cc-2019-public-report.pdf>

COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Education Council (2019) The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, Education Services Australia, Canberra:

<https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>