

# ACT curriculum framework

**The ACT Electoral Commission and the ACT Legislative Assembly would like to assist teachers with finding information about elections and government in the ACT. The topics listed below have been chosen from the ACT Curriculum framework *Every chance to learn from Essential Learning Achievement No. 22.***

In providing this information, the Commission and the Legislative Assembly would like to promote their combined program at the Assembly as an ideal hands-on excursion to experience many of the concepts covered in the curriculum.

The novelty of the Assembly as a location can be expected to engage students in a way that a classroom lesson containing the same information cannot. However, use of excursions needs to be integrated into a broader civics and citizenship framework. Unprepared students are more likely to disengage if they have not been previously introduced to concepts such as elections and government or exposed to positive experiences of citizenship in primary school.

Ideally students should be exposed to classroom teaching in a democratic school setting where civics and citizenship education begins in early primary school and continues in a progressive way to upper secondary school.

The Assembly experience program is run by Education Officers and can be booked by telephoning 6205 3016.

## **The ACT Curriculum Framework - *Every chance to learn.* Essential Learning Achievements**

Elections ACT has extracted the parts of the **Framework** it sees as relevant to teaching about elections and parliament. We have provided definitions and links to websites to give teachers the resources to teach the **essential content** to achieve the **markers of progress** of the **Framework**.

### **Overview**

The overview of the **Curriculum Framework** describes the scope of the Essential Learning Achievement. It defines the key features and concepts of the Essential Learning Achievement and identifies its distinctiveness from other Essential Learning Achievements. The overview also identifies explicit links to other Essential Learning Achievements.

### **Bands of development**

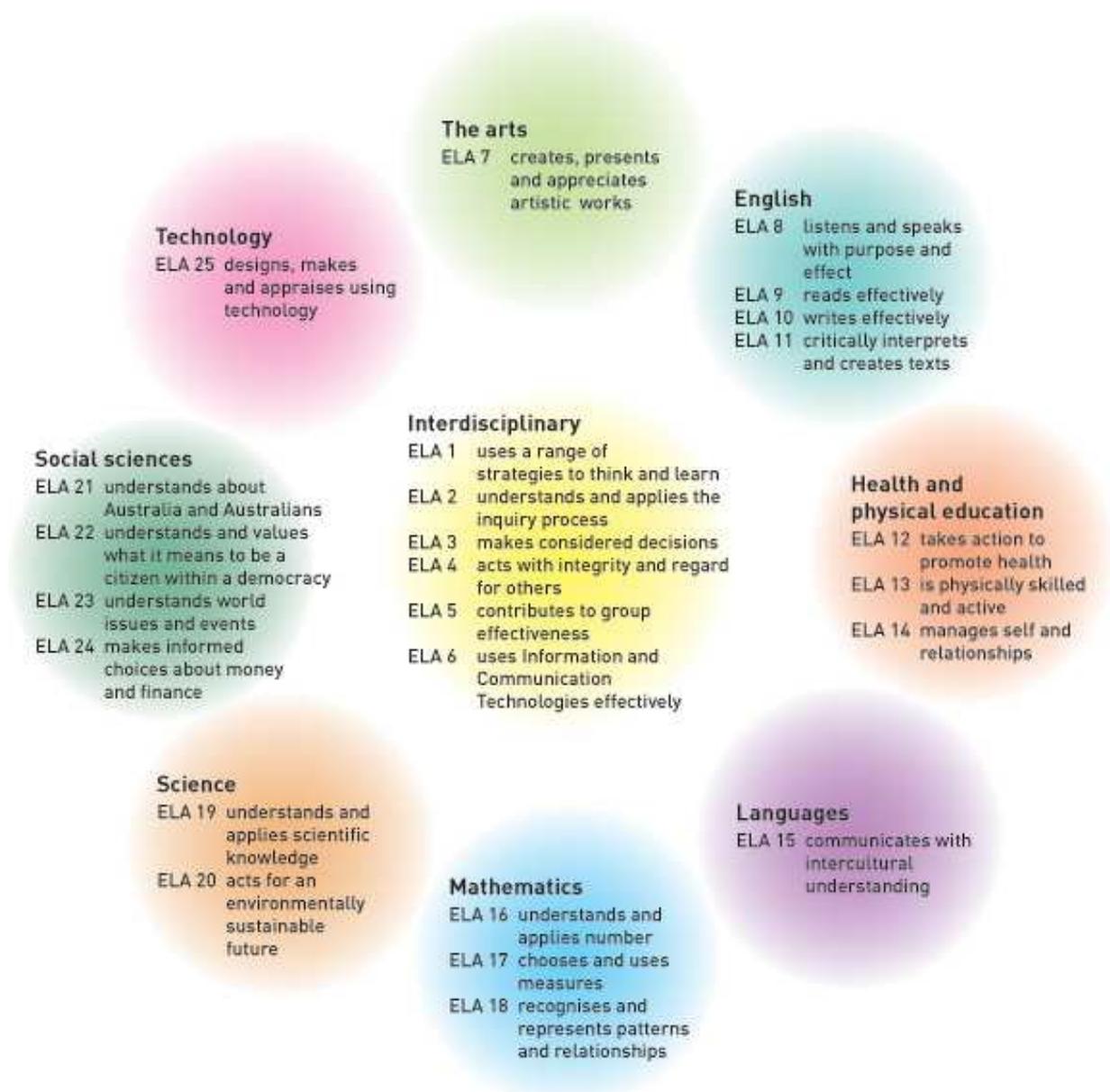
The **Curriculum Framework** has been sequenced in four bands of development from preschool to year 10 – early childhood, later childhood, early adolescence, later adolescence. The four bands of development are related to ages and school years.

### **Markers of progress**

Markers of progress are defined for each band of development. The markers of progress describe the typical achievement expected of students by the end of each band of development. Most students will make steady progress in each Essential Learning Achievement as they move from preschool to year 10.

The following chart is taken from *Every chance to learn* and places the Essential Learning Achievements within the framework

The student ...



## 22 The student understands and values what it means to be a citizen within a democracy

### Overview

This Essential Learning Achievement is about developing students' understanding of Australia's democratic society and commitment to participating in it as informed citizens. It focuses on three main aspects: features of Australia's representative democracy; principles that underpin democratic society; and active citizenship.

Understanding the features of Australia's representative democracy involves the examination of constitutional, parliamentary and legal systems to gain understandings about how Australia is governed and how particular institutions and processes contribute to building a cohesive and civil society. Features include: the ways in which individuals, groups and governments make decisions; the role of political parties; how parliaments are elected and governments are formed; levels and functions of government; and the role of the legal system.

Democratic principles have been developed throughout history and are expressed differently in democratic systems of government around the world. Such principles include: sovereignty of the people; distribution of power and authority; transparency and accountability of government; freedom of speech and of the media; independence of judicial institutions from government; respect for and equality before the law; civilian control of the military; and respect for diverse choices and views and citizens' rights and responsibilities. Understanding and valuing democratic principles involves consideration of how they are expressed and applied in Australia and in other places.

Active citizenship is about informed participation in civic life through democratic decision-making processes. Active citizens express their views and exert influence through representative groups and democratic processes. They participate in family, school and community activities for the common good, take appropriate individual and collective action on social and political issues and contribute to social cohesion in a diverse society.

This Essential Learning Achievement is closely linked to a number of other Essential Learning Achievements –

*ELA 3 The student makes considered decisions*

*ELA 4 The student acts with integrity and regard for others*

*ELA 5 The student contributes to group effectiveness*

*ELA 21 The student understands about Australia and Australians*

*ELA 23 The student understands world issues and event*

## Selections from the Overview relating to parliaments and elections:

### How governments and parliaments are elected and formed

In Australia there are three levels of government where parliaments are elected to govern the people and make laws– federal, state/territory and local. Once elected, the party (or coalition parties) that holds the majority of seats in parliament forms a government.

### The Australian Parliament

- For information about the election of **Federal Parliament** go to the Australian Electoral Commission website - <http://www.aec.gov.au/>
- Visit the Electoral Education Centre at Old Parliament House by booking on 1800 020 067
- Federal elections are held every three years on a date determined by the Prime Minister and approved by the Governor General. Australia is divided into 150 federal single-member electoral divisions. That means that one candidate is elected from each division to represent that division in the House of Representatives. Each State elects 12 Senators and the two Territories each elect 2 Senators to make up the 76 Members of the Senate.
- The party, or coalition of parties, which gains the majority of members in the House of Representatives forms the Government.
- To find out about the Federal Parliament visit <http://www.aph.gov.au/>  
Use the site to find information about local members.
- Visit Parliament House by booking on 6277 4890.

### The ACT Legislative Assembly

- The 17 members of the ACT Legislative Assembly are elected every 4 years on the third Saturday in October.
- The ACT is divided into 3 electorates

Brindabella	elects 5 members
Ginninderra	elects 5 members
Molonglo	elects 7 members.
- The party which gains the majority of seats, either on its own, with a coalition or as a minority with the most members, forms the Government. In a minority government smaller parties and/or independents need to support the Government in order for laws to be passed.
- To find out about the ACT Legislative Assembly, visit:  
<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/>  
Use the site to find information about members.
- To find out about how the Assembly is elected organise a visit to the Assembly by booking on 6205 3016. Participate in a hands-on program tailored to your requirements and include a Hare-Clark mock election. Ask about resources for teachers.
- For information on the electoral process see our fact sheets:  
<http://www.elections.act.gov.au/education/factsheets.html>

## The levels and roles of government

Australia's system of government is characterised by three distinct levels – Federal Government, State or Territory Government and Local Government. Each of these levels of government has different responsibilities. For a description of the three levels of government see:

<http://www.peo.gov.au/students/fss/fss55.pdf>

[http://www.peo.gov.au/faq/faq\\_14.html#14\\_1](http://www.peo.gov.au/faq/faq_14.html#14_1)

See also Legislative Assembly Fact Sheet Number 4 at:

<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/education/fact-sheets.asp>

It is important to remember that, uniquely in Australia, there are only 2 levels of government in the ACT – Federal government (Divisions of Canberra and Fraser) and Territory government (Electoralates of Brindabella, Ginninderra and Molonglo). The ACT does not have a local level of government; the ACT Legislative Assembly is responsible for both state and local matters.

For a detailed description of the different roles and functions of each tier of government and their relationship to each other see the Parliamentary Education Office factsheet – A Multi-tiered System – Governing Australia: <http://www.peo.gov.au/students/cl/multi.pdf>

## Selections from Bands of development relating to elections and parliaments

### Early childhood band – preschool to year 2

The New Zealand Electoral Commission has a resource suitable for teaching Years 1 and 2 the topics listed in the essential content below.

***Hands up!*** examines issues at the heart of citizenship and involvement in society. It encourages students working at early primary school levels, to become socially and 'politically' active in issues relevant to their own lives, to their school and their local community. This resource provides information for teachers in a 'ready-to-use' format. The seven activities build sequentially and are linked to the concepts outlined in the conceptual overview. Students learn more by 'doing' than just reading or being told about political process.

*Hands up!* can be found at <http://www.elections.org.nz/hands-up.html>

### Markers of progress

- ❖ Identify their rights and responsibilities as citizens within the class and school
- ❖ Understand that voting is a way that groups make decisions and make some class and group decisions by voting

### Essential content

#### *Democratic features*

- ❖ *Personal rights and responsibilities*
- ❖ *Purpose of rules in protecting rights and responsibilities*

#### *Democratic principles*

- ❖ *Voting - show of hands versus secret ballot on same topic*
- ❖ *Significant places where people make decisions*
- ❖ *How and why people make decisions*

#### *Opportunities to learn to:*

- ❖ *Make decisions in groups to achieve common goals*

## Later childhood – year 3 to year 5

The New Zealand Electoral Commission's **Hands up!** can also be used in Later Childhood to cover the essential content listed below. Some adaptation is needed to fit the Australian and ACT context.

**Hands up!** examines issues at the heart of citizenship and involvement in society. It encourages students working at later primary school levels, to become socially and 'politically' active in issues relevant to their own lives, to their school and their local community. This resource provides information for teachers in a 'ready-to-use' format. The seven activities build sequentially and are linked to the concepts outlined in the conceptual overview. Students learn more by 'doing' than just reading or being told about political process.

*Hands up!* can be found at <http://www.elections.org.nz/hands-up.html>

### Markers of progress

- ❖ *Know that Australia is a democracy*
- ❖ *Understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society*
- ❖ *Engage in the rights and responsibilities of a democracy within their school and local community*
- ❖ *Understand the role and purpose of elections, parliament and government*
- ❖ *Recognise their responsibility to be informed and active citizens of their school and local community and what this involves*

### Essential content

#### *Democratic features*

- ❖ *The three levels of government*

#### *Democratic principles*

- ❖ *Australia as a democracy and the values that are fundamental to a healthy democracy*
- ❖ *The role and purpose of having a constitution, elections, parliament, government, political parties, elected representatives and civic participation*
- ❖ *Key civic terms – democracy, citizen, government, parliament*

#### *Active citizenship*

- ❖ *Ways in which citizens are influenced by and can influence decisions, events and movements*

#### *Opportunities to learn to:*

- ❖ *Contribute effectively to representative groups (SRC) in familiar contexts*

## Early adolescence – year 6 to year 8

The Victorian Electoral Commission has developed a secondary school resource: **Your Opinion Counts**. ACT teachers are encouraged to use this resource up until the section that covers Victorian elections and then replace that section with information gained from this site about how the ACT elects members to the ACT Legislative Assembly.

*Your Opinion Counts* contains curriculum resources designed for teachers of middle secondary school students. *Your Opinion Counts* explores democracy and the electoral process through contemporary themes such as human rights. By examining the electoral system in the context of current issues, it is hoped that students will gain an understanding of the relevance and role of elections in society. *Your Opinion Counts* is also designed to foster an ongoing interest in democratic and political processes.

*Your Opinion Counts* can be found at <http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Education/education-resources-yoc.html>

To make this resource ACT-specific use the factsheets at <http://www.elections.act.gov.au/education/factsheets.html>

If you feel *Your Opinion Counts* is not suitable for your Year 5/6 class you may like to adapt the primary school resource from New Zealand. **Hands up!** examines issues at the heart of citizenship and involvement in society. It encourages students working at later primary school levels, to become socially and 'politically' active in issues relevant to their own lives, to their school and their local community. This resource provides information for teachers in a 'ready-to-use' format. The seven activities build sequentially and are linked to the concepts outlined in the conceptual overview. Students learn more by 'doing' than just reading or being told about political process.

*Hands up!* can be found at <http://www.elections.org.nz/hands-up.html>

## Markers of progress

- ❖ *Understand the rights and responsibilities associated with being a citizen in Australia*
- ❖ *Identify the roles and principles of key institutions underpinning democracy in Australia*
- ❖ *Understand the role of each level of government*
- ❖ *Describe the general process of elections and how governments are formed*
- ❖ *Know ways individuals, groups and organisations can influence decisions and engage in school or community activities that demonstrate this*

## Essential content

### *Democratic features*

- ❖ *Features of Australia's representative democracy including the Australian Constitution, the difference between parliaments and government, elections, how governments are formed, roles of elected representatives, functions and services provided by the three levels of government and the roles of courts*

The system of government in Australia is known as a representative democracy. Representative democracy means that power is vested in the people, who exercise their power through elected representatives in parliament. More information on representative democracy can be found at: [http://www.peo.gov.au/faq/faq\\_6.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/faq/faq_6.html)

To find out how the parliament works and what its main roles and functions are go to: [http://www.peo.gov.au/faq/faq\\_5.html#5\\_1](http://www.peo.gov.au/faq/faq_5.html#5_1)

To understand the difference between the Parliament and the Government go to: <http://australianpolitics.com/democracy/terms/parliament-government.shtml>

To understand how a member represents their constituents go to: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/infosheets/is15.pdf>

The Constitution is available as a pocket sized booklet, with an overview and notes, from the Parliament of Australia site at <http://www.peo.gov.au/publications/const.html> for very little cost.

### *Democratic principles*

❖ *The principles and institutions that underpin Australia's representative democracy (parliament, free and fair elections, political parties, secret ballot, head of state)*

Have a look at an interesting publication by John Hirst on the Victorian Electoral Commission website titled *Making Voting Secret*.

On 19 March 1856, legislation was passed in the Victorian Parliament to introduce the Secret Ballot. This was a world first in electoral administration. The story of how this famous event occurred is a marvelous piece of history, including colourful characters, riots, intrigue, ingenuity and even a government resigning en masse!

The events of this period are worthy of use in the classroom or enjoyed as a personal taste of Victoria in the 1850s.

<http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/secretballot.html>

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) website contains lesson plans covering political parties (among others you may find useful):

<http://www.peo.gov.au/teachers/ho/p/index.html>

### *Active citizenship*

❖ *The civic values, rights and responsibilities of Australian citizens*

Some ideas for exercising rights and responsibilities as citizens can be found on the website for the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship which also lists the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship at:

[http://www.citizenship.gov.au/should\\_become/](http://www.citizenship.gov.au/should_become/)

Links to other resources:

<http://www.citizenship.gov.au/learn/schools/>

❖ *Ways to become involved in, or influence, representative groups in the school or community (e.g. a campaign to raise awareness about a significant issue, elections)*

## Opportunities to learn to:

- ❖ *Express their own viewpoints on issues and contribute to class and group decision-making*

Use an election for your school's SRC to illustrate how an election is conducted in a democracy. An election will provide the students with a hands-on experience of how students will vote as adults. Students need to be provided with well thought out guidelines for eligibility to be a candidate and assisted in the conduct of an election campaign. Provide as much realism on election day as possible. Above all, abide by the results of the election to demonstrate that your school is democratic.

Read the factsheet on school elections at:

<http://www.elections.act.gov.au/pdfs/factsheets/factschool.pdf> and then use these instructions to assist you in running your own election:  
<http://www.elections.act.gov.au/education/Edresources.html>

Phone 6205 0033 to get Elections ACT to assist you with this project.

- ❖ *Rights and responsibilities in a democratic society*

## Later adolescence – year 9 to year 10

The Victorian Electoral Commission has developed a secondary school resource: **Your Opinion Counts**. ACT teachers are encouraged to use this resource up until the section that covers Victorian elections and replace that section with information gained from this site about how the ACT elects the ACT Legislative Assembly.

*Your Opinion Counts* contains curriculum resources designed for teachers of middle secondary school students. *Your Opinion Counts* explores democracy and the electoral process through contemporary themes such as human rights. By examining the electoral system in the context of current issues, it is hoped that students will gain an understanding of the relevance and role of elections in society. *Your Opinion Counts* is also designed to foster an ongoing interest in democratic and political processes.

*Your Opinion Counts* can be found at:

<http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Education/education-resources-yoc.html>

To make this resource ACT specific use the factsheets at:  
<http://www.elections.act.gov.au/education/factsheets.html>

## Markers of progress

- ❖ *Describe their rights and responsibilities as young Australians to contribute to a democratic society*
- ❖ *Know how to vote in Australian elections and referendums*

The most effective way to teach students how to vote is to get them to vote either in a real election for the SRC (or some other school related election) or to set up a mock election. For instructions on how to run your own election see:  
<http://www.elections.act.gov.au/education/Edresources.html>

For hands on experiences of voting in ACT and Federal mock elections either:

- Visit the ACT Legislative Assembly – book a session by phoning the Education Officer on 6205 3016 to learn about the Territory system of government; or

- Visit the Australian Electoral Commission Electoral Education Centre at Old Parliament House by booking on 1800 020 067 to learn about the federal system of government.

Check out the South Australian Electoral Commission site for its animated *How Your Vote Counts* which explains the history of voting, the various voting methods and their advantages and disadvantages.

This presentation features animations of the different voting and vote counting methods (First past the post, Preferential and Proportional Representation) and a glossary of terms: <http://www.seo.sa.gov.au/flash.htm>

## Essential content

### *Democratic features*

*Significant features of democracy in Australia, including parliamentary elections, government accountability and the role of political parties.*

The Parliament of Australia webpage <http://www.aph.gov.au/parl.htm> is useful to explain the separation of powers.

The process of parliamentary elections can be revisited by conducting an SRC election using the steps outlined at: <http://www.elections.act.gov.au/education/Edresources.html> and by organising visits to the ACT Legislative Assembly (telephone 6205 3016) or the Electoral Education Centre at Old Parliament House (telephone 1800 020 067). Request sessions tailored to your students' needs.

Information on political parties can be found at <http://australianpolitics.com/parties/>

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) website has lesson plans covering political parties (among others you may find useful) at: <http://www.peo.gov.au/teachers/holp/index.html>

#### ❖ *The Australian constitution*

Use the Australian Electoral Commission website for information about the process used to change the Constitution through referendum. <http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/index.htm>

### *Democratic principles*

#### ❖ *The principles of sovereignty of the people, common good and separation of powers*

A paper from the journal *Issues in Ethics* V5 N2 (Spring 1992) on the website of Santa Clara University, a Jesuit, Catholic university located in California's Silicon Valley gives a comprehensive explanation of *the common good*.

<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/commongood.html>

### *Active citizenship*

#### ❖ *Ways in which citizens can influence government*

Contact the ACT Legislative Assembly for details on contacting a local member to visit your school, or to send them a letter or e-mail. Ensure that the contents of the letter or the e-mail are relevant to the student's interests.

In an election year, consider contacting candidates to set up a debate between them or with your students on a topic that passionately concerns your students.

*Opportunities to learn to:*

❖ *Reflect on their rights and responsibilities as young adults and consider ways in which people, individually and collectively, make decisions and contribute to the common good*

A paper from the journal *Issues in Ethics* V5 N2 (Spring 1992) on the website of Santa Clara University, a Jesuit, Catholic university located in California’s Silicon Valley gives a comprehensive explanation of *the common good*.

<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/commongood.html>

A comprehensive list of civil (human) rights resources can be found at:  
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/buslaw/law-research/subject/human.php>

To view dates of historic events relevant to civics and citizenship check the events calendar at:  
<http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=14546#top>

**Some other interesting Internet sites**

Democratic Audit of Australia	<a href="http://democraticaudit.org.au/">http://democraticaudit.org.au/</a> and earlier site archived at <a href="http://democratic.audit.anu.edu.au/">http://democratic.audit.anu.edu.au/</a>
Australian Electoral Commission – research Youth Electoral Study first report	<a href="http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/youth_study/index.htm">http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/youth_study/index.htm</a>
Peter Brent’s site (ANU PhD graduate)	<a href="http://www.enrollingthepeople.com">http://www.enrollingthepeople.com</a>
New Zealand Elections	<a href="http://www.elections.org.nz">www.elections.org.nz</a>
Electoral Council of Australia	<a href="http://www.eca.gov.au">www.eca.gov.au</a>
International Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance (IDEA)	<a href="http://www.idea.int/">http://www.idea.int/</a>
Civics and Citizenship Education	<a href="http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=27562">http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=27562</a>