

National Cultural Policy Submission



National Capital Educational Tourism Project

Background

Since 1999 the National Capital Educational Tourism Project (the NCETP) has encouraged and assisted Australian students to visit Canberra on a school excursion, to engage with National Cultural Institutions (NCIs) and to learn about core educational areas, e.g. Civics & Citizenship, History, Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Art and Sport.

The NCETP is an exemplar of cooperative marketing in the cultural sector, incorporating the NCIs, along with many private cultural businesses in Canberra.

The NCETP's marketing activities are based on the premise that schools visit the National Capital; not any individual institution or attraction.

An interstate school visit is Australian Curriculum-based and highly organised – on average including 49 students visiting 12 NCIs over 3 days.

173,000 students visited Canberra on an excursion in 2019!

Collaborative Branding & Marketing

The NCETP provides the following observations:

- NCIs assist teachers in delivering educational experiences related to fields of study in which they are less confident or knowledgeable.
- The Canberra excursion experience is a world class opportunity for students to undertake experiential learning in civics and citizenship.
- During the course of a 3-year cycle around 50% of all Australian primary students visit Canberra, accompanied by approximately 10,000 teachers.
- Students who visit Canberra are more likely to understand their place in Australian society, to participate in civic activities, and to acknowledge and support the role of government, law and democracy in a balanced society.

Collaborative Branding & Marketing – Recommendations

The NCETP recommends the following:

- The Australian Government must provide support in terms of appropriate funding and processes to facilitate the ability for NCIs to participate in collaborative programs.
- Strategic intervention is necessary to boost NCIs by funding them from a central budget (related to student engagement) not subject to the vagaries of the portfolio budgeting pressures.
- NCIs could possibly be encouraged to bid for a proportion of this funding, with funding bids for education programs to be considered by the NCETP Stakeholder Council.

Capacity & Funding

Over the past 10 years there has been a correlation between the level of funding NCIs receive and how students are able to connect directly with stories told at these places.

Over this time the NCIs have faced significant budget cuts and efficiency dividends which have directly resulted in a reduction of staff and resources.

The NCETP makes the following observations:

- Resource constraints translate into a situation where there is not enough capacity at many NCIs for the number of students who wish to visit and engage with their programs – this is especially due to science programs outside Questacon.
- Additionally, Teachers want after hours and weekend programs, to most effectively use their time and to enable them to complete a visit to as many NCIs as possible.
- Despite only effectively having the ability to host students 75% of the year, rather than compensating by increasing operating hours by 25% from March to November, NCIs tend to operate only within 'business hours'.
- After Civics & Citizenship, the 2nd most cited reason people come to Canberra is to engage with science, however pre-COVID Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics students were heading overseas to experience related programs, with Canberra increasingly not seen as a viable educational destination directly as a result of capacity issues.

Capacity & Funding – Recommendations

In the short-term, the NCETP recommends funding of the following be undertaken to address the demand for NCI experiences:

- Extended opening hours so students can experience more NCIs in their time in Canberra.
- Additional delivery spaces for NCIs, especially for new or redeveloped attractions.
- Extra sessions at the Parliamentary Education Office, when parliament is sitting.
- More staff at NCIs to allow for weekend sessions.
- More staff at NCIs providing STEM education.

In the medium-term, the NCETP recommends the following be undertaken to address the demand for NCI experiences:

- The Australian Government should provide NCIs with a collaborative budget to develop programs and audience participation, administered by a central organisation that supports ongoing development.
- NCIs could bid for a proportion of this funding, to enable collaborative initiatives.

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) provides financial assistance to support students to visit the National Capital to undertake educational programs at Parliament House, the Museum of Australian Democracy, the National Electoral Education Centre, the Australian War Memorial and other NCIs.

PACER rebates are available to all eligible Australian schools, and vary according to a school's distance from Canberra.

In 2021 the Australian Government increased the rebate for school students traveling to Canberra by 50% to the end of 2022, however schools travelling to Canberra often make the decision to do so 2 or more years ahead of their travel dates, so the efficacy of short-term rebate increases is extremely limited.

Additionally, excursion costs related to flying, coach travel, accommodation and catering have all increased recently as we attempt to resuscitate educational travel post-lockdowns.

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate – Recommendations

The NCETP recommends the following:

- Acknowledgement of the importance of PACER in enabling emerging generations to experience the NCIs that all Australians support.

- To encourage schools to be confident to book travel well ahead of time (particularly schools from regional and rural communities) PACER rebate levels should be extended to at least the end of the 2025 school year.
- This would greatly assist the recommencement of school visits from Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, including students in Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote locations, who tend to be disadvantaged compared to others.

Outreach Should Encourage Visitation to Canberra

While the NCETP supports outreach outside of Canberra, its remit is to primarily encourage visitation to Canberra through showcasing the collections and stories of the NCIs.

While the NCETP understands the opportunities to showcase NCIs in regional Australia it should not be at the expense of NCIs sustaining programs available onsite.

An outreach program cannot replace watching Question Time at Parliament House or attending a Last Post Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial.

Outreach Should Encourage Visitation to Canberra – Recommendations

The NCETP recommends the following:

- The Australian Government should support collaborative outreach programs among NCIs, to stimulate interest in visiting them, provided onsite funding and capacity issues have been addressed.

Onsite & Online Educational Resources

The NCETP makes the following observations:

- NCIs provide resources and content to teachers in an online capacity.
- Schools conduct online research prior to visiting a cultural institution (to provide context to enhance onsite engagement with real people, buildings and artefacts while in Canberra), and conduct follow-up online activities on returning home.
- Onsite and Online experiences are complementary, and should form a continuum of educational experiences, across time and space.
- There is no substitute for standing in the same room as an important historical artefact – the essence of the object can be suggested by an online image, but it cannot be fully conveyed.
- The online world can give a sense of an object, but it can't fully stimulate the senses.
- The profound effect of being somewhere real and experiencing something real cannot be overestimated, for instance the Australian War Memorial conducts a daily wreath laying ceremony at which the simple story of a foot soldier turns a name on a wall into a story that generates meaning.
- Online content, delivered properly, serves to convey educational information and to stimulate visitation.

Onsite & Online Educational Resources – Recommendations

The NCETP recommends the following:

- There should not be a false equivalence given to onsite and online visitation that results in a funding trade-off between them – both forms of engagement are critical to learning.

Further Information

The NCETP has conducted detailed biennial research since 2001 on the *Size and Effect of School excursion to the National Capital* through the University of Canberra and would be happy to share this detailed information at any time.