

Voting Age Bill

Stuck for ideas? Use this bill for the Run a parliamentary committee classroom activity. The Voting Age Bill works well with high school classes.

This page includes a master script for the teacher and individual scripts for students who have been given roles for this activity.

Terms of reference

An inquiry into the Voting Age Bill. The committee will investigate changing to the law to lower the voting age to 16, including:

- the advantages and disadvantages of giving 16 and 17 year old Australians the right to vote in elections
- what changes would be necessary to enable 16 and 17 year old Australians to vote in elections.

Witness groups

Group 1. Voice for Youth

Group 2. Elections Australia

Group 3. Democracy for Australia

Group 4. Democratic Heritage Society

Master script

Chairperson: I declare open this hearing of the committee into the Voting Age Bill. I welcome all the invited representative groups. The terms of reference are to determine:

- the advantages and disadvantages of giving 16 and 17 year old Australians the right to vote in elections
- what changes would be necessary to enable 16 and 17 year old Australians to vote in elections.

The committee will now hear from several witness groups who expressed interest in the inquiry. I welcome representatives from _____ (the chairperson chooses a group). Please approach the table.

The witness group approaches the table and sits down.

Chairperson: Please state your names for the Hansard record.

Witnesses state their names in turn.

Chairperson: Do you wish to read a statement to the committee.

The witness group spokesperson reads the statement.

Chairperson: Committee members, do you have any questions for the witness group?

The committee members ask questions, which are answered by the witness group members.

Chairperson: I thank the representatives from _____ (group name) for coming today.

The above is repeated for each witness group.

After all the witness groups have been heard, the chairperson of the committee ends the inquiry.

Chairperson: This committee inquiry is now adjourned. The committee will consider the evidence heard here today and will write its report. The report will be tabled in the Parliament.

Individual scripts

An inquiry into the Voting Age Bill

The committee will investigate changing to the law to lower the voting age to 16, including:

- the advantages and disadvantages of giving 16 and 17 year old Australians the right to vote in elections
- what changes would be necessary to enable 16 and 17 year old Australians to vote in elections.

CHAIRPERSON



I declare open this hearing of the Committee into the Voting Age Bill.

I welcome all the invited representative groups.

The terms of reference are to determine:

- the advantages and disadvantages of giving 16 and 17 year old Australians the right to vote in elections
- what changes would be necessary to enable 16 and 17 year old Australians to vote in elections.

The committee will now hear from several witness groups who have expressed interest in the inquiry.

After your opening statement, say:



I welcome representatives from (choose a group):

Group 1. Voice for Youth

Group 2. Elections Australia

Group 3. Democracy for Australia

Group 4. Democratic Heritage Society

Please approach the table.

Please state your names for the Hansard record.

Allow each witness time to say their names



Do you wish to read a statement to the committee?

Allow the spokesperson to read their statement.

After the groups opening statement has been read, say:



Committee members, do you have any questions for the witness group?

Give each senator a chance to ask a question.

After the questions have finished:



I thank the representatives from _____(group name) for coming today.

Repeat the above for each witness group.

After ALL the witness groups have been heard, say:



This committee inquiry is now adjourned. The committee will consider the evidence heard here today and will write its report. The report will be tabled in the Parliament.

EXAMPLE COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

You are the Committee on Electoral Matters. You are holding an inquiry into the Voting Age Bill, which would lower the voting age to allow 16 and 17 year old Australians to vote in elections.

The following four witness groups will appear before the committee to answer your questions about this issue:

Group 1. Voice for Youth

Group 2. Elections Australia

Group 3. Democracy for Australia

Group 4. Democratic Heritage Society

After the committee hears from these witness groups, it will write a report based on the evidence it has heard. The report can recommend to support or oppose the idea of lowering the vote age, or to make changes to the idea.

You need to think of questions to ask each group. These are the sorts of questions you might like to ask.

- How will the right to vote improve the lives of young Australians?
- Do 16 and 17 year old Australians really want the vote?
- Are 16 and 17 year olds responsible enough to vote?
- Is changing the law enough? What other changes do we need to make 16 and 17 year olds ready to vote?
- Would lowering the voting age significantly affect electoral procedures?
- What impacts will lowering the voting age have on the community?
- Do we need an ongoing education program for young voters?
- Who is your witness group speaking for and what evidence do they have to support their position?
- What methods did your witness group use to find its evidence?

VOICE FOR YOUTH

You are Voice for Youth. You want more rights and responsibilities for Australia's youth. It's your job to convince the committee that lowering the voting age to 16 years is a good idea.

Write a statement outlining your group's view. While you are doing this you may want to consider the following questions:

- Why should 16 and 17 year olds help make decisions about the future of our country?
- How are today's young people better informed about issues facing Australia?
- Why is it unfair that 16 and 17 year olds pay taxes but don't have the right to vote?
- What research have you done to back up your claim?

Voice for Youth Spokesperson

When asked if you would like to make an opening statement, say:

 Thank you Chairperson, we are Voice for Youth.

We believe that...

ELECTIONS AUSTRALIA

You work for Elections Australia (EA). You organise and run federal elections. You don't have an official position on whether the voting age should be lowered to 16. Your job is to give expert advice about how lowering the voting age to 16 would affect the conduct of elections.

Write a statement outlining your group's view. While you are doing this you may want to consider the following questions:

- What obstacles would EA face making sure 16 and 17 year olds vote? How would you overcome those obstacles?
- What sort of education campaign would EA run to encourage young people to vote?
- What research have you done to back up your claims?

DEMOCRACY FOR AUSTRALIA

You are Democracy for Australia. You support giving the youth of Australia a voice. However, you feel that not all 16 and 17 year olds are ready to vote. It's your job to convince the committee of your point of view.

Write a statement outlining your group's view. While you are doing this you may want to consider the following questions:

- Why is it important to give youth a voice?
- What would be the benefits of optional voting for 16 and 17 year olds?
- What research have you done to back up your claims?

Democracy for Australia Spokesperson

When asked if you would like to make an opening statement, say:



Thank you Chairperson, we are Democracy for Australia.

We believe that...

DEMOCRATIC HERITAGE SOCIETY

You are from the Democratic Heritage Society. You believe that the voting system in Australia works well and should not be changed. It's your job to convince the committee that lowering the voting age will not be good for Australian democracy.

Write a statement outlining your group's view. While you are doing this you may want to consider the following questions:

- Why do you think that 16 and 17 year olds are not ready to make responsible decisions?
- Why do you think that 16 and 17 year olds will just vote the way their parents or friends vote?
- What research have you done to back up your claims?

Democratic Heritage Society Spokesperson

When asked if you would like to make an opening statement, say:



Thank you Chairperson, we are the Democratic Heritage Society.

We believe that...

COMMITTEE REPORT

The Committee has investigated the issue of lowering the voting age to 16 and makes the following recommendations.

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

