



YACWA's Oral Submission to the Inquiry into the Administration and Management of the 2017 State General Election

ABOUT THE YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak nongovernment youth organisation in Western Australia with a membership of over 500 youth service organisations, community organisations, academics, individuals and most importantly young people themselves. Established in 1980, YACWA has worked tirelessly for over 35 years to deliver high-level representation and advocacy for the Western Australian youth sector and young people to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society.

YACWA's role is to:

- Provide information and support to the non-government youth sector;
- Work to promote fair and positive outcomes for young people in our community;
- Promote equity, equality, access and participation for young people in Western Australia;
- Advocate to all levels of government on the best interests of Western Australia's young people;
- Encourage the active participation of young people in identifying and dealing with issues that are important to them; and
- Provide a strong, united and informed voice capable of effectively advocating for the non-government youth sector and the young people with whom they work.

Youth engagement and participation in political governance is at the core of what YACWA stands for and tries to achieve. Young people are an important part of the Western Australian community and it is important their voice and opinions are involved in decisions that affect them. One of the key tenets of our mission is to ensure young people are engaged by policy makers to ensure that their opinions on policies affecting them are taken into account. We have carried out a number of surveys and consultations gaging young people's engagement with government on both a state and federal level.

YACWA CONSULTATION PROCESS

Relevant to the Inquiry, YACWA conducted a pre-election and post-election survey to gather information on young people's participation in the 2017 WA State Election.

- The pre-election survey received 300 respondents aged 17 to 25.
- The post-election survey was smaller in scale, and received 41 respondents aged 17 to 25. Respondents were restricted to those who had participated in the pre-election survey.

- Surveys were promoted through YACWA's internal networks (mailing list), as well as online through social media.

KEY FINDINGS

The results from YACWA's consultation found young people were largely disengaged with the WA State Election. The majority of respondents indicated a dissatisfaction with the amount and format of information provided to them on topics such as how to enrol to vote. Tactics intended to appeal to young people by the WAEC were poorly received.

- Young people felt the methods used by the WAEC and politicians were not relevant to them, and were inaccessible. Young people indicated a strong desire to be engaged through social media, as well as to receive enrolment and voting information online. Physical mail outs and flyers were considered irrelevant to young people, and sometimes their complexity can act as a deterrent to engagement.
- Disengaged young people felt the policies of candidates were irrelevant or uninteresting. Many of them felt politicians did not care about issues that affected them as young people, and related this back to their disengagement with the election process.
- The amount and quality of information provided to young people on key topics such as how to enrol to vote was considered inaccessible and irrelevant. Many young people indicated that a lack of quality information discouraged them from enrolling or placing a vote. Those who did engage with information did so online, however found the process was too complex.
- Many survey respondents felt providing them with information on the electoral process (such as how to enrol and how to cast their vote) would be effective in promoting youth engagement. This information should also be promoted to young people via social media and direct information sessions.
- Voting processes were sometimes unfavourable for young people. Many young people are employed in the retail or hospitality industries and work weekends. Some respondents indicated the polling times and places made it difficult to vote on election day. Many respondents expressed a desire for online voting systems, as well as automatic registration/enrolment upon turning 18.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop specific awareness campaigns and resources for young people

1. That the WAEC develop a targeted strategy to improve youth participation and awareness outcomes in future electoral processes.
 - Young people face unique barriers to participating in electoral processes, such as working arrangements and education requirements. Resources and awareness campaigns to engage young people must acknowledge and address these barriers in order to be effective.
2. That the WAEC, as part of any engagement strategy for young people, develop specific information and resources to support young people.
 - Many survey respondents indicated dissatisfaction with the information provided (or not provided) to them about the electoral process. Those who were not enrolled to vote in particular indicated this was the main barrier to their lack of enrolment, being discouraged by the complexity of the information available.
 - Information should be provided in clear, step-by-step format online and promoted via social media and direct information sessions.
 - Youth-specific resources should be provided in formats that are relevant to young people, and should be combined with a broader marketing campaign encouraging young people to engage with the political system.

Meaningfully involve young people in engagement strategies

3. That the WAEC ensure any strategy to increase youth participation in electoral processes is developed in partnership with young people, and acknowledge their expertise.
 - Young people are the experts in their own affairs, and their expertise should be utilised and respected when attempting to improve outcomes relevant to their participation and engagement.
 - Involving young people in engagement strategies is vital to understanding the unique barriers to political participation they face.
 - The involvement of young people is especially important when developing information to inform young people on voting processes, as well as how advertising campaigns are developed and then disseminated. These should be reviewed by young people to ensure it is relevant and accessible.

Consider barriers to polling place access faced by young people

4. That the WAEC consider physical and practical barriers to voting processes experienced by young people, and develop strategies to reduce them, such as online voting systems.
 - Many young people are employed in the retail or hospitality industries (400,000 and 380,000 young workers respectively), and often work weekends as a result (Department of Employment, 2017).
 - Young people indicated rigid polling times and locations made it difficult to vote on election day when also navigating work commitments and lack of transport options.
 - Many respondents expressed a desire for online voting systems to alleviate this issue, as well as automatic registration/enrolment upon turning 18.

Engage young people through social media

5. The WAEC utilise social media platforms to engage young people in the electoral process and disseminate information. The format and platform used should be determined in conjunction with young people to ensure relevance.
 - Young people indicated a strong desire to be engaged through social media, as well as to receive enrolment and voting information online. Which online platforms are used should be determined in conjunction with young people to ensure they are relevant to young Western Australians.

Promote candidate policies relevant to young people

6. The WAEC consider ways to ensure the information it provides on election candidates is relevant to young people.
 - Young people surveyed felt the policies of candidates were irrelevant to young people, or uninteresting. Many of them felt politicians did not care about issues relevant to them, and related this back to their disengagement with the election process.
 - A common theme was a desire for more information on political parties, as well as for this information to focus on issues relevant to young people.
 - To encourage higher polling turnout among young people, the WAEC should ensure that it is providing young people with the necessary information for them to make informed decisions, and in accessible formats.

DETAILED SURVEY RESULTS

'Voting... What does it mean to you?' YACWA Pre-Election Survey

February – May 2016

Respondents: 300 (17 to 25)

- Approximately 10% of respondents (31 respondents) were not enrolled to vote.
- Respondents not enrolled to vote indicated they were unsure how to vote, were disillusioned with the political system, or were cautious about fines for failing to vote in future.
 - *'I have no idea about voting as this topic is never discussed anywhere and I don't know the enrolling age'*
 - *'I don't know anything about it. We aren't taught it or nothing is spoken/explained as to what we can do and how we enrol'*
 - *'Was never shown how to enrol to vote so I've left it until next time'*
 - *'I don't know how to enrol'*
 - *'It's too complicated. I can't find a simple, no effort required way'*
 - *'I don't support a particular party's agenda; thus feel my vote is invalid'*
 - *'There's no point'*
 - *'Not interested'*
 - *'Because once you enrol you get fined if you miss voting'*
- Of those not enrolled to vote, 11.63% of participants said they would not enrol in future. 18.18% were unsure.
- The majority of respondents were disillusioned with the political system – almost 75% of participants strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that 'Politicians understand issues affecting young people'
- Creative ideas to encourage more young people to vote and engage in the democratic process –
 - *'For politicians to interact with young people by going out to schools and talking to them about how it all works'*
 - *'Stronger social media presence'*
 - *'Short films to show young people by having a vote and say you can have what you would like to see happen'*
 - *'Politicians making a greater effort to reach out to young people'*
 - *'Give them ways politics affect their lives'*
 - *'If politicians actually listened'*
 - *'Simply making it relevant to them, making it clear they can be heard and voting is a chance to push for change'*
 - *'Actually raise issues relating to the young demographic'*
- Almost 90% of respondents get their news and information from social media.

Voting Habits in the 2017 WA State Election – YACWA Post-Election Survey

September 2017

Respondents: 41 (aged 17 to 25)

- 67.5% of young people believe that the electoral process did not effectively engage with young people
 - *'More effort needed to be made to target young people to ensure they are enrolled and that they understand the voting process/how to vote etc. A lot of young people demonstrate little awareness and knowledge towards voting.'*
- No young people surveyed were motivated to vote by the Dark Lord Advertising campaign, with a small percentage saying they were put off of voting by it. 73% did not see the campaign at all. .
 - *'Didn't see the advertising campaign.'*
 - *'Hard to remember'*
 - *'It was immature and not respectful to voters'*

- 90% of young people surveyed believed that social media is the best medium for engaging young people in the electoral process. The second most popular choice for engagement was in-person information sessions (approximately 7% of respondents).
- A significant number of young people responded saying political parties, their policies and their lack of engagement with young people was the main reason for their disillusion so this would suggest this could be the main reason for traditional low levels of enrolment rather than the electoral process itself.
 - *‘Show how future policies will affect young people. Show that politics in this state isn't just for ‘old white people’*
 - *‘Politicians need to gear some of their campaign and promotion towards issues relevant to young people’*
 - *‘If political parties actually had policies that young people agree with, they would vote more’*
- Young people aged 18 to 25 are more mobile than other age groups, with 64% living at an address different to that of five years earlier compared to other age groups (34%) (ABS 4102.0, 2017). Young people may as a result be changing electorates more often, and may face questions about in which electorate to vote. Young people may need additional resources or support to understand electorate boundaries and the effect these have on the significance of their vote. The more mobile nature of young people was also not reflected in the WAEC survey results.