

Human Rights Education



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

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Background

Accessible and wide-reaching human rights education is key to the realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Federal government funding for human rights education has been limited over the last five years.

There has been no significant federal government commitment to supporting human rights education since the *Australian Human Rights Framework 2010*. That framework included mandatory training for public servants, which has since ceased.

The delivery of human rights education is a statutory responsibility for the Australian Human Rights Commission. Specific funding from the government for this purpose ceased in 2014.

Australia's implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) has been ad hoc with information on national initiatives and activities last provided to the WPHRE in 2012.

There remains a need for ongoing human rights education across Australia, for both the general public and for specialised audiences.

Key Issue – Human rights education in schools

In 2015, Australia adopted a new national curriculum for schools, with most Australian schools now using this curriculum.

The curriculum contains limited references to human rights and no explicit reference to human rights education, with the latter varyingly implemented.

In research conducted in 2015-16, teachers identified this lack of reference as a considerable barrier to incorporating human rights education in their classrooms.² The Australian Curriculum is currently under review which provides an opportunity for human rights to be incorporated more holistically in school education.

The Commission continues to develop [human rights education resources](#) for use in schools. Classroom resources, mapped to the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Learning Framework, are periodically released for schools and early learning centres. The resources are linked to the teaching of



History, Civics and Citizenship, Digital Technologies, Health and Physical Education and Humanities and Social Sciences and include topics relating to anti-racism, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, digital privacy, and democracy.

There is a continued need for human rights education in schools, to ensure that children in Australia understand their own rights and their responsibility to protect and respect the rights of others. This may best be achieved by integrating human rights education throughout the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendations

Government incorporate human rights more fully in the national school curriculum

Government fully implement the cross-curriculum priority on 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' and ensure availability of bilingual education

Key Issue - Human rights education for the public service

A human rights e-learning package for public servants developed in partnership with the Attorney General's Department was defunded in 2016 and is no longer accessible. At the time, this had been mandatory for all public servants to undertake.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has recently developed a series of introductory online learning courses on a range of issues. The Commission also delivers training on a fee for service basis on a range of topics including sexual harassment, the rights of people with disability, the rights of older workers, drafting statements of compatibility with human rights and challenging interactions.

A stronger commitment to human rights education is needed from the government



Targeted education and training are needed throughout the public service, at all levels. Education would be particularly beneficial for those drafting statements of compatibility with human rights, as well as those working in law enforcement, the administration of justice and places of detention.

Specialised human rights education is also needed for those working with some of Australia's most marginalised communities, including children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities and/or migrants.

For example, a lack of cultural competency and knowledge of trauma informed practice has been identified as a major concern for government and service delivery organisations addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples more appropriately.

Recommendations

Government train public servants and ensure that statements of compatibility are of a consistently high standard

Government expand human rights education in all areas of the public sector, particularly for those working with children and in the administration of justice and places of detention



Endnotes

¹ The statutory responsibility to provide human rights education is laid out in the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth), *Age Discrimination Act 2004* (Cth), *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth), *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) and *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth).

² Research was conducted by Lonergan Education on behalf of the Australian Human Rights Commission. The purpose of the research was to assess teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of the Commission's existing classroom resources as well as to identify areas for optimisation. Lonergan Research conducted an online survey, interviews and focus groups with over one thousand teachers and education professionals across Australia. This research identified 'the lack of visible links to the Australian Curriculum [as] the largest hurdle for achieving full integration of human rights education in teaching practices.' The final report/s are not publicly available.