



**The sitting of Queensland Parliament  
in North Queensland  
3 – 5 September 2002**

**Report on  
Students' ballot on  
issues of importance to them**

**VOTE 1 FOR KIDS**  
**Tell us what's important to you!**



**Commission for Children and Young People**

The sitting of  
**Queensland Parliament**  
in North Queensland  
3 – 5 September 2002

**Report on**

**Students' ballot  
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## **Introduction**

During the North Queensland sitting of Parliament, 3 – 5 September 2002, the Commission for Young People conducted a ballot of children and young people to highlight the issues they consider most important to them.

Students from local and visiting schools across North Queensland were encouraged to participate in the balloting process organised by the Commission as part of Community Engagement activities in association with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

This paper is a summary of the outcomes and findings of the voting process involving these young people.

## **The voting activity**

Students from schools across North Queensland attending the Parliamentary sitting were invited to vote on the issues they felt were most important to them. Voting occurred over the three-day sitting period. Young people were asked to complete a ballot form, with the voting process simulating an election. Booths were open from 8:30am to 5:00pm each day and the students participated enthusiastically in the voting process.

The Commission set up 25 ballot boxes provided by the Electoral Commission. They were the same ballot boxes used in state and federal elections. Students were asked to select the five issues of most importance to them from topics including family, school, the arts, law and order, health, employment and training and technology. The topics were chosen to align with specific government portfolios whose business impacts on children and young people, to inform Ministers of the issues of greatest significance to young people.

Students were asked to number in order of importance (one being “most important”; five “least important”), the five issues of most importance to them. There were ten topics listed on the ballot, along with the category “other”, which allowed students to vote for an issue not listed on the ballot.

A space was provided beside each of the 11 available choices, and participants were asked to identify what was most important about their first choice (i.e. the “most important” issue). Students were also asked for basic demographic information about their age, gender and cultural background.

As the students approached the community engagement marquee, they had the opportunity to see the Commission’s display, which outlines the Commission’s key roles. As they entered the marquee, each young person was handed child-friendly brochures on the Commission and a bubble pen, which they used to fill out their ballot paper and were then allowed to keep.

After lodging their votes, the students were invited to participate in another activity provided by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in the marquee.

At the end of three days, voting closed and ballots were collected. Each ballot was individually numbered for future identification and reference. Informal ballots were discarded, and the remaining data was entered into a spreadsheet for analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative responses were analysed.

## **Participants**

A total of 2,250 participants voted during the three days of the Parliamentary sitting. However, in the initial filtering process, 387 informal ballots were discarded from the original sample, leaving a total sample of 1,863 ballots. Participants consisted of 1035 females and 825 males (three participants did not indicate their gender), ranging from five to 17 years of age.

## **Filtering the initial sample**

Ballot forms were identified as informal if they contained incomplete or misleading information regarding the participant's age or gender, or contained responses that could not be objectively interpreted.

Where the participant identified as 18 years or over, ballots were classified as informal and discarded because the primary aim of the project was to identify the issues most important to children and young people. The decision to exclude these ballots was based on the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000*, which adheres to the definition of a 'child' as stated in the Acts Interpretations Act (1954) as an "individual who is under 18"<sup>1</sup>.

However, exceptions were made for incorrectly completed ballot forms providing that key information was present and clearly indicated. Ballot forms completed with indicators such as ticks and/or crosses instead of the instructed numbering system were considered valid if the participants' five chosen issues, as well as their age and gender, were clearly identifiable. As a result, different sample sizes apply to different analyses.

## **Analysis of votes**

Two key patterns of responses were investigated. These were the identification of participants' "most important" issue (their first choice or primary vote) and secondly, the registration of all five issues identified, ignoring prioritisation.

Analysis generated answers to the following:

- the issue voted as most important (i.e. highest frequency as number one choice)
- comparisons between all issues identified on the ballot
- patterns of votes according to age groups
- patterns of votes according to cultural background
- patterns of votes according to gender
- the issues receiving the most number of votes (ignoring prioritisation)

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<sup>1</sup> Acts Interpretation Act 1954, definition of "Child"

## Issues voted most important

Table 1 represents the percentage of first choice or primary votes each issue received. The top six issues voted as most important were: family, school, sport and recreation, health, the environment and technology.

Clearly, family was regarded by participants as the most important issue, with over half the young people nominating this issue as their first choice (50.8%). This was followed by school (15.9%), sport and recreation (9.2%), health (7.7%), the environment (3.9%), and technology (3.5%).

While the percentage of primary votes for these latter issues seems considerably lower than that for family, the importance of these issues to the participants is demonstrated in the high percentage of these issues falling within participants' preference votes, as discussed later.

Table 1: Overall 'most important' issue as indicated by percentage of primary votes

<b>Issue</b>	<b>% of first choice votes</b>
Family	50.78 (946)
School	15.94 (297)
Sport and recreation	9.23 (172)
Health	7.73 (144)
Environment	3.92 (73)
Technology	3.54 (66)
The arts	1.88 (35)
Law and order	1.45 (27)
Employment and training	1.40 (26)
Other	0.75 (14)
Transport	0.32 (6)
No 1st preference given	3.06 (57)
Total	100.00 (1863)

## Comparisons between issues identified on the ballot

Figure 1 demonstrates the percentage of votes for each issue listed as participants' second to fifth choices, or preference votes. Overall, these votes demonstrated the importance to the students balloted of health, school (education), and the environment. This suggests that these issues, while not regarded as "most important", are of significance to the young participants.

If family was not voted number one in importance, it was often included in the next four choices. Furthermore, issues such as the arts, employment and training, and technology, received a moderate proportion of preference votes. Transport and law and order did not feature highly.

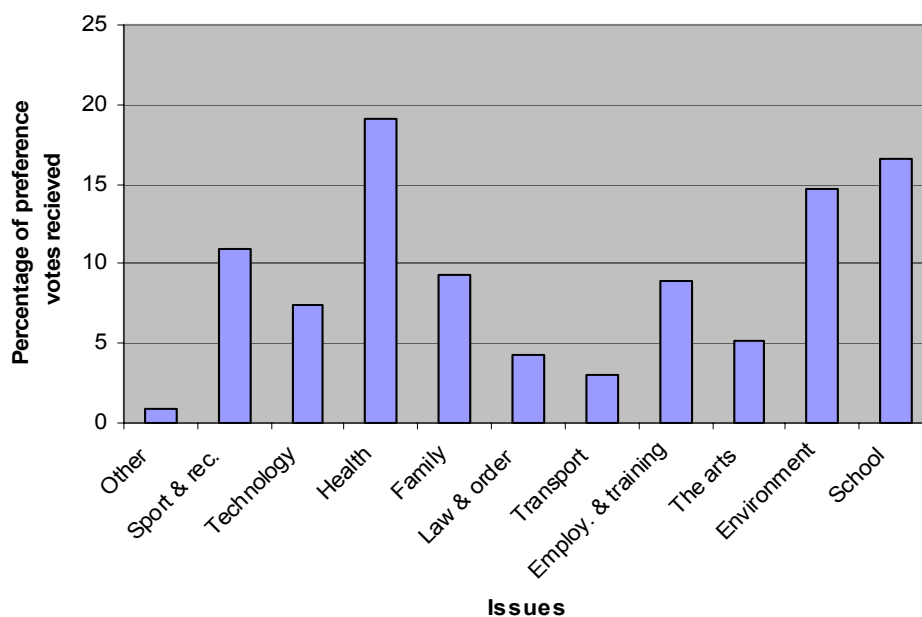


Figure 1. Percentage of preference votes (2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>) received on the various issues

### Voting patterns across age groups

To analyse whether differences existed across age groups with respect to the most important issues, voters were divided into three age groups. It should be noted that there were only a small number of participants in the lowest age group, and generalisations for this group should not be made. The groups were 5-9 year olds (n = 48), 10-14 years (n = 1592), and 15-17 years (n = 223).

An analysis was then done to identify the five issues which received the most number one votes from each age group. Figure 2 illustrates the five most important issues, as indicated by the percentage of primary votes received, identified by age group. Overall, the two younger groups of participants tended to vote for the same issues as their most important issue, while the older students' votes reflected a different pattern. The three age groups did not differ on the two issues receiving the most primary votes. However, differences were found with respect to the other issues chosen as most important.

Across all age groups, family was regarded as the most important issue, receiving the greatest number of first preference votes (5-9 years = 68.8%, 10-14 = 50.9%, 15-17 = 46.2%); this was followed by school (education) (5-9 years = 12.5%, 10-14 = 16.0%, 15-17 = 16.1%).

For the 5-9 years age group, other issues chosen by some as important were the environment (8.3%, n = 4), sport and recreation (6.3%, n = 3), and health (4.2%, n = 2), respectively. The first preference issues for the 10-14 years group were sport and recreation (9.6%), health (7.5%), and the environment (4.2%).

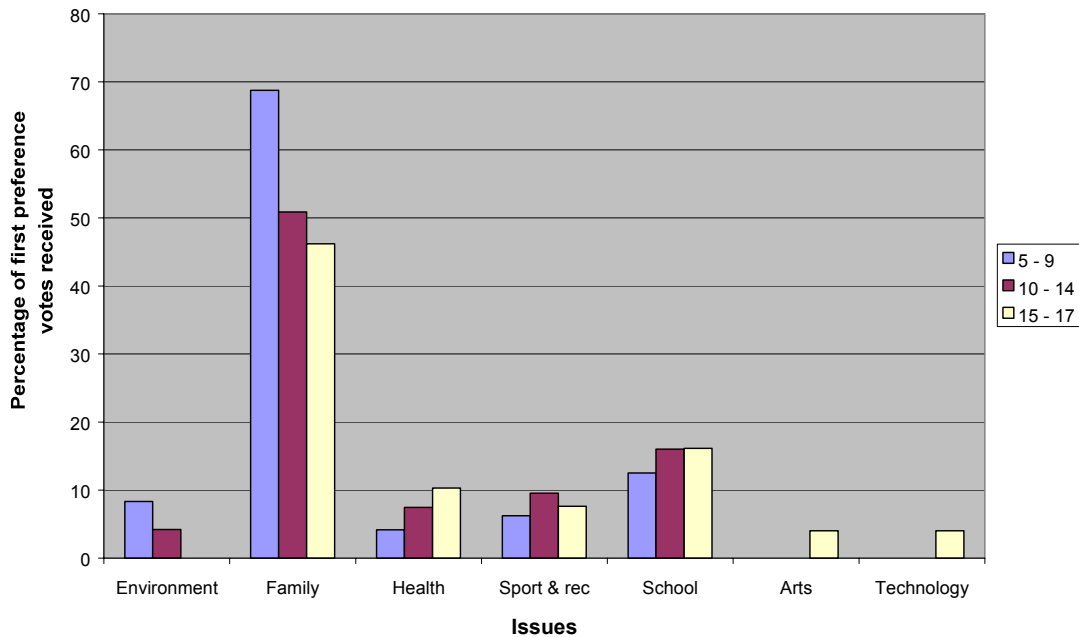


Figure 2. Top five issues by the percentage of first preference votes received by age group

Differing from the younger age groups, few of the 15-17 year old participants voted for the environment as their most important issue. Rather, these older students voted for health (10.3%), and sport and recreation (7.6%), respectively. The arts and technology each received an equal number of first preference votes (4.0%). Arts and technology were not considered important issues by the two younger groups.

### Voting patterns across cultural background

To examine whether differences existed across cultural background with respect to the five “most important” issues, participants were divided into three cultural groups: Indigenous (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) (n = 150), those from a non-English Speaking Background (NESB) (n = 211), and those identifying as neither (neither Indigenous nor from a non-English speaking background) (n = 1215). Ballots on which cultural background was not indicated were not included in this analysis (n = 287).

Figure 3 illustrates the five most important issues, as indicated by the percentage of primary votes received, by cultural background. Across all cultural backgrounds, the issues and the order of these issues in terms of importance (primary votes received) generally did not differ.

Similar to the pattern across age groups, family emerged as the most important issue, receiving the greatest number of primary votes (Indigenous - 53.3%, NESB - 47.9%, non-Indigenous - 51.0%), followed by school (Indigenous - 17.3%, NESB - 17.5%, non-Indigenous - 15.1%).

Other issues voted most important were sport and recreation (Indigenous - 11.3%, NESB - 8.5%, non-Indigenous - 8.9%) and health (Indigenous - 2.0%, NESB - 7.6%, non-Indigenous - 8.6%), respectively. It must be noted that for the Indigenous group, a fifth “most important” issue was not identifiable.

The issues of the arts, environment, health, law and order, transport, and technology each received an equal number of primary votes (2%). For the remaining two groups, the environment ranked fifth in terms of number of primary votes received (NESB - 4.7%, non-Indigenous - 4.4%).

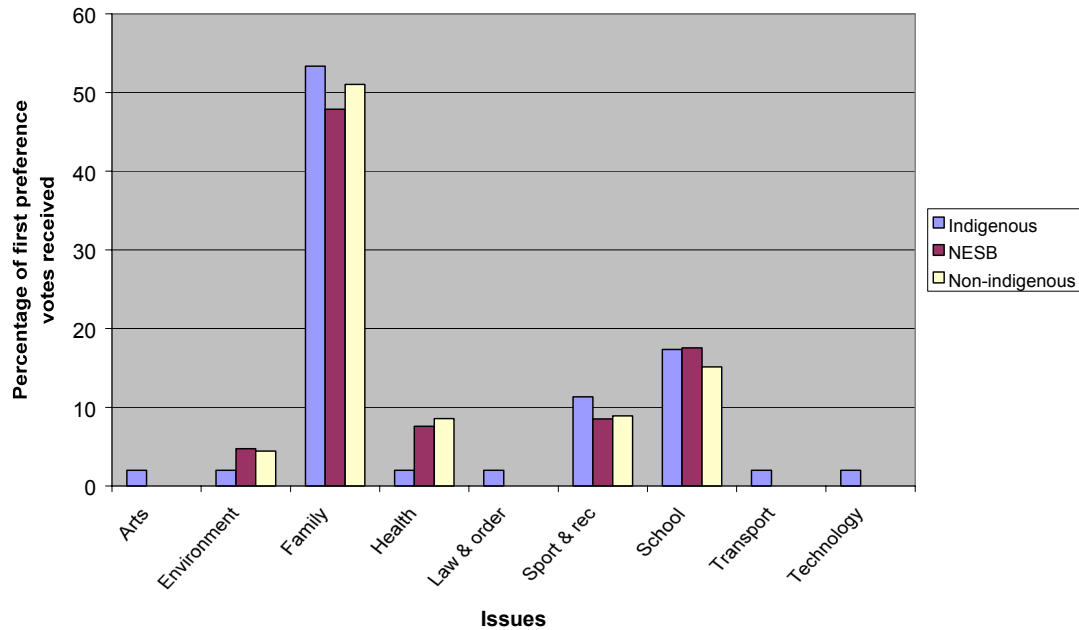


Figure 3. Top five issues by percentage of primary votes analysed by cultural background

### Voting patterns across gender

Table 2 represents the five most important issues for young people as indicated by the percentage of primary votes received, by gender. Reflecting the pattern for age group and cultural background, both genders voted family (males - 41.9%, females - 57.8%) and school (males - 15.9%, females - 15.9%) as the first and second most important issues respectively, although a higher percentage of females ranked family as their most important issue than did males.

The primary issues ranking third to fifth for the males were sport and recreation (14.3%), technology (7.4%), and health (6.5%). In contrast, health was identified as more important to females, receiving the third most primary votes (8.7%). Other issues considered most important by females were sport and recreation (5.2%), and the environment (4.3%).

Table 2: Top five issues to young people as indicated by percentage of primary votes, by gender

Male (M)		Females (F)	
Issues	% first choice votes	Issues	% first choice votes
Family	41.94	Family	57.78
School	15.88	School	15.94
Sport and Recreation	14.3	Health	8.69
Technology	7.39	Sport and Recreation	5.21
Health	6.54	Environment	4.34

### Issues receiving most votes

Figure 4 shows the overall number of votes received by each issue regardless of prioritisation, that is, the most important issues notwithstanding priority. The five issues receiving the greatest number of votes were family, health, school, the environment, and sport and recreation. The general pattern of voting reflects previous analysis in terms of the issues of most importance, but not in terms of the ordering of these issues.

Family received the greatest number of votes overall, with 1640 (88.0%) of participants voting for this issue as one of their five most important issues. This further validates family as the most important issue to the young participants across age, cultural background, and gender.

Family was followed closely by health then school, with over 82 per cent of participants voting for each of these issues within their five chosen issues (n = 1570 and n = 1531, respectively). Placement of health as higher in priority in comparison with previous analyses, suggests the overall importance of this issue to the young people.

The issues receiving the third and fourth greatest number of votes overall, were the environment (n = 1165) followed by sport and recreation (n = 989). The placing of the environment ahead of sport and recreation in terms of importance does not reflect the general pattern observed in previous analyses. However, these results do support the pattern observed in Figure 1, which demonstrated the percentage of votes for each issue falling within participants' second to fifth choices. Once again, this reiterates the overall importance of the environment to the participants.

It is worth noting that over a third of participants voted employment and training (n = 690), and technology (n = 615) within their five chosen issues. This represents a moderate proportion of votes, and indicates that these issues should not be disregarded when addressing young people's concerns.

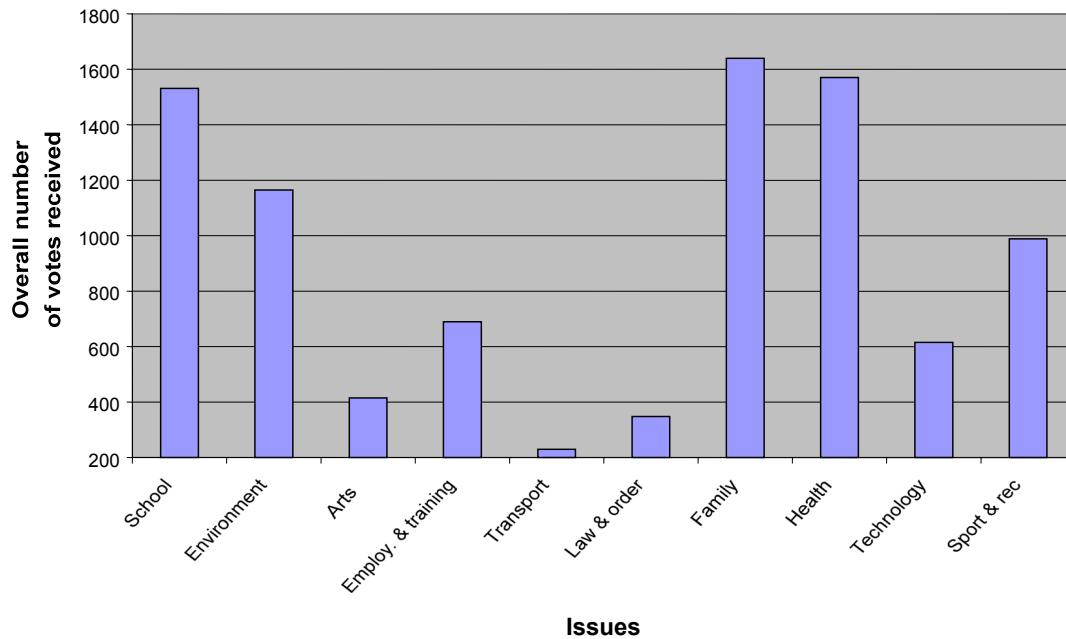


Figure 4. Most important issues by the overall number of votes received by each issue, regardless of prioritisation.

## Analysis of comments

Having voted for five issues in order of importance, participants were then asked to explain what was important about the issue nominated as most important, their first choice. Some children commented on more than one issue, but most made no comments at all.

The greatest number of comments made in relation to family were encompassed by the phrase “family comes first”, reflecting its overall nomination as the most important issue. Four major themes emerged from participants’ explanations of what was important about family. Specifically, most responses highlighted love, support and care provided by families throughout life, and the companionship they offer, as important aspects of family. Furthermore, safety and security afforded by family was a recurring theme. Numerous participants expressed a strong focus on family togetherness, happiness and wellbeing, and the need to sustain families and prevent family breakdown/disintegration. Finally, family was regarded as an integral and meaningful part of the young person’s life. Many participants made the statements that family “is a part of me” and “I couldn’t live without them”, reflecting a dependence and need for family.

School (education) was another “most important” issue that elicited many comments. The most important aspects of school highlighted by participants were the need to learn, to secure a future, gain employment, widen employment opportunities and provide financial support to family. Comments are summarised by a general statement made by one participant that “a good education gives students a head-start in life and prepares them for the future”. A large number of participants also expressed concern about more specific aspects of school that they felt were important. Participants felt that larger classrooms, smaller classes, more teachers, and more computers are required.

The issue receiving the next highest number of comments was sport and recreation. Participants who identified sport and recreation as most important felt it provided a means of enjoyment, exercise and fitness, socialisation, and physical and mental wellbeing.

The issue of health also produced a number of comments. In general, maintaining health and healthy lifestyles, health and quality of life for all, longevity and disease prevention were identified as important sub-issues of health. Numerous comments identified the need for increased funding for research and development in the area of disease prevention and medicine, increased funding to hospitals to improve facilities and staffing, and to increase the availability of and access to health professionals within the community and hospital settings.

When the environment was nominated as most important it was mostly because it was regarded as a source of life. Participants stressed the need to maintain a clean and unpolluted environment, and to protect and preserve our wildlife, plant life and oceans to ensure a healthy environment for current and future generations.

Substantially fewer comments were made regarding employment and training. Explanations given by participants who nominated employment and training as most important generally reflected those of school (education). Gaining experience and employment in chosen fields, getting “better jobs” and securing a future (financially and job-wise) were comments highlighted by participants in relation to this issue. Additionally, unemployment and the need to create more jobs for younger people were identified by participants as important and in need of attention.

Responses made regarding technology focussed on its importance in our future and the necessity to “keep up to date” and informed on technology, particularly computer technology.

When nominating “other” issues as most important, participants again identified social relationships. In particular, friends appeared most frequently in responses. Socialising in general, animals, spirituality and religion, recreational activities, employment, and wellbeing (“feelings”, “being happy”), also featured.

A small number of comments focussed on the arts. Participants felt the arts are important to provide an outlet for creativity and the expression of feelings, to improve confidence and self-esteem and provide entertainment and enjoyment.

Similarly, the few participants who identified law and order as most important highlighted the importance of these institutions in maintaining a civilised and rule-based society, providing protection, justice and safety and preventing crime.

Finally, the few explanations of why transport was an important issue focussed on two major aspects. These were the need to increase public transport to reduce pollution and the identification of transport, especially public transport, as an efficient means of travel.

In summary, the considerable number of comments made about the importance of family demonstrates the importance these young people place on family and

social connectedness in their lives, both present and future. The remaining topics also indicate a desire to maintain social connectedness, and along with family, these issues reflect a desire to ensure a healthy and secure future, financially, socially, physically and mentally.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the results indicated five issues of most importance to the young participants - family, school (education), sport and recreation, health, and the environment. These five issues continuously featured as most important across age group, cultural background, and gender in the quantitative data. The significance of these issues to the young people was qualified and strengthened by the qualitative responses given by the young participants.

Issues such as technology, the arts, and employment and training, while not commonly receiving first preferences, did appear in the top five first preferences for some groups. In addition, these issues received a high percentage of votes falling in participants' preference votes for the overall sample. This suggests that the arts, technology, and employment and training, while not considered "most important" overall, are of significance to the young participants balloted in Townsville.

The present activity aimed to provide young people of North Queensland with the opportunity to inform Members of Parliament of the issues they felt were most important to them. The purpose of this report was to provide a summary of the issues identified as most significant by these young participants to assist MPs to better accommodate young people's concerns.

In general, the results of the study demonstrate the overwhelming importance of family and social connectedness in the lives of these young people. Furthermore, the results indicate a strong future-oriented outlook of the young people. This is evidenced by the importance placed on issues such as school (education), sport and recreation, health, the environment, technology, and employment and training. The significance of these issues to the young people who participated in the ballot reflects their desire to maintain social connectedness, and to secure future financial, social, physical and mental wellbeing.