



Parliamentary Education Office

Summary

This year is expected to be another record year for the Parliament Education Office's popular role-play program conducted at Parliament House in Canberra. As in recent years, the program continues to operate at or near capacity for much of the school year with increased demand being particularly noticeable earlier in the school year (Terms 1 and 2).

In addition to maintaining (updating and reprinting) the PEO's extensive suite of educational publications, considerable resources were devoted in 2013 to maintaining and expanding the on-line parliamentary educational resources that are available on the PEO website (www.peo.gov.au). In particular, the range of contemporary parliamentary education information has been expanded, a parliamentary timeline has been developed and numerous new video products have been posted. In recent months the website and other PEO resources were extensively updated to reflect the results of the September Federal election.

In 2013 the PEO conducted a number of successful parliamentary education outreach programs. A range of specially targeted programs were also conducted for delegations and student groups visiting Parliament House.

Role-Play Program

The PEO role-play program remains the flagship activity of the Parliamentary Education Office. In 2013 the program was extremely well attended by students from around Australia. So far in 2013 the role-play program at Parliament House has operated at or near capacity during most school terms. In recent years averages of 90,000 students have participated in the program each year. The current year is expected to see an increase in student numbers. (Attendances to the end of September plus forward bookings for December suggest that approximately 92,332 students in 2,691 groups from 1,587 schools will participate in the program in 2013). A noticeable trend has been that demand in Terms 1 and 2 is growing while demand in Terms 3 and 4 remains consistently strong. Since it began in 1990 over 1.75 million students have participated in the PEO role-play program at Parliament House.

In 2013 the PEO role-play program:

- benefited from the appointment of several permanent part-time and casual parliamentary educators,
- addressed changes and issues arising from the recent Federal election,
- was marketed through the National Capital Educational Tourism Project School Excursion Planner and other publications,
- was refreshed through the ongoing review and updating of role-play scripts,
- continued to be enhanced by the active involvement of members and senators,
- was the subject of a user survey, and



- was supported by an improved range of teaching resources provided to visiting groups.

Other PEO Programs

- During 2013 several long established PEO programs were again conducted, including:
 - a week long Rotary Adventure in Citizenship (RAIC) program for Year 11 students from around Australia,
 - the National Youth Science Forum for senior secondary science students,
 - the attendance of senior secondary economics students at hearings of the House Economics Committee, and
 - several tailored programs for indigenous groups and parliamentary and other delegations visiting Parliament House.
- Three parliamentary outreach programs were conducted in the middle of 2013. These visited regional centres in South Australia (Renmark and Mount Gambier), Victoria (Mildura and Warrnambool) and Queensland (Rockhampton and Mackay). Parliamentary outreaches are able to target groups that have difficulty attending the PEO's Parliament House programs due to financial or geographic factors. The PEO continues to explore options for the cost-effective delivery of PEO programs to regional and remote audiences (including the adaption of PEO educational resources for interactive smart board use, the use of social media applications and interactive video conferencing options). The strengthening of the PEO website, in particular in the areas of video content and contemporary information, has also benefited regional and remote audiences.

PEO Publications and Resources

Demand for PEO printed publications and other resources continued to be strong in 2013. Some resources are provided free of charge (eg to visiting teachers and members and senators) but increasingly PEO publications and resources are provided on a cost (or near cost) recovery basis. In 2013:

- the PEO *Despatch Box Educational Resource Kit* continued to sell well and was actively marketed to teachers and schools as well as members and senators,
- new and updated editions of many PEO publications, including *Get Parliament*, were produced,
- several new video products were produced and fielded, including:
 - a video in the *People in Parliament* series featuring the Usher of the Black Rod,
 - several videos in the *Parliamentary Snapshots* series, including *Federation*, *Three Levels of Government* and *The Constitution*, and
 - two instructional video guides for teachers to encourage them to conduct House of Representatives and Senate role-plays in their classroom.

PEO Website

The comprehensive PEO website (www.peo.gov.au) continues to be a key vehicle for providing practical parliamentary education content to students and teachers around Australia, in particular those in regional and remote areas. In 2013 the site was enhanced by the fielding of an expanded Parliament Now section and the development of a parliamentary

timeline. In financial year 2012-13 usage of the PEO website continued to increase (590,827 visitors and 5.9 million page views).

The PEO website will be extensively redesigned in late 2013. This is expected to improve user navigation, make the site more contemporary and increase its audience appeal. However, the strategic architecture of the current site, which is familiar to existing users, will be retained. In the lead up to the redesign, extensive content revision has been undertaken in recent years. In 2013 a review of Assignment Assistant (an online facility where students can ask specific questions) has also been undertaken with the site likely to be reconfigured in 2014.

It is also planned to introduce a Content Management System (CMS) to the PEO website in late 2013/early 2014. Introduction of a CMS will support new (including interactive) applications and features and improve the efficiency of web site maintenance and updating.

Member and Senator Liaison

The PEO continues to provide members and senators with an annual allocation of resources to assist them in their engagement with students and schools in their electorates/States/Territories. This allocation has been reviewed, improved and moved to a financial year basis.

In 2013 members and senators continued to be actively involved in PEO programs. Members and senators are advised of school groups visiting from their electorate/State/Territory. They often visit to address and answer questions from student, either in the Hospitality area or PEO role-play venues. In addition, during the RAIC program students were provided with an opportunity to meet their local member or senator and several members and senators participated in parliamentary outreach programs being held in their electorates or States/Territories. During 2013 the PEO continued to benefit from the oversight and guidance provided by a joint advisory committee to the Presiding Officers jointly chaired by the Deputy President, Senator Stephen Parry and the Deputy Speaker, the Hon Bruce Scott, MP.

National Curriculum

During 2013 the national curriculum in civics and citizenship was under active development by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Given the important role the PEO plays in the area of civics education, the PEO has closely monitored developments in this area and contributed to the development and finalisation of the curriculum. Earlier in the year ACARA released the Shape paper for civics and citizenship. The paper was reviewed extensively by PEO staff with a detailed submission being made to ACARA. More recently the draft curriculum was released by ACARA. This has also been the subject of extensive analysis by the PEO. Pleasingly the draft curriculum recognises the importance of parliamentary education and lends support to educational visits to Federal, State and Territory parliaments. Both the Shape paper and draft curriculum were considered at length by the National Capital Civics and Citizenship Group (an association of Canberra-based institutions involved in civics and citizenship education) chaired by the Director of the PEO.

Collaboration with Colleagues

In 2013 the PEO invested heavily in building professional relationships with civic and citizenship (in particular parliamentary education) colleagues. Some initiatives have been:

- meeting and briefing parliamentary and electoral education and community outreach colleagues from the UK parliament, several African nations and numerous Pacific nations,
- assuming chairmanship of the National Capital Civics Education Group and discussing with colleagues the developing National Curriculum in Civics and Citizenship.