



ADULT EDUCATION DISCUSSION – DEMOCRACY AT WORK (NT)

The Northern Territory Parliamentary Education Services unit provides three main adult education programs: tours for community groups, *Know Your Parliament* sessions (general or tailored parliamentary information sessions) and *Democracy at Work*.

Democracy at Work was initiated by our former Speaker, Jane Aagaard, as a program specifically targeting “new arrivals” (i.e. recent immigrants and refugees) to help facilitate their understanding of Australian democracy. PES already had good working relationships with the NT Electoral Commission and the NT Supreme Court and so developed a program concentrating on three fundamental features of democracy: elections, parliament and the courts.

Each of the three session focuses on how that aspect of democracy works in the Northern Territory, with references to Australian and state systems also. The sessions are also designed for ESL audiences and so include visual presentations as well as a more hands-on aspect like a role play or tour. In addition, they are deliberately flexible to suit the needs of the participants.

The NT Electoral Commission run a 60 minute session which includes a PowerPoint presentation covering the role of the electoral commission, general information on voting and enrolment, the three levels of government and the two main voting systems used in the Northern Territory (and Australia) being first-past-the-post and preferential. A mock election is then run where participants vote (some for the first time) for their favourite food using the preferential system. They are then shown how votes are counted and how preferences are distributed. Depending on the English and literacy levels within the group, the mock election may start with campaign speeches from four participants encouraging others to vote for their food. This presentation is basically the same presentation conducted for students at schools, however, the *Democracy at Work* sessions often end with a fairly extended question time from participants, many of whom share their voting experiences (or lack of) in their home countries. The NT Electoral Commission conduct their part of the program (and most of their education sessions) in a function room at Parliament House.

Our team then run a parliamentary education session, often starting with a PowerPoint presentation covering the basics of the Westminster system, the federal and state parliaments, and then details about the NT Legislative Assembly, the Chamber and parliamentary processes. We also offer a short modified role play (if English and literacy levels allow) to show how a bill is passed and a question and answer session with a Member if they are available. This is then followed by a tour of Parliament House, concentrating on the parliamentary aspects (rather than features of the building for example) and includes at least 20 minutes sitting in the Chamber. Participants often feel very privileged to have been given such access to the Chamber, and Parliament House itself. Also, there are often questions about how citizens can be more directly involved in the law making process.

The Northern Territory's Supreme Court is located right next to Parliament House, and so easily follows on from the first two sessions. However, sometimes time constraints mean the court session is conducted on a separate day from the electoral and parliamentary sessions. It begins with a PowerPoint presentation about the NT Supreme and Magistrate courts, and includes their links to Australian courts, the separation of powers and the Australian Constitution. Participants are then taken on a tour of the different court rooms and the holding cells. The tour also covers information about the history of the Supreme Court, as well as how Australian and State/Territory court structures were formed. The courts session concludes with an address from a Judge or Magistrate about the judiciary and its role in Australian democracy, and an opportunity for participants to ask questions. Again, participants are very appreciative and surprised at being able to get so close to our judicial system.

As well as conducting the parliamentary part of the program, our PES team takes on all the coordination and promotion of *Democracy at Work*. The NT Electoral Commission and Supreme Court do not have dedicated education units as we do, but rather one person who does education in addition to other duties. We work closely with these two individuals on other programs as well, and are always looking for further opportunities to collaborate.

A pilot *Democracy at Work* was run in 2010 with a class of East Timorese English language students from our local university, Charles Darwin University (CDU). Their lecturer was very enthusiastic about the program and provided very constructive feedback which saw us making a number of significant changes to the program. Some of the changes she recommended was making a role play and meeting with a Member an option for future participants, and also including the option of running sessions on different days for ESL learners as it is a lot of information to take in, especially in another language. From her feedback we made the program more flexible, both in its content and structure, to ensure it suits the needs of differing audiences.

While the program has a lot of support in theory from a range of stakeholders, it has been difficult attracting regular participants. We have only run the session four times in three years; twice for AMEP students (Australian Migrant English Program), once for asylum seekers in an education program, and once as part of a Community Legal Facilitators training program that was identifying leaders amongst newly arrived communities. We have had two cancelled sessions also. The program has been regularly promoted amongst community groups who offer services to newly arrived immigrants and refugees, as well as citizenship ceremony organisers.

For future promotion, it is worth contacting the AMEP program on a regular basis as the program is perfectly suited to their students, and they have a fairly high turnover of lecturers. There are also a number of detention centres in Darwin who run recreational activities and outings for their detainees (separate from the education program that previously participated) that may be interested in taking part. The PES team have also discussed setting a date, and then promoting the program to individuals, rather than trying to get groups to commit.

All three providers are still enthusiastic about the value *Democracy at Work* offers, and will continue their efforts to attract future participants.