

35th CPA Australia & Pacific Regional Conference, Rarotonga 2016
Youth Participation and Parliamentary Education—‘Get the kids involved’

Leanne Clare, First Clerk Assistant (Procedure)
Chamber, Education and Communication Services

The Queensland Parliamentary Service has been delivering education programs to promote the role and functions of Parliament for nearly 25 years. These programs comprise a range of activities currently delivered by a small team of 4 staff.

My presentation today will focus on our youth education programs. It is argued that for voters to fully participate in free and fair elections they must first understand the democratic process and their role in it.

Our aim is to engage students and capture their interest, so that when the time comes, they will understand why they are voting and the role their parliament and members perform. In other words, ‘Get the kids involved’!

Slide 1

The Queensland Parliament has clearly identified the engagement and education of young people in its strategic plan. The plan provides that to improve awareness of our Parliament we will:

1. Deliver education and awareness programs about the Parliament
2. Raise youth awareness of the importance of the institution by linking parliamentary education programs with the national curriculum for civics education.
3. Maintain and improve the regional outreach awareness programs over the term of each parliament.

So what does this mean in practice?

We aim to target youth from primary school through to university and provide them with appropriate interactions with our institution depending on their age, their culture and their facility with the English language.

Slide 2

Each year around 10,000 school students visit the Queensland Parliament and participate in our free educational tour program.

Parliamentary Attendants provide the students with an overview of the how the parliament works — we show a video, then a Q & A to reinforce what was covered in the video. The students are taken on a tour of the parliament which concludes with the students participating in a role-play of a mock parliamentary debate in the Legislative Assembly Chamber.

This role play was introduced in 2012 for primary school students aged 10 – 12 years old as it was considered that the students should not just see their Parliament but also learn how it operates.

Slide 3

This year we incorporated ipad-minis into the student's visit. At the end of their tour, each student is now able to use one of these devices that has a specially designed educational e-booklet on it, where the students answer questions about what they have seen and learned during their visit to Parliament House. Previously booklets were handed out for this purpose, but the ipad-minis now provide a much more innovative and interactive learning experience for the students.

The ipad-minis also allow us to update our information to reflect any changes that may occur in the Parliament, whereas before the booklets could easily become obsolete or out of date.

What are our results?

Well, at a recent teacher professional development seminar we conducted in a regional area, one of the teachers mentioned that she recently brought her students to parliament. It had been several years since she had done this as previously 'the students thought it was boring'.

She returned this year and said that now it is fantastic, the kids loved it and so did the teachers. They learnt so much. The students thought it was exciting and loved the role play and other improvements we had made. They will be coming again.

Slide 4

However, as Queensland is a large decentralised state it is not always possible for students to have the opportunity to travel to Brisbane. This means we have to find a way to reach those students who can't visit.

Twice a year our Education team packs up and travels to a regional area to deliver a youth parliament for primary students, a teacher professional development workshop and parliamentary education activities for classes in high school.

The youth parliamentarians debate motions— two motions are set topics and the other is chosen by the student on an issue that is relevant to their community.

[recent set topics dealt with type of food in school canteens and employment for young people.]

Last year we reached 173 primary students in this way.

Slide 5

The red circles on this map indicate where we have run regional programs since 2011. In March next year we travel to Roma (in green)

While we are yet to visit schools in the Torres Strait, which is some 2,100 km north of Brisbane, we did have students from Poruma Island participate in the youth parliament we held in Cairns in far north Queensland.

We were unable to use a video conference as the internet connection was not reliable. Instead, we asked the students to video record their speeches which we played at the youth parliament and sent a video of the day back to the students.

So here is Munro Stephen a year 6 student from Poruma with his speech which was about funding to provide a fence around the school grounds to keep animals out.

CLIP

We hope to see Munro participating in one of our other programs in the future!

Slide 6

For secondary school students we provide a number of activities:

- Legal studies students from years 10 to 12 visit parliament house and participate in programs covering the functions of parliament. This includes role plays, such as a committee hearing, debating a bill, a voting activity and watching parliament when sitting.
- We conduct a legal studies youth parliament which is held annually in Brisbane. For this we draft a bill and amendments and the students take the bill through the various stages, speaking and voting on the bill and amendments.
- We work with the Queensland Electoral Commission and the Department of Education to deliver annual Constitutional Conventions in Brisbane, Cairns and Townsville. The education team runs voting activities and role plays.
- Part of our regional program is to visit schools in areas with high Indigenous student numbers. Our Indigenous Liaison Officer addresses the students about the role of parliament and runs a role play activity that the education team has developed. This year he spoke to approximately 200 students in Mt Isa and the Bundaberg area.
- We visit regional high schools to deliver a game show that we have developed to highlight certain parliamentary functions.

In 2015-16 we reached 1,125 secondary school students.

Slide 7

For tertiary students we work with universities to facilitate an internship program for approximately 30 third or final year university students.

We deliver lectures that cover parliamentary business, the role of committees, how legislation is made and parliaments scrutiny role.

The interns are required to submit a written paper that demonstrates their understanding of these functions.

We also match the students with an MP to undertake a research project for the member.

Both the paper and the project form part of their assessment for the subject.

We work with the Department of Communities to provide the annual YMCA youth parliament for young adults. The parliament runs for three days and Members are invited to chair the different sessions.

Since 2009 we have run an annual Indigenous Youth Parliament in collaboration with the Office of Youth. This youth parliament is aimed at Indigenous youths aged from 18 to 25 across the state. We provide briefings on the bill to Act process as well as draft a bill for introduction and debate and amendment.

We also visit universities to deliver lectures.

Slide 8

What's important to remember here is the ripple effect: it's impossible to engage every student in Queensland, but we know that reaching as many as we do can have an important impact, especially in smaller communities.

For example – in 2012 the Agriculture and Environment Committee held hearings regarding home ownership in the Northern Peninsula Area of Queensland, in a little town called Injinoo with a population of around 400.

Two former participants of the Indigenous youth parliament living in that community spread the word about how to get involved. They understood what the committee process through their participation in the youth parliament.

As a result we had well over one hundred locals attend the hearing and have their say.

The relationships developed with the parliament through the Indigenous Youth parliament program have resulted in greater representation of Indigenous people attending parliamentary committee hearings.

We have reached over 1,200 young people through these programs last year.

Slide 9

So what are some of our achievements? Well, we have seen

- 3 parliamentary interns gain employment in electorate offices
- 2 former YMCA youth parliamentarians later became MPs – one became a Minister at 29 and is a current Minister
- 2 former interns later became Ministers in their early 30s.
- Our Education programs have also led to effective committee engagement with remote communities

Last year over 12,000 young people interacted in some way with the Parliament.

Learning is the foundation of being engaged, and engagement is the foundation of contribution.

Our aim is for these 12,000 young people to become engaged citizens who will participate in our democratic processes, make informed decisions about their representation, and make a contribution where they can.

Thank you.