



AUSTRALIAN SENATE

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15 July 2015

The Hon Tony Smith, MP  
Chairman  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Smith

Thank you for your invitation to the Parliamentary Education Office to contribute to your Committee's inquiry into Electoral Education. The Parliamentary Education Office is an office of the Department of the Senate. However, in recognition of its 'whole of parliament' and national responsibilities, it is jointly funded by both chamber departments.

Please find attached a submission which details the important role the Parliamentary Education Office plays in providing parliamentary education services and resources to schools, students and teachers.

We would be pleased to provide further details the Committee may require.

Yours sincerely

(Rosemary Laing)

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS  
INQUIRY INTO ELECTORAL EDUCATION**

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**Submission by the Parliamentary Education Office, Department of the Senate**

**INTRODUCTION**

An important responsibility of the Department of the Senate is to promote awareness of the Parliament, in particular the Senate and its work. In discharging this responsibility, the Department, together with the Department of the House of Representatives, jointly fund the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO). The PEO is tasked with providing ‘whole-of-parliament’ parliamentary education services and resources for Australian schools, teachers and students. It also plays an important role in supporting members and senators in their parliamentary education dealings with students.

This submission details the work of PEO in meeting its parliamentary education responsibilities to schools, teachers and students. At the outset, however, it is important to recognise that the focus of the committee's inquiry, electoral education, is significantly different to the PEO's focus, which is parliamentary education. Electoral education emphasises, in general terms, the importance of voting and aims to ensure that people have knowledge of voting procedures. Parliamentary education focusses primarily on the outcome and consequences of voting, the purpose of which is to elect a parliament from which government is formed. While electoral education finds its purpose on polling day, parliamentary education is of ongoing relevance and emphasises an understanding of the processes of law making, representation and scrutiny of government operations. Therefore its scope is wider.

Of course parliamentary education does not operate in a vacuum and must be seen as an integral part of the civics education continuum. Therefore, for the purpose of establishing a proper foundation for the discharge of its parliamentary education responsibilities, the PEO will routinely but briefly touch upon electoral education matters. However, as explained below, the extent of this dealing is limited and incidental to the PEO's primary mission of parliamentary education.

It is hoped that this submission will be of relevance to the committee's terms of reference and assist the committee in its inquiry. More specifically, the PEO's experience and the delivery methods and approaches it employs, may be relevant and have wider application in the area of electoral education.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SENATE AND PUBLIC AWARENESS**

Australia's Parliament is accountable and open to the public, for their observation and scrutiny. An informed public which understands the parliamentary process is empowered by this knowledge to demand the best from their elected representatives and their institutions of governance. As a result, the Department takes seriously its responsibility for communicating

knowledge about the Senate, and the wider Parliament, to Australians of all ages and levels of parliamentary awareness.

The department discharges its responsibility to promote public awareness of the Senate and its work through a wide variety of mediums, including public lectures, exhibitions, printed materials as well as social media and the internet. Its audience is wide and stretches from primary-level school children to adults. The department produces and makes available an extensive range of informative and educational materials for teachers, media and others who wish to be able to inform others about the Parliament and the Senate. The Department does this through a variety of means but, consistent with the current inquiry's terms of reference, this submission will focus on the educational activities of the PEO.

## **THE PARLIAMENTARY EDUCATION OFFICE (PEO)**

### **History**

In 1982 the then Joint House Department conducted a survey of the needs of students and teachers visiting Parliament House. Students surveyed after their visit revealed a poor knowledge of basic parliamentary facts. This suggested that they were not deriving maximum benefit from their visit and highlighted the need for an information resource to prepare students for their visit. Responding to these findings, the Presiding Officers in late 1984 approved a joint project of the Senate and the House of Representatives to prepare a comprehensive information kit on the Parliament for school students. The information kit became the *Parliament Pack*, and was distributed to all primary schools in Australia in 1987. A second kit followed for secondary schools in 1988. The *Parliament Pack* was an encyclopaedia of Parliament, presented in two categories: Parliament & People, and People in Parliament. It contained videos, broadsheets, posters, card games, resource books and role cards.

In August 1988 a discussion paper titled "Education for Active Citizenship" was tabled by the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. The paper consisted of extracts of submissions to the *Education for Active Citizenship in Australian Schools and Youth Organisations* inquiry by the committee, and its aim was to "stimulate further discussion". The Committee's report was tabled in the Senate in February 1989. A follow up report, *Active Citizenship Revisited* was produced by the Committee in 1991.

The success of *Parliament Pack* and a growing public awareness of the importance of student civics education led to an increased commitment by the Parliament to address the parliamentary education needs of students and teachers. In particular, it was the catalyst for the establishment of the PEO in 1988, which was tasked with developing additional parliamentary education resources and programs for students and teachers. With the establishment of the PEO's Education Centre, a purposely fitted-out committee room that simulates the Senate or House of Representatives chamber, educational programs for visiting students commenced in 1988.

## **The PEO today**

Over the last 27 years the PEO has developed an extensive range of parliamentary education programs and resources, which are used by students, teachers and members of parliament. Foremost among the PEO's programs is the long running experiential role play program for students visiting Parliament House. In addition, in recent years the PEO has progressively moved from printed resources to more engaging and effective methods of delivery embracing new and emerging technology. This includes a significant and growing web presence and the harnessing of video and digital mediums by the PEO for the delivery of parliamentary education information and learning.

From humble beginnings the PEO has developed into a small but highly capable organisation which today plays a leading role in the parliamentary education of teachers and students. In the years ahead the PEO intends to continue to apply its modest resources in monitoring and harnessing new and evolving technology. In particular, the PEO is keen to maintain ongoing access to its teaching programs and resources by all teachers and students - not just those able to visit Parliament House in Canberra. Over the years the PEO has worked constantly at addressing the challenges posed in delivering effective parliamentary education programs and resources to regional and remote areas of Australia.

As the PEO is organisationally and physically part of the Department of the Senate, its staff are parliamentary officers of that Department. In this important respect the PEO differs from other civics education organisations, including the Electoral Education Centre and the Museum of Australian Democracy, which form part of (and report to) the executive. Implicit in the parliament's decision to establish the PEO is recognition that parliamentary education is an essential parliamentary responsibility that is best delivered by the parliament.

Given its role as an important but specialist player in the civics education continuum, the PEO recognises the importance of establishing and maintaining close professional relationships with other civics educational institutions, both nationally and internationally. Collegiate professional relationships with State and Territory parliamentary educators and educational colleagues at the Australian Electoral Commission, the Museum of Australian Democracy, the High Court of Australia and the National Archives of Australia are particularly important for the PEO. Along with the PEO, these latter institutions are founding members of the National Capital Civics Education Group, which acts as an effective vehicle for practical consultation and coordination on civics education matters, including the draft national curriculum in civics and citizenship. The PEO Director currently convenes the group.

## **Reporting**

As part of the Department of the Senate the PEO reports to the Clerk Assistant Procedure and ultimately to the Clerk of the Senate. Strategic oversight is provided by the Parliamentary Education Office Advisory Committee appointed by the Presiding Officers and jointly chaired by the Deputy Presiding Officers.

In recognition of its ‘whole of parliament’ teaching focus and the fact that the PEO produces educational programs and resources that explain the work of the Parliament as a whole, the PEO liaises closely with senior officers nominated by the Department of the House of Representatives.

### **Staffing and Funding**

As indicated above, the PEO is jointly funded by the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives (which provides an annual financial contribution).

The PEO has as at 2015:

- a staff comprising 6 full-time personnel (Director, Education Manager, Project Officer, Parliamentary Education Support and Liaison Officer, Education Centre Coordinator and Office Manager), five part-time Parliamentary Educators and six ‘casual’ (irregular intermittent) parliamentary educators, and
- access to Senate Public Information Office technical resources in the areas of publishing, graphic design and video production.

## **PEO PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES**

### **The PEO – a Unique Experience**

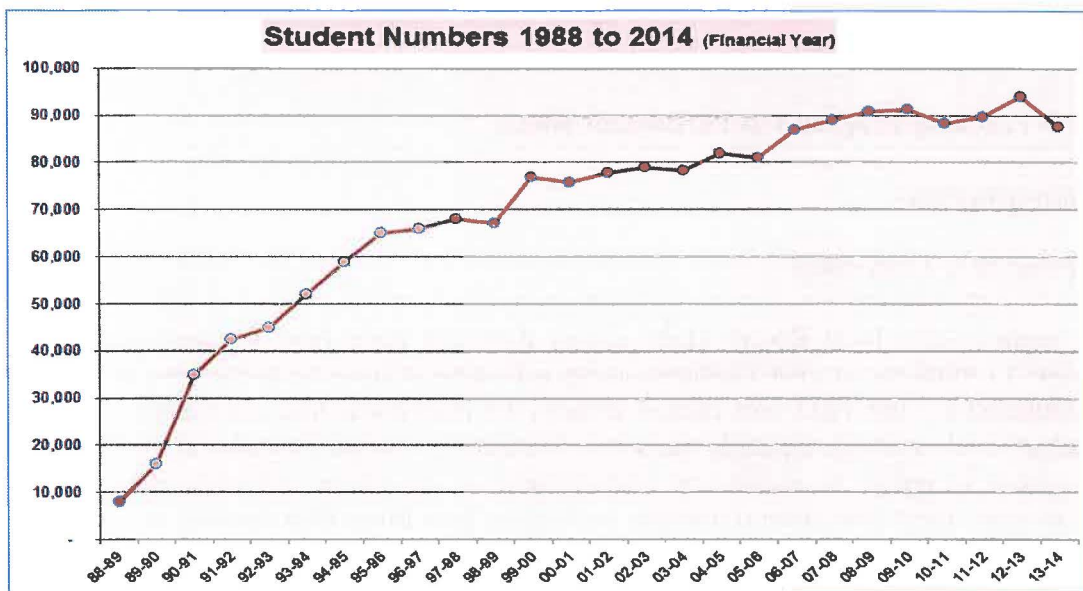
From early beginnings, the PEO has developed into a unique and leading organisation in the delivery of programs and resources about the Parliament and its work, which caters for schools, their teachers and students. As a result the PEO regularly receives visitors and delegations from other parliaments and briefs them on its innovative approach to parliamentary education.

### **PEO Role Play Program at Parliament House**

The long running and popular PEO Education Centre program is a one hour parliamentary role-play activity conducted for students visiting Parliament House, of whom eighty percent are in their final year of primary schooling. The hour-long program allows students to act as members of parliament or parliamentary officials and work through the essential steps in the legislative process. The role-play program is conducted throughout the school year and two sessions are offered on the hour from 9am to 4pm. One session is conducted in the PEO’s dedicated Education Centre, which is configured and furnished as a replica chamber of the parliament. The second program is conducted in an available and suitable space in Parliament House which can be arranged into a simulated chamber. Visiting school groups are offered a range of role play scenarios to choose from, including the passage of legislation through the House of Representatives or the Senate, a Committee hearing and Question Time. On average over 90% of visiting groups select a House of Representatives scenario and almost 90% of all scenarios selected involve the passage of legislation through the House of Representatives.

Over the last eight years the PEO parliamentary role play program at Parliament House has averaged 90,000 students a year. In 2014-15 90,132 school students in 2,665 groups from 1,611 schools participated in the PEO’s role play program at Parliament House. Students from every state and mainland territory undertook the program. The following graph details student numbers in past financial years. Since 1998-99 the PEO has educated, at Parliament House alone, over 1.89 million students, most of whom are now adults and eligible to vote. During 2016 the PEO expects to educate its two millionth student.

## PEO Output: Teaching at APH – *Financial Year*



For much of the teaching year the role play program operates at or near capacity, which is governed by available resources, including staffing and access to suitable teaching venues at Parliament House. Demand for programs during peak teaching periods (May to November inclusive) often exceeds the available teaching slots necessitating some schools to be placed on a waiting list.

To address unfulfilled and growing demand a comprehensive outreach strategy has been developed, including travelling teams of educators and an extensive suite of printed and web-based educational resources. This is discussed in greater detail below. The PEO is also currently exploring the possibility of interactive video conferencing for the remote delivery of parliamentary education programs.

### *The Methodology of Role-Play*

Role-plays were developed by the PEO so that students visiting the Parliament experience parliamentary decision-making – the Parliament at work. Schools book sessions, which are conducted in the PEO Education Centre or another suitable venue. During their role play session students take on the role of federal members or senators. A typical role play scenario involves

debating a hypothetical bill in the "chamber". Role play programs are facilitated by highly trained parliamentary educators. To enhance the visiting student's experience and to aid cognitive learning, parliamentary attire and props (such as a replica Black Rod or Parliamentary Mace) are used. The focus of the role play is upon developing the student's parliamentary knowledge, in particular around the functions of parliament and basic parliamentary procedures. In setting the scene for the role play, parliamentary educators and students will briefly discuss the election of members and senators.

Engaging students in this way conveys the basics of parliamentary concepts and processes accurately and engagingly. These role-plays have been so successful that other PEO programs are based on this hands-on learning methodology.

## **Other PEO Teaching Programs at Parliament House**

### **Partnership programs**

#### *Rotary Adventure in Citizenship*

For over twenty years local Rotary clubs across Australia have funded approximately fifty selected year 11 students to visit Canberra under a hosting scheme to participate in programs mostly conducted by the PEO and related directly to Parliament and citizenship. Occurring during Budget week, students typically attend the Treasurer's Budget Speech and the Opposition Leader's speech in reply. In addition to participating in legislative and committee role play activities, students meet their federal member or senator, hear from other members of parliament and senators and undertake a session on elections. Key elements of the electoral education session, including an electoral role play, are conducted by specialist educators from the Australian Electoral Commission's Electoral Education Centre

#### *National Youth Science Forums*

This program involves a partnership between the Australian National University, Rotary and the PEO. Selected Year 11 senior science students attend programs in Canberra during January and are briefed about the operations of Parliament and government from a science perspective. A summer school for science teachers from around Australia is also conducted in January. In all these programs electoral education issues may be briefly touched upon if required for the purpose of providing a background for the delivery of parliamentary education training.

### **Tailored Programs**

Upon request and subject to resources, the PEO frequently provides tailored parliamentary education programs to other educational and interested groups visiting Parliament House. These groups are typically diverse and have included indigenous groups, undergraduate and qualified teachers and civics education groups. As required, briefings or programs for visiting parliamentary delegations and electoral officials from Australia and overseas are also conducted. Again, other than incidentally and for the purpose of providing a foundation for parliamentary teaching, the issue of electoral education is not canvassed with these groups.

## **PEO Reach Strategy**

Each year approximately 2.5% of the national student population will visit their national Parliament and have the opportunity to participate in the PEO's Canberra-based programs. As the PEO's parliamentary educational mission is a national one, the PEO recognises that it must develop and provide effective parliamentary education programs and resources for students and teachers who are unable to visit Canberra. These activities are of particular relevance and importance to students in remote, regional and socially disadvantaged areas.

To enable it to address the parliamentary education needs of all Australian students, the PEO invests in an extensive and expanding reach strategy, which includes outreach teaching programs, a suite of printed publications and video and digital and web-based resources.

### ***Parliament Alive Program***

The long running *Parliament Alive* Program allows the PEO to send teams of parliamentary educators into the field to conduct parliamentary role play programs around Australia. Conducted three or four times a year, the *Parliament Alive* program has visited every State and mainland territory. Visit locations are carefully selected and are the result of statistical analysis that highlights areas within Australia that are under-represented in the PEO role-play program at Parliament House. Each year several of these locations are chosen and approximately 3 to 4,000 students are educated. The local member usually participates in these programs and on occasion relevant senators.

By way of example, in financial year 14/15 three week-long programs were conducted involving 3,134 students from 62 schools. In mid-April 2015, an outreach program visited regional Victoria (the electorates of Gippsland and McMillan). A second outreach to suburban Adelaide (electorates of Kingston, Wakefield, Makin and Port Adelaide) was conducted in late April to early May and a third outreach visited north central New South Wales (electorate of Parkes) in mid-May.

### **PEO Educational Resources**

The PEO produces a comprehensive suite of parliamentary educational resources for students and teachers. Some of the more significant resources are detailed below.

While, some of the PEO's educational resources are provided or accessible free of charge, such as from the PEO website, most printed resources are sold on a cost-recovery basis with the proceeds being applied to defray production and posting costs. Recognising the constrained financial situation of most schools, the PEO endeavours to keep the cost of its resources as low as possible to ensure their affordability and the widest possible distribution.



PEO resources are proving increasingly popular. Awareness of PEO resources is promoted through on-line advertisements, the distributions of flyers, targeted promotions, Chamber department twitter accounts, the SCOOTLE national professional learning network for Australian educators and by word of mouth.

- *PEO Website*

The extensive PEO website is a key vehicle by which the PEO is able to provide parliamentary information and educational resources to teachers and students throughout Australia. Beginning as a series of files loaded onto a personal computer linked to the Internet by telephone in 1996, the PEO website last financial year recorded over 907,523 sessions. During those sessions 2,222,469 pages were viewed. The growing popularity of the site is demonstrated by the fact that in the previous financial year, 2013/14, 719,124 website sessions were recorded.

The PEO website contains an extensive range of parliamentary education resources in text, imagery and video formats. Information and resources are grouped in the following areas: Programs (PEO teaching programs), Learning (educational resources for students to access directly), Teaching (resources, including lesson plans and curriculum-linked units of work, for teachers), Reaching (information about the PEO's reach program), Multimedia (an extensive range of parliamentary videos and imagery), Quick Answers (concise and easy to digest information on a broad range of parliamentary topics) and Resources (highlighting PEO stand-alone education resources). The PEO's extensive range of videos has proven particularly popular as students and teachers increasingly employ video and digital media in the classroom. The website contains several educational resources dealing with electoral education matters, including a fact sheet.

Considerable efforts are made to ensure that PEO educational resources can be accessed by teachers and students with a disability. For example, an audio version of the constitution is available for people with sight disabilities and transcripts for the hearing impaired are provided for PEO videos. In 2012 PEO's student videos were recognised by the Deafness Forum of Australia awarding them a Captioning for Kids Award.

To keep pace with the changing learning technologies familiar to students in the twenty-first century, the PEO increasingly delivers new resources on-line through video and interactive programs. Recent additions to the website include an interactive parliamentary timeline, draft national curriculum-linked teaching resources, and videos and printed resources supporting the anniversaries of World War I and the Magna Carta. In addition, a *Parliament Now* feature which details recent parliamentary activities and statistics has been added and *Your Questions on Notice*, has been introduced to allow students to pose questions directly to a parliamentary educator. In coming years the PEO intends to not only maintain the currency and accuracy of the website but expand its content and interactive resources.

- *Parliament of Wizards*

This resource is available as a CD. It introduces upper primary school students to the world of Parliament through the popular medium of imagination and magic where, in role, students create their own wizard parliament and debate bills related to the world of magic.

- *Get Parliament*

This resource is an A4 booklet designed for upper primary to lower secondary students. It covers essential civics topics including federation, the Australian Constitution, the three levels of government, elections and how Parliament works. The resource may be ordered individually or in class sets. The resource is supported by downloadable activity sheets for students to use with each section of *Get Parliament*.

- *Parliament in Pictures.*

Consisting of 10 A2 display quality posters, this resource illustrate key parliamentary concepts using photographs, graphics and accessible language. Two of the posters deal with electoral education – *Choosing Members and Choosing Senators*. The resource is supported by a teacher's classroom guide, which assists teachers to teach to the posters. The guide also contains activities teachers can use in conjunction with the posters.

- *Role Play the Parliament - A Teachers Guide*

Another A4 booklet, this resource provides an illustrated step-by-step guide to conducting a law-making role-play in the classroom, complete with student worksheets.

- *Pocket Constitution*

This resource is a pocket-sized (A6) edition of Australia's Constitution, published jointly by the PEO and the Australian Government Solicitor (AGS). The resource includes an informative overview of the constitution by the AGS and has appeal to students of all ages.

- *Chamber Posters*

This resource consists of two large (A2) display quality posters showing the Senate and House of Representative chambers.

- *Despatch Box Educational Resource Kit*

The PEO has created the *Despatch Box*, a purchasable resource for parliamentarians and teachers, for use in the classroom. The box contains props and items designed to facilitate the conduct of role-play programs in the classroom to educate students more widely about legislative processes and to create interest in the role and operation of Parliament. Approximately 220 have been sold since 2004. The resource has recently sold out.

## **FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

- *Website*

The PEO website is a living resource that is constantly updated and expanded to ensure its accuracy, currency and continued relevance. New educational resources will be developed and posted to ensure that the website meets the future educational needs of teachers and students, including under the draft national curriculum. Interactives and resources capable of use on multi-media devices, such as electronic whiteboards, will be a particular area of focus. At the end of each parliamentary session the website will continue to be updated to reflect significant events and parliamentary statistics.

- *Interactive Video Conferencing*

In recent years the PEO has investigated interactive video conferencing in order to assess its relevance for the cost-effective delivery of PEO parliamentary educational programs. Several recent trials of the technology have proven successful and demonstrated the wide potential of the medium. The PEO is currently exploring technical and funding issues associated with the possible acquisition of a stand-alone capability.

## **INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT OF SENATORS AND MEMBERS**

The PEO actively supports and encourages senators and members in their parliamentary education dealings with students, teachers and schools - both at Parliament House and in their electorate or State or Territory. Where possible, senators and members are encouraged to visit and address visiting school groups at Parliament House and to participate in PEO outreach teaching programs in their electorate or State or Territory. Senators and members may also be involved in other PEO educational programs, such as the Rotary Adventure in Citizenship program. Further, each financial year senators and members are provided with an allocation of PEO resources and promotional items for use when engaging with students. The PEO has also developed a range of educational resources that senators and members can personalise for use when interacting with students.

**Dr Rosemary Laing**

**Clerk of the Senate**

15 July 15

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