

Where does Malcolm Turnbull sit?

The story behind establishing a Parliamentary Education Office.

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Goals

The House of Assembly Education Office aims to deliver Civics and Citizenship Education to Tasmanian school students under the guidelines of the Australian National Curriculum, with a strong focus on the Parliament of Tasmania.

The Education Office also aims to introduce and/or expand parliamentary education to adults in the Tasmanian community. The office is aiming to involve adults that may have little understanding of the Westminster system and/or The Parliament of Tasmania.

History

The office was formed in October 2015 with the appointment of an in-house Education Officer. The Education Officer is a qualified teacher. Initially, the office employed one part-time Education Officer (0.6 FTE) under the supervision of the Second Clerk-Assistant. With the start of the 2017-2018 Financial Year, this was expanded to two Education Officers (1.6 FTE) after a successful budget submission to the Department of Treasury and Finance by the Speaker of the House of Assembly. The selection process for the second Education Officer is currently underway.

Strategic Planning and the Education Office

As a newly formed unit, the initial work was to review any existing education programmes and educational resources for schools within the Parliament of Tasmania.

Once this information was collated, a plan was formulated on the best approach to establishing and developing the office. This plan fell into three main categories: develop the in-house programmes, design education resources for classroom use, and plan outreach programmes for isolated, rural or disadvantaged schools.

Developing in-house programmes became the initial priority for the Education Office, particularly expanding and refining a selection of role-plays. In reality, students were already booked to visit Parliament House, therefore working on their educational experience was more urgent. In practice, all three categories of work for the Education Office are completed around face-to-face contact with visitors in Parliament House, with all three categories progressing concurrently.

Progress so far and Current Projects

There has been considerable progress in the Education Office since October 2015, much of which is on-going work and will remain so. The work of a teacher is never complete as education practices continue to evolve. A more detailed examination of the categories are as follows:

Category 1: Visiting Parliament House

There are now four options for schools visiting Parliament House expanded from two options. They are: Observing Parliament, Guided Tour, Role-Play or a combination of a tour and role-play. The tour and role-play is very popular with primary schools and observing Parliament is the preferred option for Year 11 and 12 Legal Studies classes. Schools visiting from Northern Tasmania tend to take the option available at the time of their visit, working around the sitting schedule. Each of these options is under constant monitoring for improvements. For example, chamber maps (names and roles) have been created for students, whilst in the Public Gallery new role-plays have been written including for specialist groups and new treasure hunt cards have been created for the Museum.

Specialist Year 11 and 12 Legal Studies programmes are in the planning stage (e.g. Committee Role-Play, constructing a Bill).

Category 2: Resources

Some classroom resources have been written and are in development with a professional graphic designer. Examples include: a chamber poster, fact sheets aimed at four different reading levels with supporting follow-up activities.

Category 3: Outreach Programmes

A proposal for the School Outreach Programme has been drafted. Lesson plans are in the final planning stages and extra props are being purchased for the school visits. Consultation with Parliamentary Staff regarding suitable state-wide venues to host the 'mobile Parliament' has begun.

Each month three community groups are invited to visit Parliament House for a Guided Tour. These invitations are mailed state-wide. The Education Office aims to cover a diverse range of groups, especially including those groups that may have little knowledge or experience with The Parliament of Tasmania.

Visitor Numbers

The House of Assembly Education Office has been advertising the education programmes on offer via direct addressed mail to schools and the Parliament of Tasmania website. There has been a notable increase in visitor numbers.

The numbers of school visits are as follows:

2015 School Numbers*	2015 School Groups	2016 School Numbers*	2016 School Groups
1030	41	2715	94

*Public Gallery attendance not included

2016 Number Breakdowns		
Tour and Role-Play	Tour Only	Role-Play only
1890	715	110

2016 School Attendance in the Public Gallery Attendance			
Public Gallery Only	Public Gallery and Modified Tour	Total	Groups
435	347	782	24

The tour and role-play option is a significant portion of the school numbers. Pleasingly, a number of schools and teachers that visited in 2016 have returned in 2017. The 2017 numbers are comparable or above the 2016 totals.

Common misconceptions

The title of this paper reflects the most frequently asked question by visiting students and demonstrates a misconception by the student. It is not at all unusual to be asked within minutes of the students arriving, "Will I see Malcom Turnbull?" or when entering the Chamber "Where does Malcom Turnbull sit?". This question indicates to the Education Officer the starting point for the lesson, namely the three levels of government. Whilst this question is of concern, it does justify the need for an excursion to Parliament House for the student. More concerning is the student that does not visit Parliament House nor have access to high quality Parliamentary Education. These students are at risk of carrying this or other misunderstandings into the future. Indeed, the student question demonstrates the underlying need for the School Outreach Programme to reach students outside Hobart.

A less commonly asked question, but not unheard of, comes from teachers booking a visit. Approximately half a dozen teachers have asked, "Can we see the Senate when we visit?". This is a major concern. Whilst only asked a few times, it raises worrying questions about teacher capacity in delivering the Civics and Citizenship Education. Is incorrect information being taught to Tasmanian students? Are some teachers perpetuating confusion about the role of Parliament? Again, this emphasises the need for a House of Assembly Education Office.

Feedback

The feedback from class teachers and students has been very positive. This has been both written and verbal. The role-play consistently receives the highest feedback ratings. This is not surprising given it is the most interactive part of the programme. Student engagement appears to very high during the role-plays. Whilst negative feedback is rare, any suggested improvements tend to focus upon reducing the listening time for students within the tour. The Education Office is reviewing the

tour to include more activities for the students, aiming to increase student engagement. There is a long-term goal to incorporate digital technologies into the tour.

Many Members of Parliament have taken the opportunity to address schools from their electorate, and the Speaker of the House regularly joins the school groups to explain the role of Speaker. This involvement is very well received by schools. The teachers often comment that connecting students with their elected representatives is a great outcome of the visit.

Challenges

All jobs contain challenges and the work of a Parliamentary Education Officer is no different. Beginning a unit from a 'blank slate' allows the unit to have clear direction and outcomes. However, this is an enormous amount of work. The House of Assembly Education Office is extremely grateful to have additional financial support to allow the continuation and completion of work.

As the Education Officer gains a deeper understanding of the procedural side of the Parliament, new ideas are gleamed. This evolution of ideas generates a naturally busy workload.

Teachers often plan and brainstorm activities together. This is somewhat restricted in a team of one person. Thankfully the Office Supervisor, the Second-Clerk Assistant, has a natural understanding of how students best learn and is very supportive of new ideas for the office. With the securing of the second Education Officer this natural planning process should evolve.

In conclusion

The establishment of the House of Assembly Education Office has been a success. Whilst still in its formative years, the office is an exciting new dimension to Civics and Citizenship Education within the state of Tasmania.