



Constitution
Education Fund
Australia

Summer Newsletter

CEFA's Summer Newsletter

2016/2017

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CEFA is delighted to announce that from early 2017 the Australian Constitution Centre will be established in the High Court of Australia, Canberra.

In an uncertain world we need to be reminded that our Australian Constitution continues to provide stability and good governance. Australia's constitutional arrangements have served us well since federation and are recognised internationally as one of the best.

Yet, disturbingly, 2016 reports such as the Lowy Institute, the Scanlon Foundation and Essential Media show that trust in our democracy and attitudes to it, particularly for young Australians, need to improve. In 2016 only 54% of 18-29 year olds say democracy is preferable to any other kind

of government. This is simply not good enough in a country that is recognised as a leader for constitutional certainty.

We share similar democracies to countries such as the US and the UK. However, events such as the Brexit referendum and US election have made many of us realise just how different and valuable components of our own Constitution are. All three of our nations have seen our constitutional frameworks ensure peaceful transitions in challenging times.

It is vital for the future benefit of all Australians that CEFA implement new and innovative education programs that better inform people. We need knowledge of the history, processes and operation of the Australian Constitution to foster an appreciation of our unique constitutional arrangements.

All CEFA programs are developed through collaborations including with expert consultants and academics in history, constitutional law and education fields.

Each year CEFA funds its educational initiatives through a combination of private and Government funding sources. Subject to funding, CEFA will implement the following programs in 2017:

1. The Australian Constitution Centre

CEFA and the High Court will collaborate to establish the educational Australian Constitution Centre. The five year project build will involve a permanent exhibition in the old café area of the High Court that will open in November 2017. A temporary exhibit 'the Chief Justice's Gallery' will open in late March/early April 2017 and will later become the first of our travelling exhibitions which will head out to regional Australia. Using the latest digital technologies the Australian Constitution Centre, including the website, will distribute our resources across the nation.

The Commonwealth of Australia (as represented by the High Court of Australia (Commonwealth)) is engaging CEFA to build the exhibits and the website. The Australian Constitution Centre will educate the public, including the thousands of students who visit Canberra each year.

2. CEFA's Constitutional Forum (CCF)

Why are people uneasy about Australian democracy? We hear it's because we've had five Prime Ministers in five years. We hear it's because of declining trust in our elected officials and that it's because the system is not working.

But perhaps this unease is because many Australians do not have a good understanding of the processes of our system of government under our Australian Constitution.

The CCF is a research project that began in early 2015 and has reached over 1 million people. CEFA is encouraged that Australians are indeed interested. But we need to do much more to reverse negative attitudes to the operation of the Australian system of government.

Each week, the CCF research staff examine a contemporary political topic and write an article explaining how the Constitution applies to what is happening in Parliament, with the Executive Government or in the High Court. The relationship between contemporary politics and our Constitution is not generally discussed by mainstream media so

the CCF provides information that is not available elsewhere.

We explore the Constitution, section by section to discover the history, how the Constitution has applied in the past and what is happening in current debate. The CCF uses social media and web based forums to allow Australians to discuss contemporary and historical constitutional information in a free and safe communication environment. Our forum reaches ordinary Australians, but is also read and contributed to by eminent constitutional leaders from the judiciary, government, and academia on a weekly basis.

Through the CCF, CEFA is improving understanding about our Constitution and democracy for many Australians. In so doing, we are helping to lessen the feelings of unease about our democracy. This forum has the ability to grow, reach a large proportion of our population and inform people from all walks of life. If you don't receive our free weekly forum, you can subscribe on our website or send us an email.

3. Schools Constitutional education programs

Our children don't engage with democracy and they have little understanding of our system of government and our Constitution. Scariest yet, many of our teachers have a limited understanding and are therefore unable to teach it.

Governments are supporting programs addressing declining standards in numeracy and literacy in our students, while the important subject of civics and constitutional education is being neglected. Our democracy relies on an informed voter and our youth are the voters of the future.

From 2017 CEFA will be implementing more school parliaments across the nation expanding to 6000 Australian schools (60%) by the end of 2018. CEFA will particularly target disadvantaged, regional and indigenous schools.

New teaching and learning resources are being continually developed and streamlined into Australian classrooms via our dedicated digital platform, Yaba.edu.au.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) will collaborate with us to measure through NAPLAN, the expected improvement in knowledge and attitudes of young people. This will ensure that our children - voters and leaders of the future - leave school as informed, knowledgeable and engaged members of the Australian community.

CEFA will provide teaching and learning resources for every accredited pre-service teacher training

institution in Australia and provide units of work for civics and constitutional education.

4. The annual Governor-General's Prize Programs for Universities and Schools

From 2017 the Governor-General's Prize competitions will be expanded to schools and will include students, teachers and trainee teachers. Prizes will be awarded for different year levels in primary and secondary schools.

Best practice in school parliaments and other constitutional education programs will now be rewarded. Categories will include awards for both individuals and groups from public and independent schools. Special prizes will be awarded for indigenous students, students from low socio-economic areas, regional and remote communities and those with high immigrant populations. Years 11/12 will compete for the established CEFA first-time voter quiz.

The competition structures will include progression through local, regional and state competitions, culminating in a national grand final.

Best performing teacher trainees will also be awarded prizes as they demonstrate excellence in teaching and learning programs related to civics and constitutional education.

University undergraduates will continue to enter the prestigious Governor-General's essay competition. For over thirteen years, this prize has encouraged undergraduates to write about the history, operation and contemporary relevance of the Constitution. The essays will continue to be judged by High Court Justices and other eminent Australians.

CEFA's second university initiative, the undergraduate scholarship program will continue to attract future leaders. The Scholars must show a passionate interest in CEFA's work.

Events will be held each year to recognise the recipients and winners of all levels of competitions and scholarships. Finalists will take their place at the presentation of the Governor-General's Prizes at the High Court of Australia or at Government House.

Can you help CEFA spread our vital constitutional messages?

The events of 2016 have woken us all up. Some of us have been in shock. But most still realise their voice counts in a democracy. Let's harness the opportunity while we have it.

By this time next year CEFA wants to have reached some of those millions of Australians that are dissatisfied with our democracy. Our programs will restore pride in our democracy and help change attitudes. The Australian Constitution is alive today and CEFA is here to improve understanding of it.

CEFA is demonstrating that the Australian Constitution is relevant and contemporary for every Australian. Please help us to spread the word that the Australian Constitution should be treasured as our greatest public asset.

Please encourage your friends, family and work colleagues to join with CEFA. Our door is always open for constitutional conversations.

For over 12 years, CEFA has been working to establish the Australian Constitution Centre and it is now a reality. We do need your support as never before. Together we can make a difference.

Constitution Education Fund Australia

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