

## **Representation—*PA for an MP***

### **HSIE/SOSE outcomes**

Illustrates the linkages between rights and responsibilities for members of a community.  
Describes how individuals and groups value different forms of work.

### **Subject matter focus**

Using the *PA for an MP* interactive students will learn about the role of a member of parliament (MP) in the electorate and in federal Parliament House.

### **Implications for learning**

In this area of study, students have opportunities to:

- Explore the concept of representation.
- Explore the role of an MP through the diary entries of a (hypothetical) MP.
- Identify some of the demands and expectations which arise in the daily life of an MP.
- Reflect on every Australian's right to representation through their elected federal representative.
- Understand the role of the media and the public in drawing attention to issues.
- Compare the role of a PA (personal assistant) with that of an MP.
- Practice prioritising and sequencing tasks.

### **Take home message**

An MP's job is divided into two equally important roles; working in the electorate and working at Parliament House.

### ***PA for an MP* outcome**

Understand that an MP represents their constituents both in their electorate and at Parliament House.

### **Using the *PA for an MP* interactive**

This interactive uses an electronic diary format to explore the role of an MP:

- Before using the interactive, discuss the role of a PA—organising appointments, taking phone calls, correspondence.
- Discuss the role of an MP—to speak and act on behalf of his or her constituents.
- Break students into groups so that each group has access to the *PA for an MP* interactive.
- Tell your students that today they will become PAs and that their major task will be to organise the electorate diary and the Parliament House diary for their boss, the MP.
- Give students time to fully explore the interactive. We suggest at least 15 minutes.
- You (teacher) may like to gauge the emotional response of the new PAs to the pressure of the job!
- Use key questions, class activities and reflection questions to build on key concepts introduced in the interactive.

### **Key questions**

- What do MPs do? Describe an MP's role in your own words.
- Explore the major differences between an MP's work in the electorate and his or her work in Parliament House. (Where do they work? Who do they speak to? What kind of work do they do in each location?)
- How do MPs find out what issues are important to their constituents?
- How would the diary be different if Technoboy was the PA for a senator representing their state, rather than a member representing an electorate? (Refer to the House of Representatives infosheets and Senate briefs listed in the links below).

- Do you think this game accurately reflects the kind of work your M P does? Why/ Why not?
- What might be some of the disadvantages of this type of work? Ma ke a list. Consider travel demands, fatigue, cost to family life, community atti tudes, issues of privacy, conflicting priorities etc.
- Can you generate a similar list of advantages in support of this type of work?
- Decide if an MP should be paid more than a doctor? A teacher? A rock star? A cleaner? Justify your answer.

### **Class activities**

- Tell someone about your experience of being a *PA for an MP*. Would you like this job in real life? Why/ Why not?
- MPs are very busy. So are students. Design a diary for *your* week. How different are your weekdays and weekends? What things mu st you do first? Are there any jobs that you try to avoid? What would you like to do more of but never have time for?
- Search the Parliament House website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/mi-alpha.asp> Find your federal member's page. Read your member's biography and/or first speech. Did your member say anything that you find particularly interesting, important or controversial? If so, what was it? What do you think about this issue?
- Invite your MP to visit your school. Prior to the visit make a list o f the issues in your area that you think your MP should know about. Discuss these issues during the visit.
- Choose an issue related to one of the following areas of federal responsibility: welfare, health or education funding, environment, transport, agriculture, immigration, defence, foreign affairs etc. Explore the issue through one or more of the following role play scenarios:
  - A doorstep interview at Parliament House where journalists interview an MP.
  - A meeting between a lobby group and an MP with a particular interest in their cause.
  - An interview with an MP, to be broadcast on a local radio station.
- Visit [http://www.aph.gov.au/committee/inquiries\\_subject.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/committee/inquiries_subject.htm) and explore the committees in the current parliament. Which committee would you choose to sit on if you were an MP? Explain why.
- Imagine you have been an MP for 25 years. You are about to retire and a leading political magazine requests the rights to publish a section from your memoirs. You agree. Produce the piece from your memoirs. Don't forget to highlight aspects of your political career. What have the challenges been? The highlights? The lowlights?
- Imagine you're an MP who lives in Western Australia and who hates flying. Write a diary entry describing why you are considering quitting politics!
- Locate the parliamentary Sitting Schedule at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/sittings/index.htm>. Count and compare the number of weeks spent at Parliament House and in electorates. What other events are listed on the sitting schedule?
- Imagine you are an experienced political journalist. Write an article titled 'What makes a great MP?' Don't forget to list the qualities that you consider to be most important.

### **Reflection**

- Reflect on how difficult it would be as an MP to satisfy all the different needs of your electorate. Think about what you would do if half your electorate wanted something and the other half did not?
- Reflect on how difficult it may be to represent the interests of your electorate as well as the interests of your political party. Consider what you would do if most of your constituents wanted something that your party did not.

### **Integration**

- Maths: Time and percentages; calculation of distance against time e.g. MP from Perth, Adelaide, Darwin or Sydney travelling to Canberra on a fortnightly basis.
- Geography: Use an atlas to study different Australian regions.

### **Literacy notes**

This study provides opportunities for students to: categorise information; conduct research; participate in a role-play; create and retell an exposition text and practice public speaking.

### **Resources**

- *Get Parliament*, magazine available from the Parliamentary Education Office.  
See [http://www.peo.gov.au/publications/get\\_parliament.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/publications/get_parliament.html)

### **Links**

- Australian Electoral Commission: <http://www.aec.gov.au/>
- The work of a member of parliament:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/infosheets/is15.pdf>
- Members of the House of Representatives:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm>
- House of Representatives infosheets:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/infosheets/index.htm>
- Senate briefs: <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/pubs/guides/index.htm>