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First Asia-Australia Mock Trial

Jodie Thomson

Article provided courtesy of the Law Society Journal

English may be their second language, but that didn't stop a team of South Korean high school students from claiming victory over a local team from Penrith High School in a recent first-ever contest for the Law Society's Mock Trial Competition.

Held via video conference in real time, the competition was the first between Australia and an Asian nation.

International events have been held for many years between Australia and the UK using video conferencing, but Robyn Cross, coordinator of mock trials at the Law Society of NSW, said they hoped to organise more events like this one in the future.

'Now that this has been such a success, we'll look at an Asian Pacific competition, with Australia and countries like Korea and Singapore,' Cross says. 'It's fantastic for kids to be able to compete against students from overseas.'

The students at Penrith High gained immensely from the



experience, even though they didn't win, says teacher Rick McLennan, who runs the school's mock trial team and competitions.

'The kids performed well and they were delighted to be in it,' he said.

'It was nice to have that extra dimension, competing against a team from a different culture.'

Most impressive, he says, was the way in which the Korean students mastered the language and the competition format, which differed slightly from their own competitions. The students, from a private school in Seoul, had recently won the domestic mock trial competition in Korea.

'Their English was very strong, with a bit of an American intonation,' Rick McLennan said.

Each team competed from their respective classrooms, with cameras and screens set up to give a live-time response.

'The Department of Education has set up classrooms in several schools like this, so this was really a trial to see how the technology worked,' McLennan said. 'We were surprised it went so well.'

Matthew Pearce, a solicitor with the Baulkham Hills Shire Council, was the Australian judge in the Mock Trial Competition's teleconference event between this team from Penrith High School and a team from South Korea. – PHOTO: RAY JONES/IMAGE WEST



Why a Mock Trial Competition

The NSW Mock Trial Competition is run by the Law Society of NSW and is regarded as one of its most successful community based programs. The program was started in 1981 with 28 schools. Today over 250 schools throughout NSW and the ACT compete in the Competition, which is open to all students in years 10 and 11. The program commences in February, and the Grand Final in December is the culmination of a year's work.

Where possible, each school is given a lawyer to coach the team and advise on legal issues and etiquette. Each round is judged by an additional lawyer/judge. Over 800 lawyers are involved in the competition each year.

The International Mock Trial is an added incentive. These trials are performed using video-conference facilities. To date there have been five trials against the UK and one with a Korean School.

Schools also have the opportunity to compete in the Empire City Mock Trial Competition in New York. Two schools travelled to New York in 2008 and had the experience of their lives.

The Mock Trial Competition is sponsored by Bond University, who provide a part-fee scholarship to the most outstanding student advocate in the Grand Final.

Comments from teachers include: 'It will be of lasting value to the students and is a powerful method of developing excellence in students and materially contributes to their success in constructing complex, persuasive argument.' Others say 'The students obtained a great deal of confidence in the communication and presentation skills they develop and thoroughly enjoy the challenge.'

If you would like more information about the 2010 Law Society's Mock Trial Competition, please contact the Co-ordinator, Robyn Cross, on Tel: 02 9926 0253 or email: robyn.cross@lawsociety.com.au