

Attorneys invited to coach students in third national schools moot competition

Attorneys are invited to assist a school team to prepare for and participate in the third national schools moot competition. During the 2010/2011 competition 60 attorneys assisted school teams and in 2011/2012 the number increased to 108 attorneys.

The competition is aimed at creating greater awareness in schools and communities in South Africa about the Constitution. The aim is also to encourage talented young people to consider pursuing a career in law. This competition provides a unique opportunity for learners to develop their research, writing and oral advocacy skills as they endeavour to come to grips with some of the constitutional issues that are presently facing the country.

Participation in the competition is open to learners from all secondary schools in South Africa and ideally those in grades 10 or younger in 2012. Grade 11 learners will be considered for participation on request. The language medium will be English, although the possibility of allowing participants to use any of the official languages in the final round is being investigated. Participation will be structured according to the nine provinces.

How the moot will work

All secondary schools in South Africa will be invited to enter a team of two learners, preferably one male and one female. A fictional problem involving a constitutional issue(s) will be set.

The first round will be in written form. Learners will write two short essays setting out the opposing sides of the case (a 'light' version of the heads of argument used in courts). On this basis the nine best teams in each province will be selected to send two students and a teacher to the provincial oral rounds in the nine provinces in May and June 2013.

The provincial oral rounds will be organised and funded by the Department of Basic Education. The four teams in each of the nine provinces with the highest scores will then be invited to send two students and a teacher to the national oral rounds in August 2013.

To provide all teams with a fair chance, material on the Constitution will be made available on the internet and to schools in hard copy on registration, in addition to background material on DVD and YouTube. Arrangements will be made for learners to approach their closest law faculty (eg, the law clinics and street law programmes, as well as the participants in the African Human Rights Moot Court Competition and other moot competitions) for assistance with their preparation. Attorneys can offer to assist a school of their choice or approach the organisers to be allocated a school team. Workshops will be organised in the nine provinces.

The essays written by the learners will be evaluated by a panel of experts and the best nine submissions in each of the provinces will be identified. At least four non-former Model C schools per province will be included in this number.

May and June 2013: The teams selected will be invited to participate in person in the provincial oral rounds.

August 2013: The four best teams from each province will be invited to participate in the national oral rounds in August 2013, when the teams from the different provinces will be paired against one another to determine the provincial winners. The two provincial winning teams with the highest scores will compete against each other to determine an overall winner during the final round. The learners who are selected for the national rounds (and the teachers who accompany them) will be expected to arrive in Pretoria on 8 August 2013. On 9 August all the participants will attend lectures on the Constitution aimed at assisting them during their oral presentations. They will also be taken on a tour of the Constitutional Court and other places of significance in the field of law, such as the Union Buildings and the Apartheid Museum.

10 August: The national oral rounds will be held. The judges in the preliminary and final rounds will be eminent jurists.

11 August: The final round will be held.

A number of prizes supporting the study of law at any South African university where outstanding participants gain admission will be awarded.

Attorneys wishing to coach or assist a school can contact competition organiser, Cherryl Botterill, faculty of law, University of Pretoria, at e-mail: cherryl.botterill@gmail.com

Barbara Whittle, communication manager, Law Society of South Africa, barbara@lssa.org.za