



RULE OF LAW

EDUCATION CENTRE

Law Day Out Program 2024

Information Pack for Teachers



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Welcome!

A visit to courts is strongly recommended in the NSW Legal Studies syllabus.

In support of teachers and students, the Rule of Law Education Centre (RoLEC), NSW Courts, and the Office of the Sheriff (OoS), work together to provide access to Courts via the Law Day Out Program (LDO).

The LDO is a paid experience, organised and facilitated by RoLEC staff. It enables schools to have a talk from a judicial officer and/ or a RoLEC staff member, and then teachers and students are supported by a RoLEC staff member who will remain with the group throughout the court observation aspect of the program to guide students into courts and answer questions where they are able.

It should be noted that there is a court mandated student: school staff ratio of 20:1 for the LDO program and that RoLEC staff cannot be counted as staff in this ratio.

This document is designed to **assist teachers to successfully plan and execute** their court experience when **participating in the LDO program**, enabling them to maximise the benefits of the experience for their students. Although executed by RoLEC staff, teachers still have a large role to play in the preparation of their students for their time at the court complex.

Teachers retain legal responsibility for their students while at court and should actively supervise their students, particularly given the high-risk nature of the location.

A Risk Management Information Plan is also available for teachers to use in completing their risk compliance documentation for the excursion.

A Student Information Sheet has been designed to accompany this teacher guide. It answers key questions students may have about the LDO program and is designed to create a reference point for students, encouraging them to take ownership of and responsibility for their experience and time in the court complex.

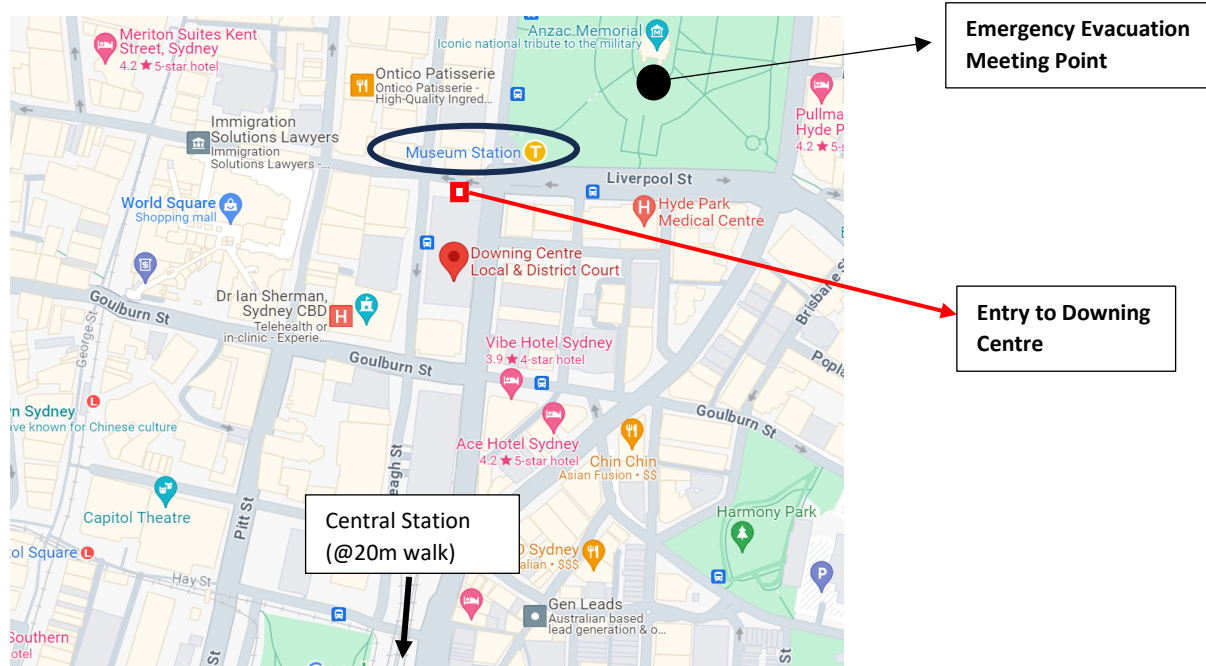
Please take the time to read the information carefully. Should you have any further questions, please email education@ruleoflaw.org.au



General Information about Downing Centre and the LDO

Where is the Downing Centre and what courts are there?

The Law Day Out is hosted at the Downing Centre Court Complex located at 143-147 Liverpool Street, Sydney. This complex houses the Local and District Courts and is also used for some high-risk Supreme Court matters.



What time do we need to arrive at the Downing Centre?

School groups are asked to meet facilitators at 8.20am at the entry to the Downing Centre so that there is adequate time for briefing from RoLEC staff and Sheriff's Officers before making our way to the judicial officer talk location. Unfortunately, we are unable to offer a later start time due to the availability of judicial officers.

What times are the courts operation and what times do they have breaks?

- Hearing Courts: 9.30am – 4pm daily
- List Courts: 9.30am – 4pm daily
- Morning Recess is @11.30 for 15-30 minutes
- Lunch Recess – 1 -2pm

Note that court recess and lunch times may vary slightly on time and length depending on the individual case.



What is accessibility like for students or teachers with disabilities?

The Downing Centre is an accessible building with lifts inside to all floors. Groups are asked to use the stairs between floors, but if there are any teachers or students with mobility issues that prevent them from using the stairs, please inform your facilitator and you are able to use the lift.

The Department of Communities and Justice uses an infrared amplification system to assist people with hearing impairments in courtrooms. The infrared hearing assistance device is similar to a hearing loop and is available in most courts, but not all. It would be advisable to call the courts in advance of your excursion to ask about the use of this system for students should they need it.

What are the Student:School staff ratios required by the courts?

The court mandated student:school staff ratio for the Law Day Out program is 20:1. Any number above multiples of 20 will require another teacher escort (i.e. 21 students requires 2 teachers, 41 students requires 3 teachers).

We strongly advise schools to consider taking more teachers than required given the high-risk nature of the location. When in courts and public areas, students are exposed to accused persons across a variety of charges, including offences against children and drug supply offences when in public galleries inside courts and in public spaces.

If a school staff member is absent on the day of the LDO program, the teacher in charge and the school must find a suitable replacement to accompany students on the excursion.

RoLEC staff cannot be counted in the student:school staff ratio. In addition, **while students are attending the court complex, the student:school staff ratio must be maintained for the duration of the visit. School staff cannot leave the complex whilst students are present, even if teachers are not directly with the students.**

This is a requirement due to the nature of the courts, medical needs of students and various risks associated with the Law Day Out experience. School staff should be practising active supervision of students and maintain a presence in case of students needing their assistance or becoming distressed.

Legal liability for the safety and wellbeing of students at all times remains with the school staff in attendance.



What does the experience look like and how long does it run for?

LAW DAY OUT TIMELINE GUIDE

Downing Centre

Please note this is a guide and you may experience changes on the day due to directions or changes received from the court

8.20 a.m

Arrive at Downing Centre to meet your Rule of Law Education Centre Facilitators and UTS Brennan Program Volunteers. RoLEC staff will give a briefing prior to entry.

8.30 a.m

Security briefing by Sheriff's Officer, security check and court entry.

8.45a.m - 9.20a.m (Local Court Officer) or

9.10a.m - 9.45a.m

(District Court Officer)

Address from Judicial Officer. Please ensure that students have questions ready, or disseminate some questions to students from the suggested questions list found on our website.

9.30 a.m - 11.20 a.m

Students divided into groups of 4-5 will observe cases in courts. Your Rule of Law Facilitator will assist with finding suitable courtrooms. Students will rotate through courtrooms in 20 minute intervals, but can stay in courts longer should they wish to hear the outcome of a case.

11.30 a.m

Court Recesses and Law Day Out experience concludes.

Court recess lasts until 12 p.m. School groups are welcome to attend the next session (12-1 p.m), however must not enter District Courts and must continue to adhere to protocols. You may walk to the Supreme Court if you wish to observe matters there, but attendance is at the discretion of the presiding judicial officer.

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What is the dress code on the LDO?

Students need to wear neat, clean and tidy full school uniform or conservative clothing to the court. Shoes should be closed in and hats cannot be worn inside the building. Thongs, singlets or shirts and T-shirts with inappropriate messages or language, along with short skirts or short shorts can not be worn. Security officers can refuse entry to any person that is deemed to be non-compliant with these requirements.

Your RoLEC facilitator will have stickers for students to wear over their school crest/ name should you need it.

Is there somewhere to buy food and drinks at the courts?

Once in the building there is nowhere to buy food or drink. Students and teachers should therefore bring morning tea. Students may leave the building for lunch but remember they must pass through security again to re-enter the court.

World Square is located a short walk away and has a wide range of eating outlets available to choose from.

What courts are we able to observe?

Please note that the requirements that have been placed upon school groups and RoLEC since the pandemic have significantly changed.

Post pandemic, the LDO operates almost exclusively in the Local Court, particularly for the purposes of observations. If we are able, we will take your group to the District Court for an observation, however, this is dependent on group size and matters being heard in the District Court that day. Other changes include:

- The requirement that your group remain together on the same floor/area at all times and
- Groups are not permitted to attend matters of a sexual nature or that involve children.

These requirements make it difficult for many groups to attend the District Courts where the case load is approximately 85% matters of this nature. There are also additional directives we may be given at the last minute depending on high risk matters being heard in the building that may alter the plans that we have.



Please be patient with our staff and follow their directions at all times while we work within the directives of the Office of the Sheriff and the Courts to give your group the best experience possible.

PLEASE NOTE THAT DUE TO THE SERIOUSNESS OF CASES BEING HEARD PRESENTLY, THE OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF HAS ISSUED INSTRUCTIONS THAT PARRAMATTA COURT COMPLEX REMAINS CLOSED TO SCHOOL GROUPS.

What are the relevant syllabus points?

It is highly recommended that students attend court once they have completed, or partially completed the Crime syllabus so that they have greater context for their observations.

Observations in the local court are relevant to a large portion of the HSC Crime syllabus, save for that of juries. There are also many relevant aspects across the Preliminary syllabus, however, we find that year 11 students are generally less able to engage with the experience given the limited exposure they have had to the concepts they are observing in courts.

What are the security protocols? How do I take measures to assist students maintain safety?

Court complexes are secure locations and groups will have to pass through security scanning. The process is much like you might encounter at the airport, with similar requirements. For this reason, you should encourage students to bring as little as possible to the courts with them.

A small bag, a notepad and a pen, a water bottle and some snacks or lunch (if you plan on not going to nearby café's or shops for lunch) should be the most that they bring with them to the courts.

Prior to the excursion day, **teachers should brief students** on what they should and should not bring with them, with particular emphasis on the need **not to bring any sharp or dangerous objects in their bags, including scissors or compasses in pencil cases, metal cutlery in lunchboxes, glass bottles etc.**

Generally, security protocols for most court complexes include:

- Security staff (usually Sheriff's officers) will speak to the students about court protocol before they go through security screening. This will include what they shouldn't have on them or in their bags and some behavioural expectations. Students



should listen respectfully and carefully and follow all instructions provided by security staff.

- When going through security, everything in pockets must go into a tray. All digital items must also go into a tray ready for scanning. Students should leave at home scissors, compasses, glass bottles and any metal cutlery. More obvious restricted items such as knives, guns, toy weapons and other offensive implements as named under the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 will be confiscated and may lead to charges, fines and imprisonment.
- Epi pens and inhalers are fine to bring through security. Please flag with security staff if you are carrying either of these items.
- School staff should be aware that if carrying a First Aid Kit, scissors will need to be removed and checked with security staff at the checkpoint. A receipt will be issued and you will be able to collect them from the security check point again when you leave the building.
- Students should understand that the use of any form of recording device including MOBILE PHONES within a Court complex is an offence under the Court Security Act 2005 and can carry a penalty of up to \$22,000 and 12 months imprisonment. Please emphasise to students that this covers all photography (including “selfies” or pictures through apps such as Pokémon Go, Bereal etc) as well as any form of audio recording. These restrictions are in place from the moment they enter Court premises. It is strongly recommended that you tell students to turn their phones off before going through security and to leave them off for the duration of their visit. Students may see some people talking on phones. They are usually legal representatives and will have special permission to use their phones.
- If there is a security or terrorism threat in a court complex, the LDO may need to be cancelled without notice.
- Prepare your students for their small group observation by:
 - Ensuring one staff member from your school maintains a presence in public areas to ensure that if students need assistance, they are able to access you easily;
 - Ensure there is a plan of what they should do if they become lost, need medical assistance or are injured;
 - Ensure there is a plan for students in place as to what they should do if they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation and you or another teacher are not directly with them to assist.



- **At all times during the LDO program, you as the teacher are the guardian of students and have the duty of care for your students.** All teachers on the LDO experience must remain in the court complex while students are in attendance to maintain the required student:school staff ratio.

What etiquette and protocols do we need to use in the courts?

- **If the court is in session (ie the Judge/Magistrate is sitting in court), when the students enter or leave a courtroom, they must stand inside the door and bow towards the Coat of Arms behind His/Her Honour.** A simple bend of the head is sufficient. The bowing of the head is an old tradition to show respect for the law. It is important that you discuss with the students the requirement to bow when entering and leaving the court. It is also important to ascertain before the court excursion whether any students are not prepared to bow and whether therefore the excursion is suitable for them. **It is not acceptable to not bow when entering and leaving a court, regardless of religious or other affiliations.** There are documents from senior leaders of all religious faiths that detail why followers are able to bow without disrespect to their own deities that we can point teachers to if they think there will be issues.
- If the judge is not present when the students enter the courtroom, bowing is not required.
- When the judge enters or leaves the room, the court officer will clearly say “Silence, all stand” and the students should stand, bow when the judge is standing at their chair and only sit after they do.
- Food, drink and chewing gum cannot be consumed in courtroom. It is fine in public areas.
- Students should not rummage in bags while in a courtroom
- Students should refrain from speaking at all times in the courtroom.
- Talking outside a court is OK but are asked to minimise noise. They should not be able to be heard in a court.
- School groups may be asked to leave a courtroom by the Judge or Court Officer for a variety of reasons. These are often unrelated to behaviour and more related to protection of participants to a hearing. If this is the case, students and teachers must comply respectfully and quietly, and find a different courtroom to observe.
- Students should remain in a court for 20 minutes in order to minimise disruption. If students are finding content distressing, they should leave quickly and quietly, not



forgetting to bow, and ensure they have a buddy with them. We will then find an alternative courtroom for them to observe.

What if there is a sign on a court door?

There may be various signs on the outside of courtroom doors. Students and teachers should pay careful attention to the signage before entering a courtroom. Some examples of signage include:

- **Non-publication Order** - the court is **open to the public but no notes should be taken about the case or the names of the parties and no information about it should be posted on the internet or in any school newsletter/post.**
- **Closed Court** - **no members of the public can enter** to watch these proceedings. These are usually child sexual assault cases.
- **Court capacity** – there may be limited capacity for many courtrooms. If the number of public gallery seats allocated are used, students and teachers must not enter. Standing in courtrooms is not permitted.

There will invariably also be signs requesting mobile phones to be switched off before entry.

Can my students be unaccompanied in court?

During the Law Day Out program, there are often times when students are unaccompanied as they attend courts of interest and are filtered into different spaces given the limited capacity of courtrooms. Students need to be properly prepared and briefed on acceptable behaviour for these instances. If you are concerned about any students for either medical or behavioural reasons, teachers should remain with such students to ensure the smooth running of your LDO.

When students are moving between courts, we will keep as many small groups as possible on the same floor of the court building so that a teacher maintain a presence to supervise students as they observe and be on hand in case of any issues arising.

If you see students behaving in a manner that is not compliant with court requirements, you should act on this immediately. If court security staff approach you to intervene, this should be acted on immediately. Failure of students to act in the required way may impact on your school's ability to visit the courts in the future if court security officers feel the behaviour of your students and your response has been unacceptable.



How do I plan for potential incidents that may arise during the day?

If there is an incident in the court complex and students are not with you, students should be told to remain calm and remove themselves from the situation as quickly and calmly as possible. They should not attempt to handle the situation themselves. If there is a police officer or court security nearby students may need to go and stand with them. If not, they should enter a courtroom where there is a judicial officer and court staff.

Students may need to debrief with a trusted teacher when reunited with the group, and if needed, teachers should keep the student with them until they are suitably calm and confident to return to the LDO program. If they are unable to calm themselves, they may need to remain with a school staff member. In extreme cases, their emergency contact may need to be called.

If a student becomes unwell at the experience, the school will need to be contacted and the teacher will need to make arrangements for the student's emergency contact to be reached.

Where are the bathrooms located in the court building?

Toilets are located on the Lower Ground, level 2 and Level 5. There are disabled toilets located on most floors. Students should make the facilitator or a teacher aware before they attend a bathroom and **students are required to attend bathrooms in groups of two or more as a safety precaution.**

How do I care for the wellbeing of students and others around the LDO?

Most students are excited to attend the courts as a part of the Law Day Out program. However, for some students it can be confronting experience, and for others, it may be an emotional trigger for past or present events. To ensure the welfare of your students before, during and after the excursion, we strongly advise teachers and schools to take a proactive approach and discuss with students the possibility of being emotionally affected by the excursion experience.



A - Before the excursion:

When choosing to participate in the LDO, please be mindful of the circumstances of your group of students. It is often helpful to send an email or letter home early in the school term or year to advise parents/ carers you will be attending court, and to ask students to let you know if there may be any issues of concern to them that feel might be an issue on the day. Ensure that you have emergency contact details for all students in case of issues arising while at court.

Examples of concern for young people may be a relative or a friend having been in court, family disputes that have resulted in court experiences for young people or young people being witnesses or victims in criminal matters. In other cases, some details that may be heard in court may also be very confronting for young people.

B - During the excursion:

Check in with your students regularly and maintain a presence around them where you are able. If any issues arise during the excursion, take the student aside and debrief with them. If you feel that they are unable to return to court, keep the student with you and call the school and the emergency contact if required.

A debrief with students as a group immediately after you leave the court is also a good way of helping your students to process the experiences they have had. Many school groups attending the Downing Centre Courts choose to do this in Hyde Park across the street, weather permitting.

C - After the excursion:

In the first class back to school, you may want to have a class discussion about the Law Day Out experience and allow students time to debrief again, and to give you an opportunity to check in with students again, particularly any that found the experience confronting. You may also want to remind students of counselling services available to them at the school in case they feel they need any further assistance.



Caring for the wellbeing of other people attending court.

The court complex and the courts will be filled with other members of the public, who may be accused persons, victims, witnesses or the friends and family of such persons. Many people who attend courts are in a fragile state including those with recognised mental illnesses or addictions. **Students should be always sensitive and respectful towards people in their vicinity.** Please remember other visitors might not be having a good day and may also behave and/or react in unpredictable ways to having students in the courts.

It is of the greatest importance that students are reminded many times prior to and during their visit that they are in the presence of people who may be experiencing one of the worst days of their lives. **They must behave in a manner that is respectful and mindful** of this. Students should try to make themselves almost a part of the background while they are inside the court complex.

It must be stressed to students that the following behaviours are not appropriate in the court complex, and it is their responsibility to ensure that they and their peers are behaving in a manner that is **as unobtrusive to others as possible**:

- Pointing
- Staring
- Making comments about cases or people
- Laughing loudly
- Speaking, eating, chewing gum or drinking while in court
- Discussing cases while in the court complex, particularly in public spaces
- Using mobile phones at any time in the court complex
- Running

Groups may be asked by the sheriff's officers to leave at any time if they feel that the behaviour of students is creating anxiety or disturbances to others in the space, or if a judicial officer reports the behaviour of students in the court complex as inappropriate. This may also have implications for future visits from your school.

Unless students are finding content distressing, they should be advised to stay in a courtroom they have entered for around 20 minutes to minimise disruption to proceedings.



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Finally...

We hope you and your students enjoy your day at the courts and find it a worthwhile experience! We welcome feedback on your Program experience. Please email any thoughts you would like to share to us at education@ruleoflaw.org.au.

Thank you for engaging with the program and helping your students to understand the vital importance the judiciary and courts play in the achievement of the rule of law in Australia. Your engagement helps to prepare them for their civic life and responsibilities as they approach adulthood, and assists us to continue to support teachers and students through resource creation, professional development and submissions.