

Mock court battle to help pupils grasp laws of land

STAFF REPORTER

PUPILS from around the country are set to gain firsthand knowledge of constitutional issues at the launch of a National Schools Moot Court Competition for grades 10 and 11 in local schools. The universities of Pretoria, Venda and the Western Cape, with the departments of Justice and Basic Education and the Foundation for Human Rights, will stage the first annual competition during this year and the next.

The final rounds will take place from March 18 to 21 next year.

The initiative enjoys the support of other law faculties, the legal profession and the judiciary.

A moot is a role-play exercise in which participants assume the role of lawyers in a fictitious court case.

The competition is aimed at creating awareness of the constitution of the country, its values and what it embodies.

Focus will be on schools and communities.

The competition will provide a unique opportunity for pupils to consider a career in law, according to the Dean of the University of Pretoria's Law Faculty, Professor Christof Heyns.

Deputy Minister of Basic Education Enver Surty views this initiative as "the most ambitious attempt in the last decade to take the constitution to the people".

"The National Schools Moot Court Competition will provide an excellent opportunity for learners in all secondary schools in our country to get a taste of how the constitution and the law works," he said.

All secondary schools in the country are invited to enter a team of two pupils.

A fictional problem involving a constitutional issue will be set.

Pupils will be expected to write two short essays stating the opposing sides of the case.

The essays will be evaluated by a panel of experts.

The best of four submissions from each of the nine provinces will be identified and the pupils invited to participate in person in the preliminary rounds in Pretoria next March. The four teams from each province 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 winning team in the final round on Human Rights

Day - March 21, 2011.

Participants will also be given the opportunity to attend lectures on the constitution in preparation for the competition.

The language medium will be English, but participants will be allowed to use any other official language in the final round.

"The initiative will provide the chance for entire communities to join forces with the schools in their neighbourhood to make sure that their learners understand their rights and obligations as stipulated in the constitution.

"It will be closely linked to the Bill of Rights and obligations issued by the Department of Education," Surty said.

For more details on the competition contact organiser Cheryl Botterill at cherryl.botterill@gmail.com.

