

Universal military training in Australia, 1911-29

Between 1911 and 1929 Australian males aged between 18 and 60 were required to perform militia service within Australia and its territories. The Defence Acts of 1903 and 1904, empowered the Australian Government to call up 'unexempted' males in time of war. The *Defence Act 1909* made training and service compulsory in time of peace.

The visit of Field Marshal Kitchener

A bill providing for compulsory military training in peace time (referred to as universal training) was introduced to Parliament by Prime Minister Alfred Deakin in 1909. It was a measure with broad parliamentary support, having been adopted by the Opposition Labor Party at its 1908 conference. At the invitation of Deakin, Field Marshal Viscount Kitchener of Great Britain visited Australia in 1909 to inspect the existing state of defence preparedness of the young Commonwealth, and advise on the best means of providing Australia with a land defence. Kitchener's report, submitted in February 1910, recommended the introduction of compulsory military training. A public version of Kitchener's report was published as 'Defence of Australia: Memorandum' in Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers – General (Session 1910, Volume II, pp. 83–104).

Records about Kitchener's visit and report

Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Lord Kitchener	1909	A2, 1910/1731
Lord Kitchener	1909	A2, 1912/945
Report on the defence of Australia by Field Marshal Viscount Kitchener	1910	A463, 1957/1059

Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/18
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/19

Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/20
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/21
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/22
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/29

The universal military training scheme

The first scheme of universal training came into operation on 1 January 1911. The Minister for Defence presented a comprehensive report on the progress of the scheme for the period 1911 to June 1912. Annual statistics for the number of registrations, medical examinations and exemptions under the universal training scheme are included in the Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia for the years 1910 to 1929.

The scheme had a chequered rate of success. The junior cadets were abolished in June 1922, and universal military training and the holding of military camps was suspended from 1 November 1929, pending a general review of defence policy.

Selected records about the administration of universal training

Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/18
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/19
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/20
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/21
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/22
Record of service for trainees in Naval Reserve for the quota years of 1894–1907	1894–1907	CT190/29

Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Department of Defence [I], correspondence files (contains information about training camps, opposition to and evasion of universal training, statistics etc)	1906–13	MP84/1

<u>Department of Defence [I] & [II], general correspondence files (contains information on statistics and forms)</u>	1917–29	MP367/1
<u>Department of Defence [I], Navy Office [I] & [II], general correspondence files (contains information about statistics)</u>	1910–21	MP472/1
<u>Correspondence files (contains information about regulations, exemptions etc)</u>	1913–17	A2023

Hobart

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Registration forms and service histories for cadet trainees in Launceston units for the quota years of 1919–1929</u>	1919–29	P2471

Information in the 'Shedden Collection'

Following his retirement as Secretary to the Department of Defence in 1956, Sir Frederick Shedden, who had held the position for 19 years, was asked to prepare a history of Australian defence policy. His manuscript, titled 'The History of Australian Defence Policy' was not published, but is held by the National Archives as part of the Shedden collection. Several chapters of the draft relate to universal training.

Collection references

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>(Duplicate copy) Chapter 25: 'A National Citizen Force – Lord Kitchener's Report (1910)'</u>	1910	A5954, 1282/2
<u>(Manuscript) Chapter 23: 'Universal Training – The Passing of the Defence Act 1909'</u>	1909	A5954, 1266/3
<u>(Duplicate copy) Chapter 32: 'A Summary of Notable Progress – 1910–13'</u>	1910–13	A5954, 1282/9
<u>(Duplicate copy) Chapter 55: 'The Report of the Swinburne Committee on Universal Training, an Air Service and an Arsenal – 1919'</u>	1919	A5954, 1284/2

For more information

Other fact sheets relating to compulsory military training and national service are:

- *Fact sheet 161 - Conscription referendums, 1916 and 1917*
- *Fact Sheet 162 - National Service and war, 1939–45*
- *Fact sheet 163 - National Service, 1951–59*
- *Fact sheet 164 - National Service, 1965–72*