

Education Programmes

2025

Start >>>

**Guides on Citizen
Engagement for Parliaments**

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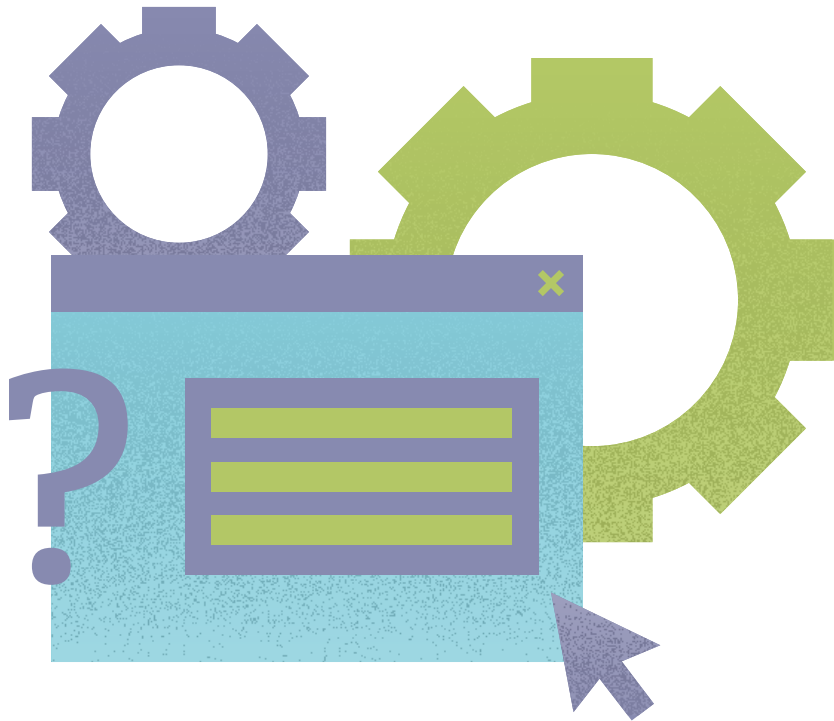
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Executive summary

Parliaments are fundamental to democracy, but it is often difficult to understand how they work. Parliaments have a **responsibility to provide opportunities for citizens across different groups in society to learn** about what their parliament is, what it does, and how to get involved.

Education programmes are widely offered by parliaments across the world, and there are various approaches for different (age and other) groups. This Guide provides an overview of different approaches and considerations to help parliaments deliver meaningful and effective education programmes.

We review the key benefits and challenges of parliamentary education programmes, and explore six different approaches that are used to varying extents in parliaments across the world:


1. Tours and workshops
2. Outreach
3. Simulations and competitions
4. Online resources
5. Internships and work experience
6. Teacher education programmes


We then review how to implement these approaches in practice. Key points include:


- » **Lay the foundations for education**
What resources (strategy, staff, space, support) will you need?
- » **Collaborate with teachers, civil society and government**
How can external groups and networks improve programmes and amplify impact?
- » **Make politics cross-curricular**
How might you use a range of topics to connect with different audiences?
- » **Use practical projects and real issues**
How can you help learners apply their knowledge?
- » **Make it special**
How can you ensure that programmes are exciting and memorable?
- » **Go beyond children and young people**
How can you ensure education is for everyone?
- » **Evaluation**
Are education programmes effective at building knowledge, skills and trust?

Finally, we provide a checklist for assessing whether your approach reflects our **eight Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement**:


 Purpose


 Inclusion


 Openness and transparency

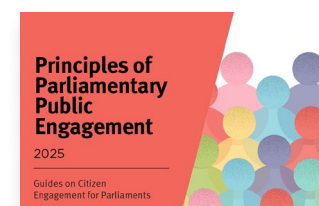
 Collaboration and empowerment

 Ethical standards

 Planning and resourcing

 Integration and coordination

 Impact and evaluation



See our Guide on ‘Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement’ for more detail on the principles

Introduction

Civic education plays a fundamental role in **safeguarding democratic institutions and practices across generations**. Citizens need to understand what parliament does, how it works, its role in democracy and, crucially, how they can get involved – not so that they can be in a constant state of engagement, but so that they are able to take action when they want or need to, and not just at the ballot box.

Engaging in civic education can help people in many ways, from better understanding current affairs and how it affects them, to feeling more politically included. Education supports other types of parliamentary engagement such as participation and consultation as well as wider forms of democratic participation such as voting and campaigning. Civic education should also be enjoyable, which is a benefit in and of itself.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has found that over 70% of parliaments offer educational programmes (e.g., tours, youth parliaments, events, internships).¹

Drawing from examples across the world, this Guide outlines different approaches to parliamentary education. A key focus is on activities aimed at school-age audiences, where parliaments provide resources and activities to support curriculum goals. In this way, this Guide complements our Guide on Youth Engagement.

Beyond schools, there are many opportunities for engaging those in tertiary education. We also provide examples and ideas around educational activities for those that may be underrepresented in politics. Parliaments' educational responsibilities should not begin and end with children and young people, but should support principles of lifelong learning.



**See our Guide on
'Youth Engagement'
for more details**

Structure of the Guide

- » **Section 1** of this Guide outlines the potential benefits of education programmes for parliaments and citizens
- » **Section 2** presents potential challenges
- » **Section 3** discusses a range of approaches for engaging different audiences in different types of programmes
- » **Section 4** provides guidance on how to put these approaches into practice
- » **Section 5** suggests key considerations for evaluating the success of these approaches
- » **Section 6** draws on our Guide on Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement, listing a checklist for assessing how well a programme or activity is meeting key principles
- » **Section 7** points to other sources of information on the topic of parliamentary education programmes

The Guide is based on extensive research and incorporates feedback from an international Advisory Group established to develop this suite of Guides on Citizen Engagement (see [Section 7](#)).

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2022) *Global Parliamentary Report – Public Engagement in the Work of Parliament*

Section 1: Benefits

Parliamentary education programmes offer great potential benefits both for parliaments and those citizens who take part in programmes. This section outlines the key potential benefits shown in Table 1. Not all benefits will be felt by all participants in the same way or to the same extent, and some parliaments will choose to maximise some benefits over others through what they deliver and how.

Table 1: Potential benefits of parliamentary education programmes

Shared benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Better-informed public » Greater democratic engagement
Benefits for parliaments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Build relationships with citizens and communities
Benefits for citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Acquisition of knowledge for its own sake and to support active citizenship » Greater capacity to take political action



Shared benefits

Better-informed public

The primary purpose of any education programme is the effective communication of information. By improving public knowledge about how parliaments work, education programmes enable more productive interactions between parliament and the public. More informed citizens will be better able to target their use of mechanisms such as petitions, based on greater understanding of parliament. There is also evidence to show that when citizens engage in civic education, they become more trusting of democratic institutions.²

More indirectly, people who have interacted with parliamentary education programmes – and their friends and family – may be better able to contextualise news about parliaments and politics. This may help them recognise misinformation and disinformation, including when it is promoted by parliamentarians. If this effect spreads widely enough, this will produce a citizenry better able to hold decision-makers to account.

Greater democratic engagement

Civic education should not only build understanding but empower citizens to use this understanding to participate. This might include getting in contact with their local representative, joining a campaign, or simply taking a more active interest when election time comes around.

Since parliamentary education programmes tend to focus on young people, parliaments might see an increase in participation among young people in particular.

Evidence shows that the earlier people start voting after they become able to, the more likely it is that this will become a habit into the future.³ It is in parliaments' interests to increase voter engagement so that elected representatives can operate with more robust and informed mandates.

² See: [What Citizenship Education Really Does for Democracy: Insights from New National Research](#) | Association for Citizenship Teaching

³ Dinas, E. (2012). [The formation of voting habits](#). *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 22(4), 431-456.



Benefits for parliaments

Build relationships with citizens and communities

Education opportunities are often the first interaction with parliament, especially for school groups and young people. Parliaments can build on these interactions to establish longer-term engagement with communities. Practical ways to do this include creating mailing lists or networks where schools, organisations and educators can access further information and opportunities.



Benefits for citizens⁴

Acquisition of knowledge for its own sake and to support active citizenship

As noted, parliamentary education programmes should enable better understanding of parliament's roles, responsibilities and processes, and how citizens can get involved. The best parliamentary education programmes also build practical skills of debate, reasoning, negotiation, compromise and finding consensus.

Aside from the instrumental benefits of parliamentary education, there is an intrinsic value to the knowledge that citizens build through these programmes. Parliaments have rich, interesting, challenging histories that are worth knowing, whether one goes on to act directly on that knowledge or not.

Greater capacity to take political action

Parliamentary education programmes can help citizens to see a role for themselves in democracy. Greater understanding of parliamentary functions and ways to get involved, as well as examples of when citizens have influenced political change, can give citizens the confidence to take action on issues that affect them. This is often referred to as strengthening citizens' 'political self-efficacy'.

⁴Whiteley, P. (2014) *Does Citizenship Education Work? Evidence from a Decade of Citizenship Education in Secondary Schools in England*, *Parliamentary Affairs* 67(3), 513–535; Tonge, J., Mycock, A., & Jeffery, B. (2012). *Does Citizenship Education Make Young People Better-Engaged Citizens?* *Political Studies*, 60(3), 578–602; Keating, A. and Janmaat, J. G. (2016) *Education Through Citizenship at School: Do School Activities Have a Lasting Impact on Youth Political Engagement?*, *Parliamentary Affairs* 69(2), 409–429.

Section 2: Challenges

Parliaments may face various potential challenges when setting up and delivering education programmes, not least because legislatures are not primarily designed to be educational institutions. Table 2 lists the main challenges, which are further outlined in this section.

Table 2: Potential challenges of parliamentary education programmes

Shared challenges	» Low public awareness and interest
Challenges for parliaments	» Limited resources » Low emphasis placed on education as a parliamentary role » Politics
Challenges for citizens	» Access to parliamentary buildings » Access to activities



Shared challenges

Low public awareness and trust

Citizens in general, and especially those who are outside formal education settings, may not be aware of parliamentary education opportunities. This is compounded by the fact that trust in parliaments is decreasing, which makes it less likely that already disengaged or marginalised groups will engage or seek out information about parliament. Misinformation and disinformation are contributing to this growing distrust of democratic institutions in countries across the world, making it harder for parliaments to reach audiences.



Challenges for parliaments

Limited resources

Parliaments run on tight budgets, which affects the staff, time, space and technology available to support education programmes. This means that parliaments need to have a clear strategy and priorities: they may focus on a core programme for a certain audience, rather than a wider variety of initiatives. This may mean that education programmes mainly reach those who are based in the capital city, or who have the resources to travel there.

In federations such as Australia, Germany, and Nigeria, where curriculum and education priorities can vary from region to region, it may be more difficult for national parliaments to provide education programmes that meet needs across states.

Low emphasis placed on education as a parliamentary role

A factor that may compound the issue of limited resources is the fact that some parliaments may not see education as an important

responsibility for the institution and therefore may devote fewer resources overall. In particular, strategic leadership and time for innovating new approaches may be lacking.

Politics

Parliamentary education needs to be free from partisan content and delivered in an impartial way. A tension can sometimes arise between making programmes relevant through activities on topical issues and ensuring that this is handled in an impartial manner. A further consideration is ensuring that MPs from across different political parties participate in education activities. When MPs do take part, parliamentary education staff may have to navigate situations where MPs take activities in an overly partisan direction. This can be mitigated by ensuring that visits include a strong impartial component delivered by parliamentary staff prior to encounters with MPs.



Challenges for citizens

Access to parliamentary buildings

When education programmes are limited to activities taking place at parliament itself, this will exclude certain groups. People with lower funds or fewer transport options may struggle to travel to the capital city, where parliaments are usually located. Parliaments can take certain steps to mitigate this challenge, such as offering travel subsidies, or develop programmes that take place in the community or online.

Some groups may face other specific barriers. Many parliament buildings are older structures that may lack appropriate facilities for visitors in general and disabled groups in particular. In contexts with colonial legacies, some communities may not feel comfortable or even willing to go to parliament.⁵

Access to activities

As any teacher will tell you, education is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour. This applies to parliamentary education programmes too. While parliaments usually work with a core education offer, those delivering the programmes need to be skilled in differentiating for different groups and different interests within groups.

Developing a range of activities, both online and offline, in parliament and in the community, and with the support of different partners (such as specialist civil society organisations), will help parliaments to reach beyond those who are already very motivated and interested in politics.



See our Guide on ‘Engaging Underrepresented Groups’ for more details

⁵ See the [Guide on Engaging Underrepresented Groups](#) for further exploration of this issue.

Section 3: Range of approaches

This section explores six different kinds of approaches to education programmes by parliaments, ranging from one-off activities to long-term partnerships:

1. Tours and workshops
2. Outreach
3. Simulations and competitions
4. Online resources
5. Internships and work experience
6. Teacher education programmes

School-age audiences and students are the focus of most of these approaches, but in some cases, parliaments apply education models for use with other groups in society, including older people, disabled groups etc.



See our Guide on **'Youth Engagement'** for more details



See our Guide on **'Parliament as a Space and Place'** for more details



1. Tours and workshops

Most parliaments offer a tour in some form, with many focusing on school groups as the key audience. Tours usually take visitors through centres of activity such as the plenary chamber and committee rooms. Depending on the history of the parliamentary building and how spaces are used, tours may include stops at areas, structures or artwork of particular significance. Tours offered at the **Austrian** and **Danish** parliaments include visits to spaces that were part of previous eras of parliamentary life: for example, the Colonnaded Hall of the imperial period at the Parliament of Austria, and the former upper chamber of the now unicameral Danish Folketing. In **Estonia** and **Trinidad and Tobago**, certain areas of the parliamentary buildings are devoted to exhibitions, which citizens can enjoy when they visit.⁶

Some tours include an opportunity to meet with parliamentarians and engage in Q&A. Some parliaments also provide workshops as part of school visits, where participants can engage more deeply with parliamentary history, democratic principles, and ways to get involved, often in a dedicated education space. These workshops are often designed to be aligned with the curriculum and parliaments highlight this when promoting opportunities.

CASE STUDY

Workshops



Many parliaments offer workshops that aim to give visitors a grounding in parliamentary processes and history. The best examples give participants the opportunity to practice their skills and knowledge and create meaningful outputs.

The **Parliament of Austria** runs 'democracy workshops' for school-age children and apprentices in vocational education. The workshops are held in a dedicated engagement space overlooking the plenary chamber. The programme offers eight different modules, of which visiting groups usually select one. The eight topics are: politicians (who they are and what they do), the legislative process, the European Union, the history of the Republic, how to participate in democracy, media in democracy, social media, and antisemitism. Four of these workshops are offered online for schools, and three for apprenticeships. This practice began during the COVID-19 pandemic and has resulted in greater participation from students and apprentices across Austria. An adapted workshop, *Parliament simply for you*, is offered for people with special educational needs and disabilities.

A key feature of these workshops is the creation of an output in the form of a newspaper article, video or podcast. These outputs are shared with the visiting group and published on the parliament's dedicated web portal for children and young people.

⁶ See our [Guide on Parliament as a Space and Place](#).



2. Outreach

Based on the recognition that the parliament building itself might be inaccessible to more remote communities or other seldom-heard groups, some parliaments operate outreach services to provide education sessions in schools and in the community.

Some parliaments manage an extensive **year-round programme** of sessions while others carry out annual tours led by senior parliamentarians. **Visits to schools** by individual representatives are another delivery mechanism for parliamentary education.

Special initiatives such as Parliament Weeks, where parliament leads a series of engagement activities across multiple formats and platforms (e.g., on social media, in parliament, in the community) are also used to build public knowledge and interest in the work of parliament. **Itinerant models** like buses, trucks, caravans or travelling plays are used by parliaments to provide information and generate interest in parliamentary activities.

CASE STUDY

Outreach

Beyond the workshops delivered on the parliamentary estate or online, some parliaments conduct outreach activities that bring educational opportunities to communities.

The **Parliament of South Australia** covers very considerable distances and has therefore developed a range of initiatives to mitigate this. Besides the offer of comprehensive online provision, the Community Education Office team also travels to schools to deliver simulation workshops. As part of this, they employ a set of floor mats, which reproduce the spatial layout of key parliamentary rooms, thereby ‘taking parliament’ to school pupils.⁷

Some parliaments do not have the resources for year-round outreach sessions, and so they focus their efforts on one region at a time. For example, since 2018 the **New Zealand Parliament’s** education team has been running an outreach programme in addition to its onsite and online programme. Education team staff travel to one town

or region at a time and deliver sessions in schools, universities and vocational education settings. The sessions consist of mock debates and Q&As with MPs. The team also offers professional development for teachers as part of these outreach visits, enhancing the capacity of New Zealand teachers to deliver content about parliament and democracy.

The education team of the **National Parliament of the Solomon Islands** conducts annual constituency tours in order to ensure that those who cannot travel to Honiara to visit parliament are nonetheless able to engage. One constituency is chosen per year, and the six team members travel by boat to deliver sessions in schools and communities. School sessions take place during the day, while community sessions happen in the evening when adults have returned from work.

A method that various parliaments use is to ‘take parliament on the road’, offering communities the opportunity to engage with



parliamentary education via travelling buses, caravans or trucks. For example, the **German Bundestag** sends an ‘Infomobile’ out to constituencies from March to October each year. Locals can access information about their representatives and engage in interactive activities such as quizzes. The Infomobile also offers lectures and discussion events in its interior space by appointment.

The **National Assembly of Zambia** has been conducting a parliamentary ‘roadshow’ since 2017 as part of an effort to raise awareness about parliament. The roadshow’s approach is one of ‘infotainment’, incorporating music and art to bring information to life as the roadshow moves through communities making announcements about the work of the National Assembly and distributing materials such as brochures and T-shirts. The roadshow is particularly popular with young people due to its lively and entertaining approach.

⁷ See more about this in our [Guide on Parliament as a Space and Place](#).



3. Simulations and competitions

Parliaments can provide practical learning opportunities in a range of ways. **Youth parliaments** are a very popular type of **simulation**. Other simulations are conducted within educational institutions (in **Denmark**, high schools run a mock election each year) or in partnership with them (e.g., **Catalan** parliamentary simulation in partnership with universities). Some parliaments offer **essay competitions or challenge prizes** aimed primarily at young people.

CASE STUDY

Simulations and competitions

Parliaments conduct **simulations** of various kinds to help participants get a feel for parliamentary processes. These opportunities range from one-day simulation workshops to youth parliament programmes that take place over the course of a year. Some youth parliaments, such as in **Cyprus** and **Wales**, support young people to produce reports on topics of their choosing. This simulation of committee activity is made real through powers to call for written submissions and

hold hearings, and through defined follow-up activities that parliament or government must perform.

The **German Bundestag** offers two types of simulation: a one-day simulation game for upper secondary age groups that is delivered throughout the year, and an annual 4-day simulation for young people selected by their local MPs. Both simulations focus on the legislative process, tasking young people to discuss and pass a piece of legislation (or four in the case of the longer programme). Topics for the simulation are agreed by the parliamentary commission for internal affairs and have included: the introduction of a year of service for young people; whether people should have the right of anonymity online; and direct democracy.

The one-day simulation programme is offered twice a week and is oversubscribed, so the team that administers the programme invites applications from May to October each year and in November and December selects groups to participate according to certain criteria. These criteria include the type of school, the region they are from, and the age group, and aim to create a mixed cohort of participating groups each year.

Online simulation games are also offered by the **European Parliament** and the **UK Parliament**, where players take on the role of a Member of the European Parliament or play as a UK 'MP for a week'.



The **Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine** has been running a large-scale simulation game since 2023. The game, *We are Lawmakers*, starts in September when teams from high schools across the country register to take part. Teams then work on legislative proposals and petitions. To support them in developing their projects, teams take part in online meetings with parliamentary committees, where MPs explain what committees do and answer teams' questions. Teachers attend training sessions to help them support their students throughout the game.

Teams' finished proposals are shared with the relevant committee which provides feedback to students. The game closes with an online forum in May where the Speaker addresses all participating teams. The game is an initiative that started under the constraints of martial law, with all activities taking place online. However, participation is strong, with 374 educational institutions from 23 regions in Ukraine taking part in the 2024-5 iteration.

Competitions are also a popular way for parliaments to engage young people in educational activities.

The **Lithuanian Seimas** has run a Democracy Knowledge Contest every year since 2022. The contest is open to upper secondary school students and consists of two rounds. The first round is a test of knowledge about Lithuanian democracy. The best-performing contestants from the first round are then invited to participate in a further quiz followed by a simulation of the legislative process at the Seimas itself.

This round takes place over six hours, with contestants taking part in debates, committee work and votes. The winners receive prizes such as digital devices and trips to institutions such as the European Parliament and NATO headquarters. An increasing number of students have taken part since 2022, with a record 20,000 participants in the first round in 2025. Eighty-three students then progressed to the final. An outreach phase was added to the programme in 2025, whereby Seimas representatives visited around 200 secondary schools to raise awareness about the programme.



4. Online resources

Many parliaments provide **educational resources online** to help schools deliver curriculum content on topics related to citizenship or democracy, or to extend students' understanding of politics and the operation of parliaments. Resources include lesson plans, worksheets, and explanatory videos. Some parliaments send schools **physical resources** to support learning on request.

CASE STUDY

Online and physical resources

Giving access to online or physical resources can amplify education teams' reach. Most parliaments now offer **online resources** of some kind.

The **Houses of the Oireachtas in Ireland** has a very comprehensive offer of online resources, which includes self-learning activities, lesson plans, historical documentaries, animations, virtual

tours of the parliament, besides more specialised and in-depth resources such as 'Exploring the Good Friday Agreement through Oireachtas Debates'.

The **Belgian Senate** has a clear division between different types of audiences, from school pupils to parents and teachers. This enables the parliament to offer pages and resources clearly targeted to those audiences. The resources include information bites, videos and games. Similarly, the **German Bundestag** has dedicated websites for children and for young people, offering a range of age-appropriate information and activities. The **Parliament of South Australia** education team has an excellent set of online resources, integrating a calendar of events and dedicated areas for different types of audiences.

The **French National Assembly** and the **Scottish Parliament** have developed comics to engage children in learning about parliament. The National Assembly commissioned the renowned cartoonist Kokopello to create an accessible and humorous comic, while the Scottish Parliament co-created its comics with school groups.



Physical resources can also be an effective way of communicating about parliament. The physicality of an object can symbolically represent a whole institution. The **UK Parliament** has a 'loan box' scheme, whereby teachers can borrow a box of replica parliamentary objects, such as a Speaker's robe, a bill and a ceremonial mace. These loan boxes are sent out to teachers, who can then use them in their class before returning them to parliament.

Schools across **Canada** can register for free **virtual reality kits** to be sent to them by the Library of Parliament so that they can access *Parliament: The Virtual Experience*, which was launched in 2020 to give Canadians a way to experience the parliamentary building during its long-term closure for renovations. The *Experience* leads the viewer through key spaces such as the two plenary chambers, the Library of Parliament and Peace Tower (constructed at the end of the First World War). Lesson plans and activities are also provided to support students' engagement.



5. Internships and work experience

There are many examples of parliaments offering young people at more advanced stages of education the opportunity to gain experience of working in parliament. These programmes can help to bring individuals from underrepresented groups into parliamentary roles.

CASE STUDY

Internships and work experience

Many parliaments provide opportunities for young people to experience the working life of parliament. These are often aimed at university students or recent graduates.

The **National Council of Slovakia** offers annual internships for high-achieving university students. Interns are placed within a team in the parliamentary administration, the Chancellery. For example, interns might spend their time supporting the work of committees, parliamentary research services or the communications team.

The **National Assembly of Pakistan** has run a similar internship programme since 2013, when the initiative was introduced by Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq. Another way in which the National Assembly supports the development of future generations is by giving graduate students access to committee records and legislative documents. In this way, the parliament is supporting the growth of the parliamentary studies field in Pakistan, recognising that it

is important not only to provide training for citizenship and public office, but for academic work in politics too.

Along with internships, the **Irish Houses of the Oireachtas** provides a programme for students who are undertaking a ‘transition year’. This is an optional scheme within the Irish education system that enables students aged 13-14 to pursue self-directed learning in a range of areas from sport to enterprise and charity work before returning to curricular study in the subsequent academic year. The Oireachtas programme runs for four weeks out of the year, with 30 students participating for a week at a time. Students are nominated to participate by their schools, and programme data shows that 45% of participants are from schools in disadvantaged areas. The programme sees students undertake an independent research project on a particular issue, culminating in a presentation at the end of the week. Students also participate in a networking lunch with parliamentarians.





6. Teacher education programmes

Teachers are a key resource in ensuring that students receive high-quality education about the work of parliament and how to get involved. Some parliaments offer training programmes for teachers to help them deliver civic education and promulgate democratic values and practices among students. These training programmes can help parliaments to develop networks of teachers that can help to advise on or even co-design resources.

CASE STUDY

Teacher training programmes

Many parliaments now offer programmes specifically aimed at teachers. These vary from one-off sessions to year-long programmes.

The **Brazilian Chamber of Deputies** offers a wide range of courses for teachers. This includes online courses, which teachers take at their own pace. These are supplemented by a longer and more complex programme which totals 130 hours of learning. This programme starts with a distance-taught course of 40 hours of learning. The top achievers from this course are then selected to proceed to the next stage (2 per federal state), an in-person phase, through which teachers travel to Brasília to visit the Chamber and have classes (also to the equivalent of 40 hours of learning). This is then followed by a distance phase, where teachers develop and apply educative projects in their school communities. This is equivalent to 50 hours of learning and teachers are supported by tutors. The course therefore encourages teachers not only to learn about the Chamber's core roles and functioning, but also to apply this knowledge in a practical project within their community. Upon completion of the

programme, teachers receive a certificate of 130 hours of learning.

The **UK Parliament** has a similar programme, the Teacher Ambassador Programme, which runs twice a year. Teachers travel to London to undergo a three-day residential training programme of talks and activities, including a tour of parliament and talks by key political actors within parliament (such as the Speaker). Teachers can then take their learnings to the classroom and develop a portfolio of activity that relates their school work with learnings about parliament. Depending on levels of completion, participants can achieve three types of accreditation: Bronze, Silver and Gold status of Teacher Ambassador.

The **Parliament of Canada** runs a Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy. This is a week of learning about parliament and democracy, where 85 teachers from across the country travel to Ottawa for talks and activities.

In all three cases, accommodation and travel costs are covered by the parliaments.



Section 4: How to put it into practice

This section provides practical guidance for parliaments considering how to develop their education offer.



Lay the foundations for education

As noted, parliaments are not educational institutions. Therefore, they need to put certain structures and practices in place to ensure that their education programmes are high-quality and meet defined goals. It can be helpful to develop an overall engagement strategy, outlining the role of education programmes as part of this.

Many parliaments have a **dedicated team** that is responsible for delivering education programmes, such as in **Ghana, New Zealand, the Solomon Islands, Ukraine** and the **United Kingdom**. It is often useful to have trained teachers within these teams, or people who are skilled communicators and trainers.

In other cases, programmes are developed and administered in-house but delivered by external contractors. While this may initially present an efficient way to get services up and running, it may prove difficult in the long run to ensure programme quality and evaluate effectively. Developing capacity in-house ensures that those delivering programmes have a strong

understanding of the parliamentary context and how to communicate it to learners. It also makes service improvement easier, since in-house staff are able to share reflections with one another and work together on innovations.

Another way that parliaments can lay the foundations for education is to consider the **spaces** that are required for education activities.⁸ Often, parliament buildings have not been built with this purpose in mind, and they are often busy working buildings with hundreds of people coming in and out every day. Identifying existing spaces that can be made suitable for education, such as committee rooms, is often a first step. If possible, creating dedicated rooms or centres can help to ensure that educators have the resources and technology they need to deliver high-quality sessions. It is important not to lose touch with the working areas of parliament, however, as witnessing a committee or plenary session, or simply the atmosphere of parliament, can be valuable for learners.



*See our Guide on
**'Parliament as a
Space and Place'**
for more details*

Finally, it is important to **ensure that stakeholders across parliament are aware of education services** and how they can be involved. Key steps include:

- » Informing MPs about education services so that they can take part in sessions in parliament or in their constituencies and point their constituents towards services. The Department of Public Engagement at the **Parliament of Ghana** has an internal communications unit attached to its education team, which is responsible for letting parliamentarians and staff know about upcoming education opportunities.

⁸ See the [Guide on Parliament as a Space and Place](#) for more information on how parliamentary spaces can be used to enhance public engagement.

Lay the foundations
for education**Collaborate with teachers,
civil society and government**Make politics
cross-curricularUse practical projects
and real issues

Make it special

Go beyond children
and young people

- » Establishing channels of communication between education teams and business teams such as committees and petitions services. This enables education teams to provide learners with up-to-date information about parliamentary business and even facilitate their participation.
- » Empowering a range of parliamentary staff to get involved in education programmes. For example, staff from committees or legislative services might join workshops to support learners to engage in simulations, or to speak about their roles and expand understanding of the range of work that goes on in parliaments.



Collaborate with teachers, civil society and government

There is a range of partners that parliaments might collaborate with to ensure their education programmes are meeting students' needs and meaningfully furthering understanding of parliament. These relationships can develop into networks that can enable effective promotion of opportunities as well.

The first group to think about is **teachers and school leaders**. Parliamentary education staff need to know what schools and teachers require in terms of civics content. Engaging with teachers and school leaders will help parliamentary teams ensure that their services are useful and will build buy-in with education providers to engage with them (especially when school schedules are tight and dedicating class time to enrichment activities can present a trade-off). Developing networks of teachers can lead to closer collaborations such as co-creation of materials.

This is an approach that the **Scottish Parliament's** education team took in developing a series of comics to help to explain key parliamentary concepts to children and young people. Eight schools participated in the project, with students working together to create fun and engaging short comics on topics such as the work of committees, parliamentary language, and the parliament building.

Parliaments should also aim to reach **beyond those who are engaged in formal education**. This may involve collaborating with those who work with young people

in informal settings such as **youth clubs** or **advocacy organisations**, as well as **adult community groups**.

Collaborating with relevant **government departments** (such as the Ministry of Education) can strengthen programme delivery and improve take-up of programmes. For example, many parliaments work with government departments to deliver youth parliament programmes, where government departments are able to activate the wider education and youth sector to get involved. Government departments can also guide parliaments on how to align education programmes with the curriculum.

The **National Assembly of Zambia (NAZ)** worked with the Ministry of Education to launch its Democracy Clubs initiative in 2022 to enhance young people's understanding of democracy and the work of parliament through discussion and practical projects. Working with the ministry helped NAZ to build relationships with schools, with 30 schools setting up Democracy Clubs in the first year of the programme.

Top tips

- ✓ Develop an overall engagement strategy that includes education programmes
- ✓ Invest in in-house staff
- ✓ Establish channels of internal communication to allow integration of education responsibilities across services

Top tips

- ✓ Recognise the range of actors who can help you develop and deliver programmes
- ✓ Don't forget that children and young people can themselves be valuable co-creation partners

Lay the foundations
for education

Collaborate with teachers,
civil society and government

**Make politics
cross-curricular**

**Use practical projects
and real issues**

Make it special

Go beyond children
and young people



Make politics cross-curricular

In many cases, politics and civics education is delivered as a distinct part of the curriculum: for younger children, the focus is on developing understanding of **key democratic principles**, while for older groups there is more emphasis on **democratic institutions, their roles and histories**.

This content can be connected to other parts of the curriculum too. For example, parliamentary topics can be used to support learning in areas such as **art** (for example through consideration of parliamentary buildings and the paintings and sculptures within them) and **mathematics** (for example in learning about the electoral system, or analysing data related to a piece of parliamentary business). This approach can also be helpful in supporting the engagement of those who do not have a strong existing interest in politics.

Top tips

- ✓ Use a wide range of disciplines to engage groups with different interest and priorities
- ✓ Develop cross-curricular approaches with subject experts to ensure learning is meaningful



Use practical projects and real issues

Programmes should provide a balance of information provision and practical exercises to help learners apply their knowledge. Simulations such as those run by the **German Bundestag** and the **Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine** are effective in that they introduce an element of play and experimentation into learning and allow participants to ‘learn by doing’. Simulations might focus on a topic selected by parliamentary staff or MPs (which are usually intended to be of general interest to a younger audience) or give participants the freedom to consider issues of their own choosing. For younger age groups, simulations can be enhanced by props such as replica bills, ceremonial items and robes, sashes or badges that indicate one’s position in parliament.

Beyond simulations, education activities can include opportunities to contribute to parliamentary business. For example, participants could be given the opportunity to participate in an open public consultation through a short survey or facilitated class discussion. The **Brazilian Senate** offers workshops to schools and community groups where participants learn about the citizens’ legislative initiative process and work together to create their own submissions.⁹

⁹See our Guide on [Youth Engagement](#).

Learning can also be made to feel more ‘real’ and engaging by showing participants what parliamentary work actually looks like. This can be done for example by bringing groups into the public gallery to observe a plenary or committee session or incorporating video clips of recent debates into sessions.

Top tips

- ✓ Support students to create outputs from their learning, e.g., articles, videos, or drawings
- ✓ Maintain strong connections with other parliamentary teams so that opportunities for consultation and participation can be realised



**See our Guide on
'Youth Engagement'
for more details**



Make it special

Participating in an education programme with parliament should be an exciting and memorable experience. Parliaments can achieve this in a variety of ways:

- » **Involving MPs** in education sessions. Citizens often have a view of MPs as quite remote and different from them. Giving citizens an opportunity to speak with MPs and ask questions about their role can help demystify parliament and help people feel more connected to the institution and their representatives.
- » Bringing groups into **parliamentary spaces**, whether in person or virtually. This is especially effective when participants can role-play parliamentary business within the space, and when they are able to observe parliamentary business in action. This can help develop a sense of ownership over the institution.
- » Give participants something to take away as a **souvenir**. For example, certificates or letters from their local MP or a senior parliamentarian can convey a sense of importance. Parliament-branded souvenirs such as pens, notebooks and mugs work well for most audiences, and for younger groups, stickers or temporary tattoos are popular.

Top tips

- ✓ Use the range of available resources in parliaments: people, places, as well as merchandise
- ✓ Consult with group leaders in advance to understand what will be most meaningful

Lay the foundations
for educationCollaborate with teachers,
civil society and governmentMake politics
cross-curricularUse practical projects
and real issues

Make it special

**Go beyond children
and young people**

Go beyond children and young people

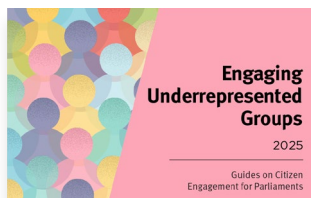
School-age groups are usually the target audiences of parliamentary education programmes. This is for good reason: educational institutions have a responsibility to develop students' knowledge about citizenship and democracy, and it is important that every young person gets this grounding. However, parliaments might want to think about how they can tailor their offer to other groups, too, such as teachers, new immigrants, rural communities, illiterate populations, women, and disabled groups.

Some groups are more likely to be politically active and aware than others due to a range of social and economic factors including educational background, gender and geography.¹⁰ This is where **collaboration with civil society organisations** can help parliaments to reach audiences who would not otherwise come to them. Parliaments often use holidays or less busy periods to provide educational activities for these groups. Some parliaments have also developed programmes to help new immigrants to learn about the political system and how they can participate.

Teachers are a key group that parliaments are increasingly focusing on in their education programming. This is based on the rationale that building teachers' capacity to deliver civics content will improve the quality of provision without parliamentary education staff needing to be directly involved in delivery. Teachers can also be a great source of new ideas for education programmes.

Top tips

- ✓ Consider which groups in society may be particularly in need of parliamentary education
- ✓ Consult with civil society organisations to understand what programmes their members might want or need



See our Guide on 'Engaging Underrepresented Groups' for more details

¹⁰ See our [Guide on Engaging Underrepresented Groups](#) for more details.

Section 5: Evaluation

This section outlines potential considerations for monitoring and evaluating the quality and effectiveness of parliamentary education programmes. The specific questions and data sources that are used will differ across contexts, but key dimensions are listed in Table 3.

When setting up a monitoring and evaluation framework, it is important to consider how you will use the data and ensure that it informs regular conversations about the quality and effectiveness of programmes.

Top priorities for evaluation include:

- » Feedback from participants, including children, young people, teachers and any parliamentary staff or MPs who are involved in activities.
- » Monitoring participant data to identify any gaps according to key factors such as geography, age and gender, as well as the type of schools or organisations that are getting involved. Knowing this information can help teams to develop strategies to reduce barriers to participation, such as travel subsidies or online options.

For more intensive programmes, parliaments may wish to consider using methods to capture participant attitudes before and after activities. Working with academic partners can increase parliaments' capacity to capture impact, including long-term impacts on participants' democratic engagement.

Table 3: Key evaluation considerations

Evaluation dimension	What to look at/measure
Numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How many people, schools or groups engage with educational programmes and/or resources – in a month, quarter, year? » What are the characteristics of those engaging? » Are there groups that are not yet engaging, or have stopped engaging?
Experience and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Are education activities achieving their learning objectives? » Do participants enjoy education activities? » How well are education activities connected to the rest of parliament (e.g., are MPs aware and involved?)
Outcomes and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Do activities lead to better understanding of parliament and democracy? » Do education activities build positive attitudes towards parliament and the democratic process? » Do activities lead to the development of political skills and greater democratic engagement?

Section 6: Checklist

The questions in this section are designed to help parliaments assess the extent to which their (planned or existing) education programmes meet the eight principles outlined in our Guide on Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement.



Purpose

Have you defined the objectives of your programme in collaboration with relevant internal and external stakeholders?

Are your objectives reflected in your evaluation plans?



Collaboration and empowerment

Are you consulting relevant stakeholders (such as teachers, youth workers, civil society organisations and the government) on how you can improve your education offer?

Are you offering participants opportunities to apply their knowledge in practice?



Inclusion

Are you offering a range of ways to access educational content and experiences?

Have you considered what barriers different groups might face to participating in education programmes and how you might address these barriers?

Are you looking for audiences beyond school groups and motivated high-achievers?



Openness and transparency

Is there clear and accessible information about educational opportunities? Does this information exist in a range of formats and a range of locations e.g., on the website, on social media, in printed materials such as booklets?



Planning and resourcing

Do you have the resources (e.g., funding, time, people, skills) to deliver on your objectives? What resources or capacity may have to be brought in from external organisations?



Integration and coordination

Are stakeholders across parliament aware of the education services on offer and how they can get involved?

Are you offering participants opportunities to contribute to parliamentary business as part of educational activities?



Ethical standards

Are all staff and parliamentarians involved aware of their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding?



Impact and evaluation

Do you have an evaluation framework based on your objectives?

Does your evaluation framework include ways to understand who is accessing education programmes and where there are gaps?

Does your evaluation plan include ways to understand the experiences of those involved in programmes?

Does your evaluation plan include points for reviewing and discussing data with relevant stakeholders?

Section 7:

Useful materials on parliamentary education programmes

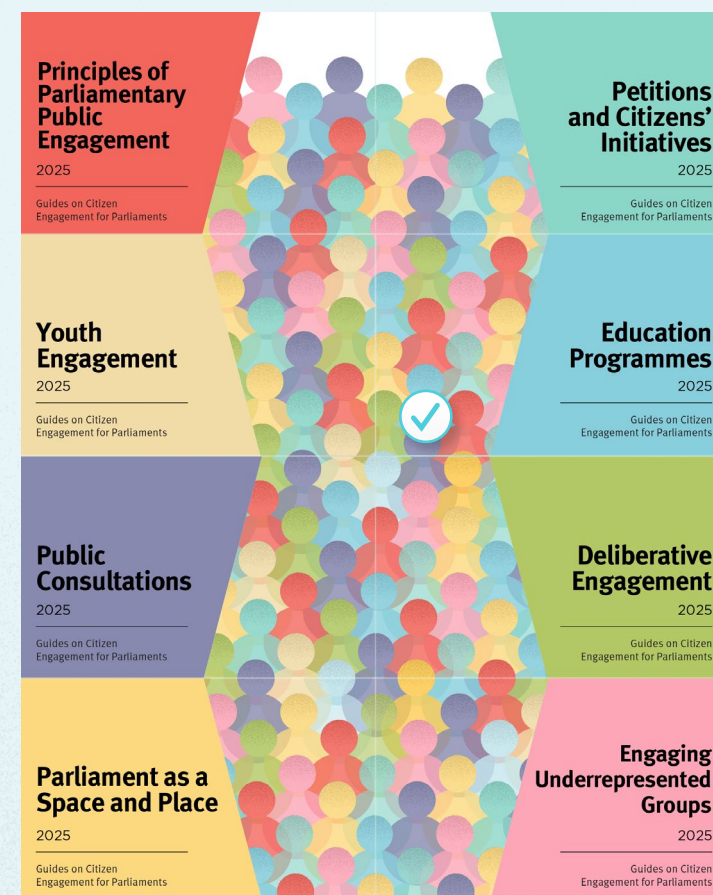
- » Parliament of Australia, [*Parliamentary Education Office*](#)
- » Belgian Senate, [*Place aux enfants*](#)
- » Better Evaluation Knowledge, [*Evaluation with children and youth*](#)
- » Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, [*Pedagogic Mission*](#)
- » EU Children's Participation Platform, the [*Lundy Model of Child Participation*](#)
- » French National Assembly, [*junior section*](#)
- » German Bundestag, Websites for [*children*](#) and [*young people*](#)
- » Irish Houses of the Oireachtas, [*Online education resources*](#)
- » Parliament of South Africa, [*Public Education Office*](#)
- » UK Parliament, [*Learning*](#)

See our other **Guides on Citizen Engagement for Parliaments**

This Guide was developed by Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira and Juliet Ollard at the International Parliament Engagement Network (IPEN) in collaboration with Inter Pares I Parliaments in Partnership – the EU's Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments.

The Guide draws from extensive research carried out in 2024 and 2025, including: a review of relevant academic research; interviews with academics and parliamentary officials from across the world; analysis of relevant practitioner reports and parliamentary documentation; testimonies from members of IPEN; and relevant seminars and workshops organised by Inter Pares and/or IPEN.

The Guide also incorporates feedback from an international Advisory Group established to develop this suite of Guides on Citizen Engagement for Parliaments, as well as from the IPEN Executive Team. The authors are very grateful to all those who shared their knowledge and expertise as part of this project.



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