

Lesson 4

Student parliament

How should schools be governed?

Learning objective	The students can define criteria relating to how school should be governed and the role of the student body in this process.
Student tasks	The students consider how their ideal student parliament would work.
Resources	A questionnaire for each student (student handout 9.3) and a large piece of paper and marker pens for each group of 4-6 students.
Method	Presentations, individual and small group work and whole class discussion.

Information box

Young people are citizens too. They have a right to have a say in things that affect them and their communities. This includes their school. Mechanisms that allow students to have a say in the running of their school not only help to ensure that young people enjoy this right, they also help them to learn about democratic processes. What these mechanisms might be is a matter for debate, however. Some people think that it is important for every school to have its own separate student parliament, others say that this is not necessary and that there are other ways of creating opportunities for students to contribute to the running of their school.

The lesson should begin with the students' inputs that they have prepared as homework. Depending on the richness of their material and the need for discussion, the time budget may need to be extended by a further lesson. As there are limits to this option, the teacher may also collect the students' work and give them written feedback. The teacher should make sure, however, that the students' work is given attention.

The lesson

The students begin the lesson by presenting the results of their surveys showing what their families and friends think about the responsibilities of a citizen. The students discuss their results.

The teacher introduces the new topic by referring to the students' material, as appropriate, and by asking students how well they think their school council or student parliament is working. If there is no form of student representation in the school at present, the teacher should ask the students if they know of any schools that have this and, if so, what form it takes.

The teacher tells the students that their task is to imagine the ideal student parliament – that is, a group of democratically elected students representing the interests of the student body in their school as a whole.

The teacher then gives out a questionnaire (student handout 9.3) which students fill in by themselves.

The teacher then divides up the students into groups of 4-6. The students in the groups have some time to compare their answers to the questionnaire and to ask each other further questions. Next, the teacher gives each group a large piece of paper and some marker pens. The task for the groups is to draw up a constitution for their ideal student parliament. The teacher should explain what a constitution is, and give some examples of the kinds of rules they might expect to find in the constitution of a student parliament.

When the groups have finished, they present their work to the rest of the class and consider the issues raised, for example:

- How much power should students have and how much should the school principal and the teachers have?
- Who should have the last word in decisions that affect the running of a school?
- Can a school be a democracy?

Finally, the students should make a class presentation to the school principal and, if they wish, make some concrete proposals for their own school parliament.

For homework, students should carry out a survey of family and friends, asking them:

- Do you think every school in the country should have a student parliament?
Why (or why not)?

The students should present the results of their survey at the beginning of the next lesson.