

Democracy matters

How former Members of Parliament can add value to civics and citizenship education

‘Civics and citizenship’ underpin New Zealand’s way of life. Our parliamentary democracy is based on the principle of one person, one vote. But how many New Zealanders really understand how it works?

It’s easy to take the rights and responsibilities of civics and citizenship for granted. But each year, events – nationally and internationally – challenge that assumption.



As part of the **School Leavers’ Toolkit**, and broader discussions through the Social Studies curriculum, the introduction of Civics and Citizenship Education provides the pathway for future New Zealand voters to understand both the theory and the practice.

The programme also puts the rights and responsibilities of civics and citizenship into a New Zealand context and helps students draw their own conclusions on whether they are important or not.

Former members of parliament want to help

The Association of Former Members of Parliament of New Zealand (AFMPNZ) comprises former members of parliament from all political persuasions.

They have a broad cross-section of experience, having served as list and electorate MPs, on select committees, as Ministers and Opposition spokespeople, in government and opposition – all components of New Zealand’s parliamentary democracy. Its members are committed to promoting the principles of democracy, civics and citizenship, without pushing their own particular political agendas.

The AFMPNZ is seeking to collaborate with schools, offering former MPs as a resource to support the promotion and understanding of civics and citizenship.

The purpose of the programme is to share lived experiences as members of parliament – to explain and demystify how our parliament works, to shine a light on practice versus theory and to encourage enquiry, discussion and awareness among young New Zealanders as they approach voting age.

Possible topics of discussion

- What’s the point in voting – I’m just one vote
- Understanding how MMP works
- Forming a coalition
- Select Committees – what are they? How do they work? Do they make a difference?
- What does an MP do? What’s the difference between Electorate and List MPs?
- What does a Minister do?
- Question time/debating in the House
- What’s the difference between local and central government?

Many schools have great relationships with their local MPs – but the demands on current MPs’ time are significant. The benefits of drawing on the experience of former politicians are that:

- they offer real life parliamentary knowledge through different political and experiential lenses
- they don’t have the same time pressures of current MPs and Ministers
- they’re spread across the country and able to offer support to a range of schools.

More information

If you would like to discuss how the AFMPNZ can help your students discover the value of democracy, please contact: former.members.nz@gmail.com

“Introducing ākonga to people who have served as MPs and worked to bring change in their communities and for our nation is a great opportunity for citizenship education to come to life in the classroom. They'll get the chance to talk to people who have been involved in some of the important social, political, cultural and economic decisions of the past 30 years. What a wonderful opportunity to weave into a critical historical and social inquiry!”

*Dr Maria Perreau, Kaiārahi,
Aotearoa Social Studies Educators' Network*

“This service will:

- Enable real life experiences and voices of former MPs to be heard
 - Explain Parliamentary processes (by experts)*
 - Help students understand how to submit a great application to select committee*
 - Help students understand how to participate effectively in a democracy**
- Help students understand the voting system from those who directly ran for parliamentary seats*
- Enable students to understand different political ideologies in society”*

*Megan Nightingale, Senior social studies teacher,
Hamilton Girls' High School*

- “– Great source for supporting senior social studies students who want to submit petitions – expert, first-hand experience of the process.*
- Students will be able to actively engage with ex-politicians to determine their points of view and ask about values directly. How are they influenced by constituents, etc.*
- Developing students' knowledge in civic education and how to be active participants in their electorates.”*

*Moira Barry, Senior social studies teacher,
Aorere College*