

Question 1

New Zealand is one of the world's most famous democracies, well known for its **free and accepting society**. In any democracy, the **people's views are equally represented** by fairly elected representatives. The unique aspects of a liberal democracy include separation of powers and protection of **democratic rights**, i.e. universal suffrage. In New Zealand, the separation of powers looks like our judiciary being completely independent, which importantly provides free **accountability uninfluenced by the current governing party(/ies)** for the government. Another important characteristic of a liberal democracy is a stress on the importance of shared values, for example all people generally agree that discrimination is wrong. Elections *should* be free and fair, and the people have a large array of base rights that the government can *never* infringe.

Question 2:

For young people to understand and eventually participate in democracy, our primary goal is to demystify, so that it is a topic that is not scary. This will come from basic familiarity with the concept, just as how the revitalisation of Te Reo Maori started by teaching basic language in schools, like simple phrases and colours; so later in life people saw it as more approachable. We want to use the same idea for democracy. We propose implementing a 2-phase introduction to democratic values into the education system. We want to see practical education at young ages, introducing people to the basics of democracy. This involves answering questions like: How does voting work? What does parliament do? What are political parties?

Our first step is accomplished through the hyper-successful model of gamification. This looks like introducing a game-based learning platform into schools that places a child right at the centre of democracy in NZ. Immersing them from year 0, with very basic ideas, gives us the ability to build on that knowledge in the future. By the time students leave primary school, the concepts should be so familiar to children that they have a working knowledge of the pillars of our MMP system.

This allows implementation of our second step, introducing theory. However, learning about a series of abstract concepts (like the separation of powers, or the 4th estate), in rigid "*civics classes*" causes a lack of engagement when students do not see how it works practically. Introducing these ideas *after* a student has learned the basics of democracy allows them to build an *effective* understanding of the more theoretical concepts. This also gives us the ability to integrate democracy in the broader history and social sciences curricula, e.g. by answering questions like "Where did democracy go wrong in 1930s Germany?" We see this as the most practical way to integrate this vital learning, because it is unintrusive. Generally, all high school students take some form of English or humanities up until Year 12 or 13 so we can ensure high catchment. Additionally, this education will be highly efficient, theoretical education, because they are already familiar with the base concepts. We will now treat democracy like any other subject, get the basics down, then elaborate, leading to a better educated populace.

Question 3:

Engaging in new topics is difficult for anyone, especially young people. We believe that strengthening democracy comes down to getting everyone involved from day one. When everyone is involved in democracy, the influence is wider than just elections. It looks like people going to select committees, reading up on recent court rulings, and keeping up with the news. We need to be the change we want to see. The reason for this is twofold. First, if we all, as students passionate about the world, engage more actively with democratic processes, there is immediately more input and voice. With the rise of “slacktivism” it is easy to post an Instagram story or call out a celebrity on twitter but real change must come from influencing the top, the government. If we actively participate, we get more widespread input into our law making; especially important from those who cannot vote but will be influenced greatly by decisions. An even greater impact our actions can have comes from their influence on other young people. As it stands, politics can be a difficult space to get into; it looks daunting because it is unfamiliar. However, involving ourselves makes it easier to involve others. Rather than people having to research, find, and attend a select committee themselves, it becomes more accessible because you can easily attend with a friend. This sounds trivial to those already involved, but it can be a very real impact for those who currently feel “out of the loop.” As humans, we like familiarity. By getting youth involved in politics, we make it a familiar space. This results in young people getting involved, and staying involved, thereby strengthening democracy. If we become the change we want to see, the rest will follow.

Question 4:

Often the biggest barrier to engagement with democracy for an adult is the lack of accessibility for someone who is not already heavily involved. While MPs hold office hours, most people are unaware, or feel uncomfortable raising issues because of a feeling of being alone. We propose a community style approach, to encourage this engagement more.

Firstly, each electorate MP should put together a **quarterly one-page summary** of updates on information regarding the electorate. The idea behind the letter is to fix the void of information between elections. Local issues should not be scary and should be well understood by all. As it stands, once the election happens, local issues sit towards the press’ back burner, and there is no way for people to see what the MP is doing; news rarely focuses on it and is temporary when it does. By compiling a letter, the MP is forced to share their progress, or lack thereof. This then leads to a more informed populace at election time and makes the MP first and foremost a local representative, not just a national politician. When we place this in the forefront of people’s minds and spur engagement about local issues, we increase trust in our democracy, for people who feel dismissed and unheard.

Additionally, to go along with this, a **quarterly information evening** with the MP where people go to have some tea, ask some questions, and engage. These community events would hold space for those in the electorate to ask questions about progress and hold the MP to account, while engaging themselves. The Info Session is designed to prompt community engagement from those who would not typically speak with their MP. There is no current mechanism for local accountability between elections; this infrequent, but important event gives the perfect opportunity for local accountability and engagement.