



## Turbocharging Civics Education for Parliamentary Resilience:

A case study of Queensland Parliament's 2024  
'Build your Parliament in Minecraft'  
competition for schools

### Abstract

This paper explores how Queensland's Parliamentary Education Team leveraged the engagement power of Minecraft Education to transform their education offerings. The 2024 'Build Your Parliament in Minecraft Competition' engaged students from diverse backgrounds, including those in remote locations, in a project-based learning experience by tasking them with the creation of a virtual legislative chamber.

Against a backdrop of declining civic engagement, this initiative demonstrates how gamification and virtual reality can foster critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork while deepening students' understanding of the work of the parliament and avenues for democratic participation. The paper outlines the competition project, highlighting its success in increasing student engagement. The project's outcomes offer insights for educators and policymakers about integrating digital technologies and experiential learning into civics curricula. Such initiatives are argued to be essential for parliamentary resilience. By equipping young people with the skills and knowledge needed for active citizenship, we can safeguard our democratic institutions into an uncertain future.

**Maria Mead**

Parliamentary Education Officer  
Queensland Parliament

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

The author acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which this paper was prepared. I pay respects to all Elders past, present and emerging and recognise their enduring connection to land, waters, and culture. I extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lore, education systems and democratic traditions have existed for millennia.

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Parliamentary resilience demands effective strategies to engage citizens in the present and prepare future generations to uphold democratic values. This paper highlights the critical role of innovative educational approaches in cultivating responsive and sustainable parliaments by equipping citizens to actively participate in their governance. Gamified learning and digital resources can support civic engagement by transforming understanding of democratic institutions, fostering a well-informed and actively engaged citizenry, deeply invested in shaping their democracy.

### **A. Democracy Diagnostics: Addressing Parliamentary Fragility**

Democracy, as a system, is a relatively recent achievement for much of the world. Despite the ancient origins of parliaments such as those in Iceland and the Isle of Man, many of the world's democracies are still being road-tested, with most yet to reach their centenary (see Figure 1). Like any complex machine, the engines of democracy are fuelled by the active participation of citizens. Recent events such as the 2021 attack on the United States Capitol and the prorogation of the UK Parliament in 2019 demonstrate the system's susceptibility to breakdown, highlighting that democratic stability must not be assumed a self-sustaining machine.

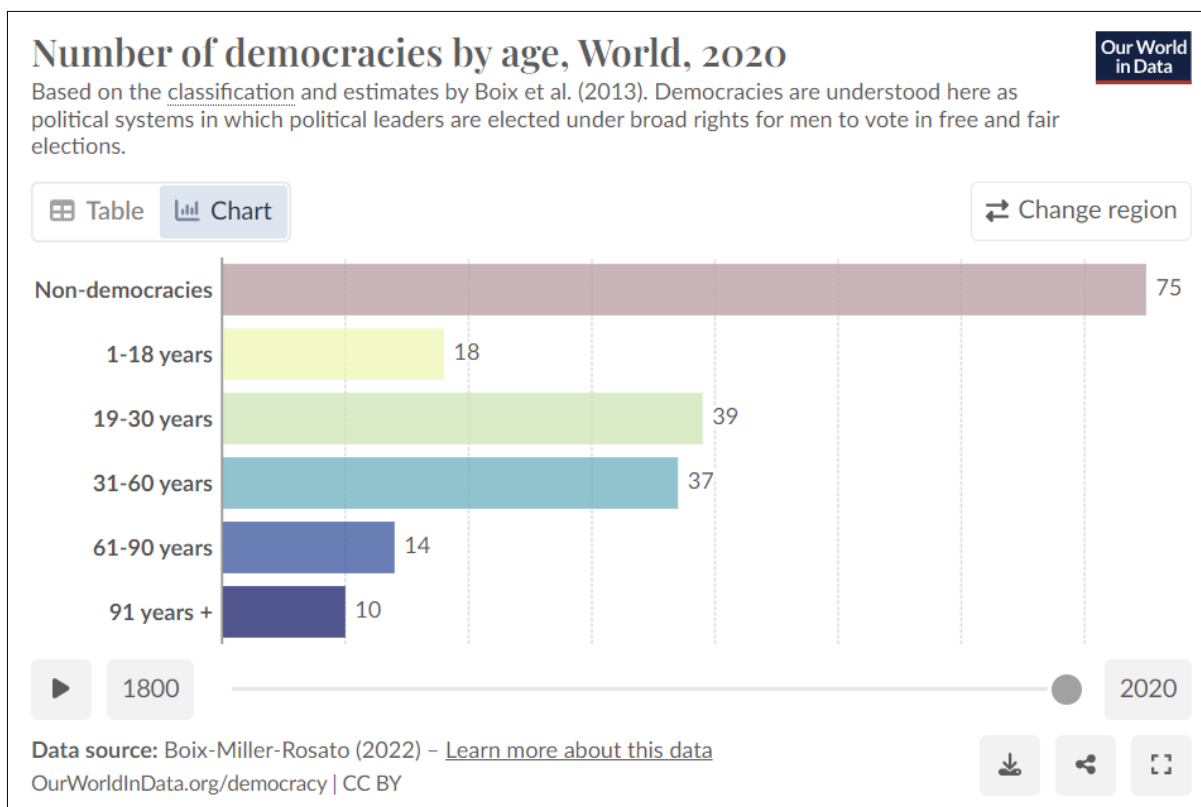


Figure 1 – Number of democracies by age, 2020 (Herre et al., 2023)

It is broadly accepted that the sustainability of parliament is impacted by factors such as public trust, polarisation, misinformation, civic education, and political engagement. Citizens in established democracies are increasingly sceptical of their governments' ability to address issues like corruption, inequality, and economic instability (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). This scepticism fuels growing disenchantment with democratic governance, particularly among younger generations, who often view it as ineffective or irrelevant to their lives (Foa & Mounk, 2017). In response, scholars and experts advocate for revitalised civics education to safeguard democracy's future.

The 2023 "Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy" survey underscores the vital role of civics education in keeping democracy on course (Australian Public Service Commission, 2024). Those equipped with civic knowledge show a higher level of satisfaction with the system – 72% compared to 54% of those without such education – indicating that understanding the mechanism of democracy facilitates participation. Civic education also fuels greater engagement in democratic activities like voting, helping to keep the engines of democracy running efficiently. Furthermore, it serves as a key defence against the roadblocks of misinformation and disinformation, providing citizens with the critical thinking skills needed to navigate complex political landscapes. Ultimately, the findings highlight that civic education is essential for keeping democracy in gear and ensuring its long-term resilience on the road.

## **B. Civic Optimisation Audit: Australia's Parliamentary Inquiry into Civics**

### **Education**

Following a referral from the Special Minister of State, Senator Don Farrell, the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters launched an Inquiry into civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia in March 2024, with a focus on improving the understanding and involvement of Australians in democratic processes (Parliament of Australia, 2024). Public hearings were held in Canberra, the Northern Territory and Queensland. In July 2024, representatives from the Cairns Youth Council and other stakeholders provided testimony about their experiences with civics education, contributing several important points and making recommendations for improvement in the following areas.

#### **1. Gaps in Formal Civics Education**

Despite engaging with civics education at school, many students felt that they did not have a deep understanding of how elections or the Australian parliamentary system worked before participating in the Young Mayors program. They noted that while their school curriculum covered general history, Australian colonial history, and political structures, it did not sufficiently prepare them for real-world civic participation, such as voting or evaluating campaign materials.

## **2. Emphasis on International Systems Over Australian Politics**

The representatives expressed concern that too much emphasis was placed on international political systems and ideologies, leaving insufficient time to focus on Australia's political system. They felt that a greater emphasis should be placed on Australian political history, voting processes, and the structure of the government.

## **3. Lack of Practical Civic Learning Opportunities**

The Cairns Youth Council members highlighted the importance of practical learning experiences. They advocated for more opportunities to engage in activities like mock elections and campaign workshops, which they found valuable in understanding the electoral process and the roles of parliament. They also recommended expanding programs that provide hands-on civic learning opportunities for all students.

## **4. Challenges in Civic Engagement Among Peers**

Also noted was that programs like Young Mayors attract students who are already engaged, but the broader challenge is in reaching students who are less interested in civics. The youth representatives recommended creating more inclusive opportunities that engage a wider range of students in civic learning and participation.



These key points highlight concerns that civics education in Australia needs to be more practical, relevant, and accessible to ensure that all young Australians are well-prepared to participate in democracy.

The Committee's final report is expected by the end of 2024. In the interim, it is imperative that we consider how civics and parliamentary educators can best support schools to strengthen all young people's knowledge and understanding of our democratic systems. Leveraging current educational theory, effective strategies for engagement, and well-designed resources will be key to successfully engaging young people in effective civics learning.

### **C. Balance and Alignment: Checking the Curriculum Trailer Load**

Whenever social issues like declining civic engagement arise, the response often shifts responsibility onto schools. Despite concerns about an overloaded curriculum, dissatisfaction with civics education in Australian schools persists. The term 'crowded curriculum' is frequently used to describe the extensive content teachers must cover. Successive Australian education ministers have acknowledged that a 'cluttered' curriculum hampers progress in core areas such as literacy and numeracy (Keddie & Harris-Hart, 2021). Balancing broad content with developing critical skills adds further pressure on educators working within limited instructional time. This debate highlights the challenges of curriculum design in Australia, where schools must prepare students for a complex world while addressing foundational needs.

In this educational landscape, leveraging specialised content teams is essential. For example, parliamentary educators are crucial in fostering democratic resilience by providing accurate information, training, and resources for civics programs. With direct

access to authentic parliamentary procedures, personnel and materials, and accurate and up-to-date information, we are uniquely positioned to deliver programs, training, and resources, ensuring high-quality, engaging educational experiences that promote active citizenship.

#### **D. Reconditioning Civics: Scanning Education Philosophies in a Comprehensive Service**

For parliamentary educators to fulfill their crucial role and enhance democratic understanding, adopting proven educational strategies is crucial. Over a century ago, progressive educational theorist John Dewey advocated for experiential learning, arguing that students learn best through active engagement, rather than passive reception. Dewey's philosophy highlights the importance of critical thinking and problem-solving throughout the learning process, stating, "Learning is not the product of teaching. Learning is the product of the activity of learners" (Dewey, 1916). This participatory, student-led model – referred to as a 'thick' approach by scholars cited in Heggart and Flowers (2018) – is particularly relevant to civics education. It promotes deeper engagement with democratic processes and equips students with the skills necessary for active citizenship beyond voting.

In today's digitally connected classrooms, technology plays a pivotal role in fostering experiential learning. Research by Squire and Jenkins (2003), Gee (2003), and Barab et al. (2005) demonstrates the effectiveness of virtual environments for improving knowledge retention, especially in complex subjects like civics and government. As Gee (2003) points out, "Digital games offer opportunities for deep learning and critical engagement that are hard to achieve through other means of instruction." These trends

highlight the value of incorporating digital tools to enhance civic education and make it more engaging.

### **E. Pedagogical Upgrade: Gamified Injection for a Civics Engine Overhaul**

Gamification has become a powerful educational strategy, incorporating game design elements such as points, badges, leader boards, and rewards into learning activities. It draws on principles from behavioural psychology and game theory to enhance motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes by making tasks more enjoyable and compelling. As Deterding et al. (2011) argue, "Gamification strategies have been shown to enhance student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes across various subject areas, including civics education." Studies by Gee (2003) and Steinkuehler and Duncan (2008) further emphasise the transformative potential of gamification in promoting critical thinking, collaboration, and civic participation among young learners. By integrating game-like elements, educators can make abstract civic concepts more accessible and engaging, fostering a deeper connection between students and democratic processes.

### **F. Civics Turbo Boost: Adding Virtual Reality to the Fuel Formula**

When combined with gamification, virtual reality (VR) has the potential to significantly boost learning outcomes by creating immersive and interactive environments that deepen student engagement (Jaramillo-Mediavilla et al., 2024). VR allows students to apply abstract concepts in realistic, simulated settings, enhancing their understanding and making learning more impactful. As Steinkuehler and Duncan (2008) note, "Virtual environments provide opportunities for immersive and experiential learning, allowing students to engage with complex concepts in dynamic and interactive ways."

In the realm of civics education, VR enables students to simulate governance structures, form political parties, hold elections, and make decisions within a virtual space. This hands-on, immersive experience allows students to better understand the complexities of civic participation and policymaking. By integrating gamification and VR, educators can create dynamic learning environments that promote active engagement and prepare students for real-world democratic challenges (Maroukias et al., 2024; Han et al., 2023).

### **G. Resource Tune-up: Calibrating Civics Education for Today's Learner**

Recognising the need to inject some VR 'zhuzh' into their traditional educational offerings, Queensland's Parliamentary Education team began investigating platforms for a virtual civics resource. The aim was to develop a realistic simulated environment as a conduit for interactive and experiential learning about the parliament, enabling students to actively participate in simulated democratic processes in appealing and collaborative ways. Drawing inspiration from the growing prevalence of virtual tours, Augmented Reality (AR) experiences and immersive digital models of venues such as Cairns Convention Centre and Queensland's Old Government House the team faced limitations due to the significant budget typically required for professional digital scanning and production. Consequently, they shifted their focus toward freely available gaming platforms.

**ABC News Australia ROBLOX** @roblox\_ausnews · Apr 10, 2023

The Prime Minister has announced his second cabinet for this term, following the mass resignation of his previous cabinet.

See the full cabinet list here:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KJcwUDCHGK6MWNIDaFoJUUKQ\\_CbKXBQT/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KJcwUDCHGK6MWNIDaFoJUUKQ_CbKXBQT/view?usp=share_link)



152

**ABC News Australia ROBLOX** @roblox\_ausnews · May 13

BobJHawke will succeed Wa ffle as Australia's next Governor-General.



4

140

Figure 2 – The AU | Australia community on Roblox simulates real-life governance.. (Roblox AUS News, 2024)

With over 56 million daily active users (Priori Data, 2024), the massive multiplayer open-world game 'Roblox' is a major platform for user-generated content and interactive experiences. An online community called 'AU | Australia on Roblox' simulates real-life governance, engaging in civics simulations including an elected parliament, judiciary, law enforcement and media coverage via X (formerly Twitter) (see Figure 2). However, Roblox's open nature, lack of strict content moderation, and risks of exposure to inappropriate material and cyberbullying make it unsuitable for use in most classroom contexts.

In contrast, Minecraft Education provides a safer, more structured platform for learning. Given Minecraft's high engagement potential and its widespread availability in schools, Queensland's Parliamentary Education team proposed a novel solution to address the lack of VR funding – enlisting the expertise of the students themselves. Involving students in the development of a Minecraft Chamber model not only resulted in the creation of the desired VR civics resource but significantly increased student participation and engagement within schools across the state. As Barab et al. (2005) highlight, "Digital tools, such as Minecraft Education, offer unique opportunities for collaborative learning and creativity, enabling students to construct and explore virtual environments that mirror real-world scenarios."

#### **H. Building Civic Torque: The Power of Queensland's Minecraft Chamber**

Thus, the 2024 'Build Your Parliament in Minecraft Competition' (the Competition) was conceived. Student teams competed to build an accurate parliamentary chamber model in Minecraft Education. This section outlines the Competition's objectives,

planning, execution, and outcomes, demonstrating its resounding success and offering recommendations to increase the potential for future gain.

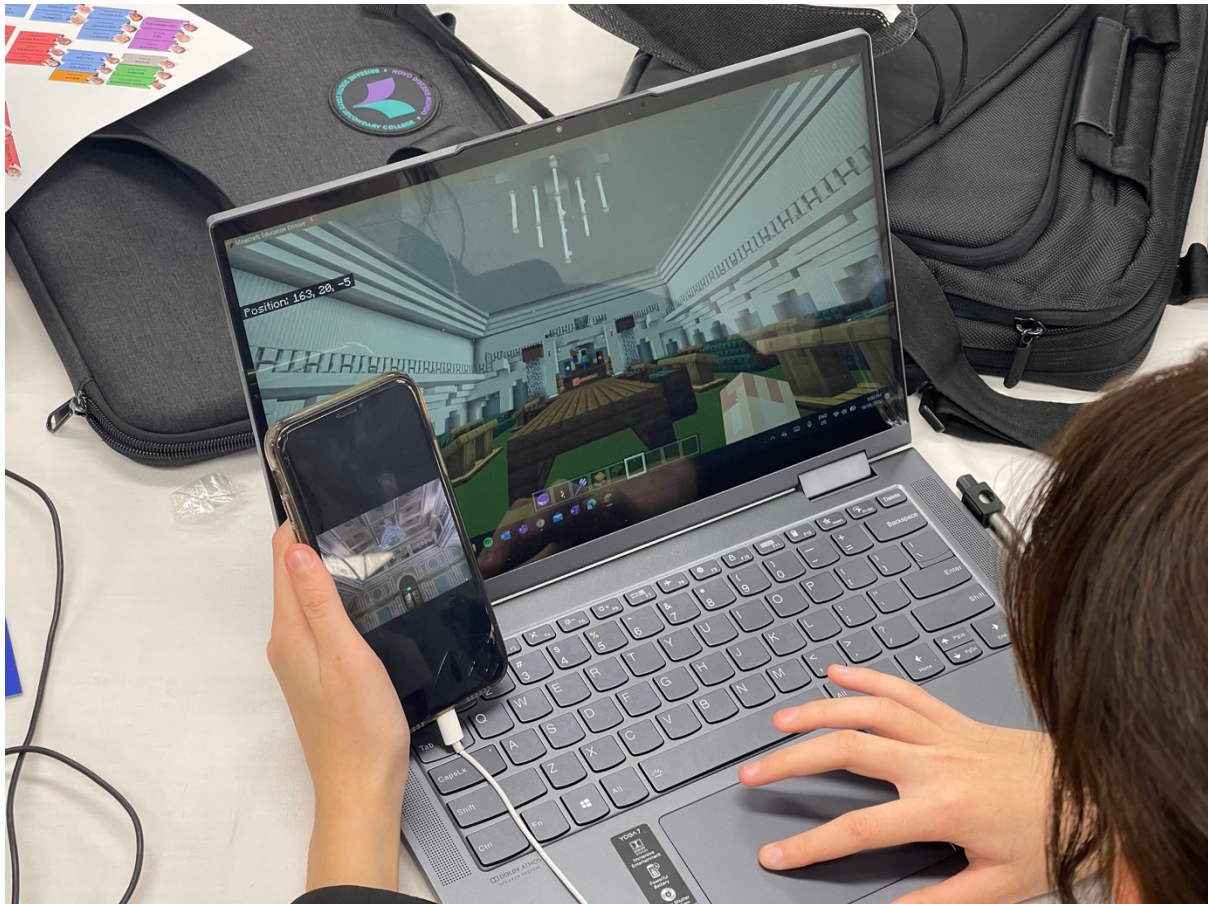


**a) Background:**

In 2022, Queensland's Parliamentary Education team piloted a Minecraft chamber build with 27 Year 7 students enrolled in a Minecraft Elective at a Brisbane inner-city school. This class was suggested by a member of the Teacher Advisory Group (TAG), which is a consultative body of experienced educators who provide insights to ensure that our resources effectively engage students and align with curricular standards. The Minecraft class and their teachers embraced the ready-made project idea and greatly enjoyed the opportunity to visit Parliament House to research their build on location (see Figure 3). To quote a quip from the Speaker with reference to their visit, “I am not sure whether you need to worry about MPs or ‘creepers’” (Legislative Assembly of Queensland, 2022). Any Minecraft gamer can explain.

For several reasons, the resulting chamber model was not fit-for-purpose. Key features such as the coat of arms were omitted. Students populated the model with characters representing the 93 Members of Parliament, limiting its usefulness as a blank template for future activities with other groups. Nevertheless, valuable insights from this pilot project helped to shape the 2024 Competition's rules and structure. For example,

restricting the size of student teams to maximise opportunities for collaboration and the provision of timely, structured guidance to support progress and encourage a reflective, goal-oriented approach.



*Figure 3 – Students undertaking the 2022 ‘pilot’ Minecraft Chamber build visited Parliament House to inspect and photograph the Chamber and refine their design.*

## **b) Competition objectives:**

The 2024 Competition had two key objectives.

1. To provide an authentic, project-based learning experience that deepened students' understanding of Queensland's Parliament. Leveraging the engagement power of a popular gaming platform and encouraging healthy competitiveness between



schools, we offered an opportunity to develop skills in iterative design, creativity, teamwork and problem-solving, along with civics content knowledge.


2. Publishing the resulting virtual chamber, providing an engaging digital civics resource at minimal cost which could be used to teach the structure and functions of parliament, especially benefiting regional and remote students who may never have the opportunity to visit the Parliament in person.

**c) Competition task:**



*Figure 4 – This student-created slide demonstrates the challenging task of representing a curved Legislative Assembly Chamber in a blocky Minecraft world.*

Participants were tasked with building a scale model of the Queensland’s Legislative Assembly Chamber using Minecraft Education (see Figure 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6), replicating all key features (flags, mace, timer clocks, public gallery etc.) and reflecting the existing colours and surfaces as accurately as possible. Representing curved seating in a blocky gaming platform is no simple task. Students were challenged to use the available Minecraft materials in creative ways.



## - MEMBERS SEATS - (EXACTLY 93)

- Jungle stairs with maps inside item frames placed on top of the desks as players can sit in the half block as maps do not have a physical hitbox for the player to be forced upwards.
- Warped stairs and warped trapdoors were used as the seats giving off the feeling of the leather seats used in the real-life structure



## The Scale

For the scale we noticed that when we used the measurements 24.5 for the length and width it was way too large so we had to find a floor plan that has a scale and so we found out the rooms measurements are actually 17 meters length and 11 meters wide but in Minecraft that measurements are too small. So we had to use the scale 2 blocks in Minecraft is 1 block per meter.

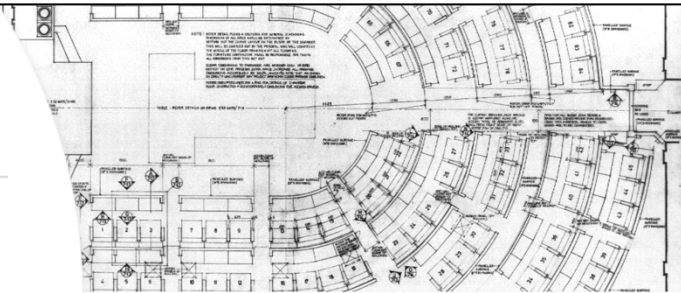
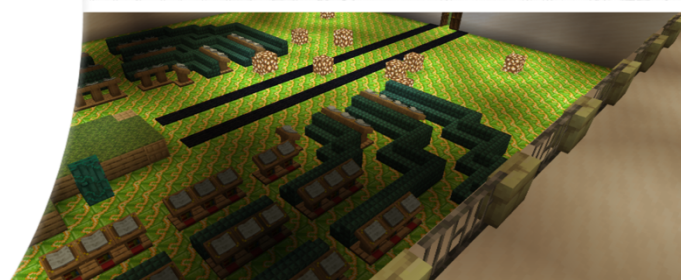



Figure 5 – Students' competition entries documented their process, demonstrating research and attention to detail.

While links to learning resources on the Queensland Parliament website, such as Fact Sheets and instructional videos, were provided to participating teachers, the Competition focused on accurate representation of the Chamber in Minecraft, therefore any civics learning outcomes were incidental. Nevertheless, it was evident from many of the submitted entries, and from the questions emailed to the team during the building period, that development of knowledge and understanding of civics content was implicit throughout the process (see Figure 5).

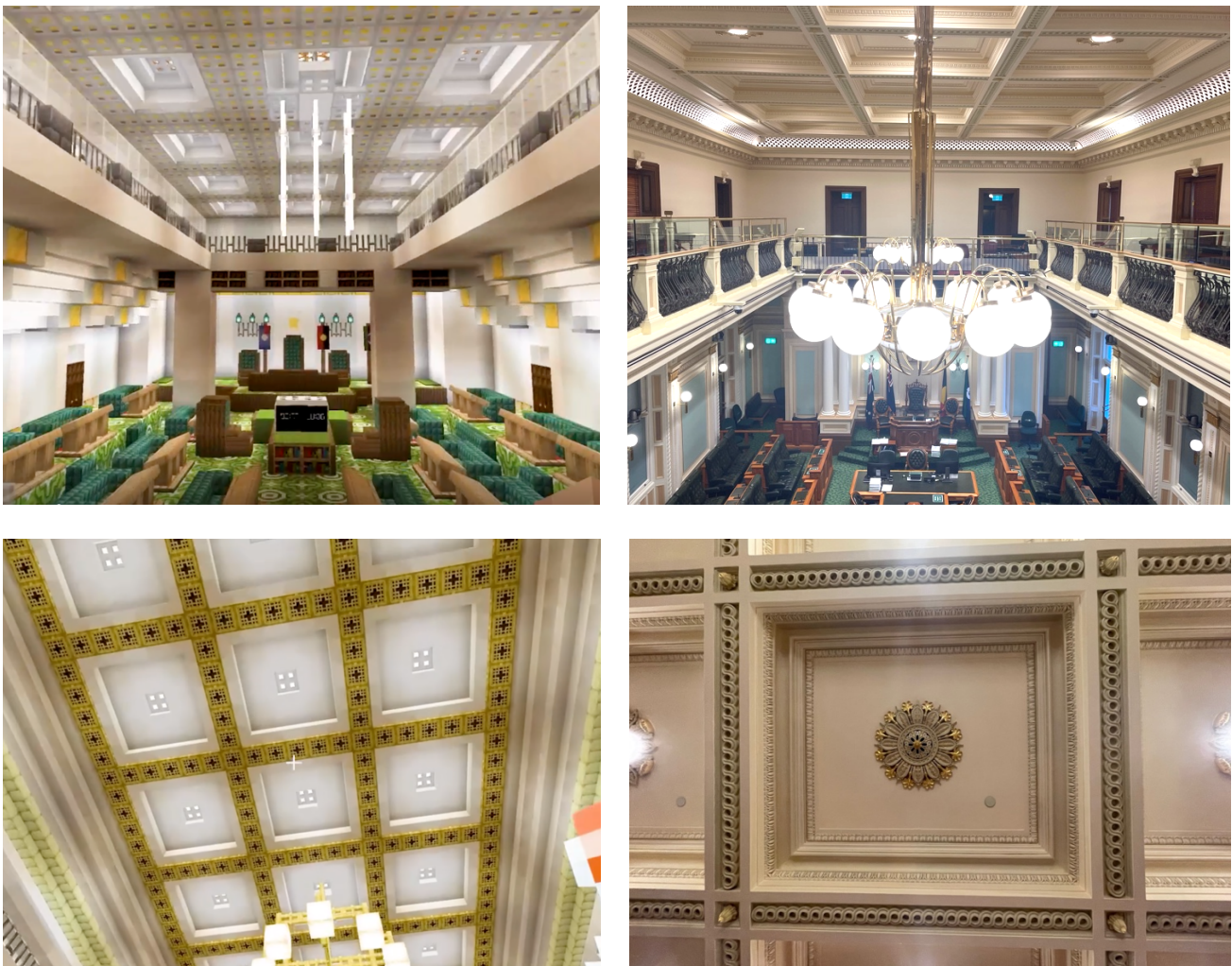


Figure 6 – Ceiling detail in student-built Minecraft Chamber models (L column), compared with the real Chamber photos provided to schools (R column).

**d) Consultation, communications and marketing:**



*Figure 7 – Queensland Parliament’s Marketing and Communications team produced graphic assets to assist with marketing the Competition.*

The Parliament’s Communications and Marketing team sought advice from Microsoft's Education Success Manager (Queensland and Northern Territory) about using Minecraft graphic assets in the design of promotional graphics and prize merchandise (see Figure 7). Early consultation with ICT Engagement Officers at Brisbane Catholic Education yielded valuable advice such as the requirement of a screen recording of the Minecraft build to be submitted with entries. This circumvented the need for judges to load each world in the Minecraft Education app which saved significant time during this period. A contact list was compiled to communicate the competition details (see Figure 8) with administrative and curriculum leaders across all educational jurisdictions in the state

(Education Queensland, Catholic Dioceses, Lutheran Education, and Independent Schools Queensland).

**BUILD YOUR  
PARLIAMENT IN  
MINECRAFT**

**An exciting competition for  
Queensland schools!**

Engage your students in an exceptional learning opportunity for 2024.

Queensland Parliament invites students from Years 4 to 12 to enter an exciting and unique competition. This innovative digital learning opportunity will foster skills in teamwork, creativity and critical thinking. Teams made up of Queensland students are tasked with building a Minecraft model of our state's Parliament, creating an innovative resource to help all Queenslanders learn about our democracy.

Registrations open: Week 9 of Term 1, 2024  
Competition launches: Week 1 of Term 2, 2024  
Entries due: Week 5 of Term 2, 2024

We have mapped the curriculum alignment for you!

Register your interest with no obligation by scanning the QR code or visiting: [forms.office.com/r/ap0sfg9pMR](https://forms.office.com/r/ap0sfg9pMR)

Not an official Microsoft event.

**MINECRAFT  
EDUCATION**

QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT

Figure 8 – Competition Flyer

A social media pack was prepared for education leaders, schools, and Members of Parliament to support promotion of the competition. Following registration, Members

were informed of the participating schools in their electorates, and many scheduled school visits to offer support and feedback on students' Minecraft builds (see Figure 9).



*Figure 9 – Mr Trevor Watts MP, Member for Toowoomba North, visited entrant schools in his electorate, to offer advice to students during their build process.*

The marketing plan incorporated email updates and reminders at key stages as well as social media posts which included graphic assets, photographic images, and a compilation of entry videos.

**e) Project timeline:**

The timeline in Figure 10 outlines the stages of implementing the Competition project.

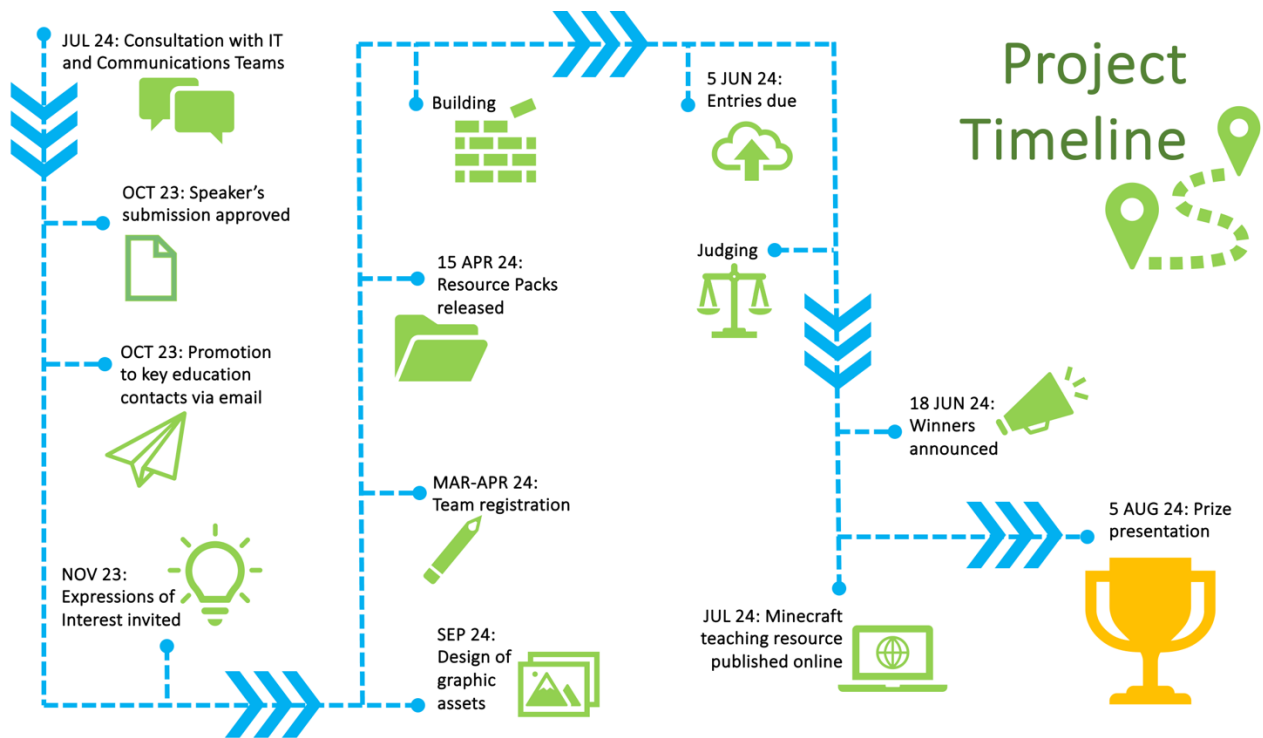


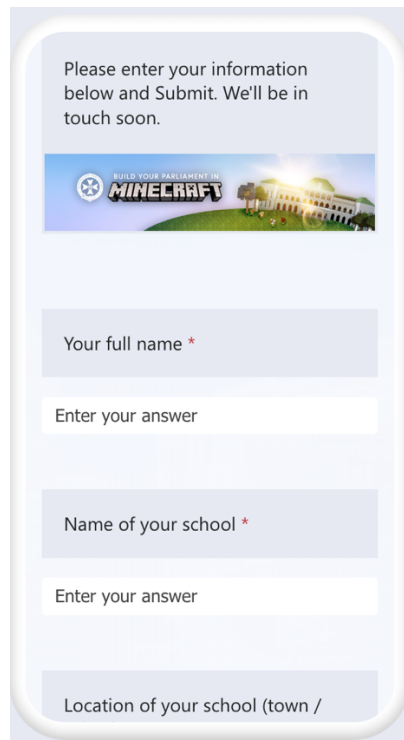
Figure 10 – Competition project timeline

#### f) Eligibility:

The competition was open to Queensland school students from Years 4 to 12. Teams of 2 to 5 students were invited to participate, with separate categories for Junior (Years 4 - 8) and Senior (Years 9 - 12) students.

#### g) Registration:

Teachers submitted an online form (see Figure 11) to register one or more teams of students. There was no entry fee and no obligation for a registered team to submit a completed entry.



Please enter your information below and Submit. We'll be in touch soon.

**BUILD YOUR PARLIAMENT IN MINECRAFT**

Your full name \*

Enter your answer

Name of your school \*

Enter your answer


Location of your school (town /

*Figure 11 – Expressions of interest, registration details and entry submissions were all managed using Microsoft Forms, accessible from a web browser on computer or mobile device.*

#### **h) Resources for entrants:**

While balancing their ongoing responsibilities, the Parliamentary Education team sought to ensure equal access for all participants by reducing any barriers to involvement. To assist entrants, they provided a link to a 'Resource Pack' that included Chamber floor plans and photographs.





This year, Queensland Parliament invited students from Years 4 to 12 to unleash their creativity in Minecraft Education and construct a lifelike parliamentary playground.

The winning model is a valuable addition to our suite of educational resources, enabling students all over the state to engage with the functions of the parliament and learn how our democracy works in fun and innovative ways.

[Click here](#) to access the [winning Minecraft model](#) of the Legislative Assembly Chamber, along with a [Teacher Guide](#) to support your use of this resource in the classroom.

Teams of up to five students were invited to complete the mission: to craft a scale model of Parliament's green chamber in Minecraft Education. Fantastic prizes were awarded, including merchandise for students, engraved awards and a chance to add the prestigious Parliamentary Education Cup to your school's trophy cabinet!

**Documents and Resources:**

- [Competition Handbook with Terms and Conditions](#)
- [Curriculum Alignment](#)
- [Competition Flyer](#) (to share with your students)
- [Social Media Pack](#) (to promote your involvement)

Figure 12 – Up-to-date project information and supporting documents were published on a dedicated webpage at [www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Minecraft](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Minecraft)

A dedicated Minecraft page on the Queensland Parliament website (see Figure 12) provided:

- A Competition Handbook outlining terms, conditions, rules and guidelines, key dates, technical requirements, submission details and judging criteria.
- Curriculum alignment details to demonstrate how participation in the competition supports implementation of the Australian Curriculum across several learning areas such as Maths, Civics and HASS (History and Social Sciences).
- A Flyer (see Figure 8) to facilitate marketing via professional networks and schools' Learning Management Systems.

- A Social media pack (see
- Figure 13) to support promotion of the school’s involvement to their community.



## Promoting your involvement in the Queensland Parliament Minecraft Competition 2024

*Suggested text for a social media / LMS post for schools\*:*

Get ready <<school name here>> <<community / students>>! 🚀

@Queensland Parliament is inviting students in Years 4 to 12 to dive into Minecraft Education and craft a lifelike parliamentary playground. <<school name>> has risen to the challenge!

We're not talking textbooks here – we're unleashing the power of Minecraft Education to turn this Civics learning experience into an epic adventure.

Be ready to <<cheer on / join>> our trailblazing build team as we dive into the ultimate quest for Queenslanders - to create our legislative legacy at the pixelated political pinnacle of civics education. We are aiming to snag the first-ever "Minecraft-ocracy Masters" cup.

Get your game face on, Minecraft Artisans, and let the block-blazing begin! 🎮 ⚡

<<ADD how students can register / coordinating staff member >>

#Minecraftocracy2023 #QldParliament

*\*replace highlighted text to suit your school and intended audience*

Figure 13 – Excerpt from the ‘Social Media Pack’ for schools

### i) School engagement:

Figure 14 illustrates the distribution of registered teams across state electorates and school jurisdictions. It is important to note that not all registered teams submitted a final entry.

## Competition Registrations

258 Teams

36 Electorates

55 Schools

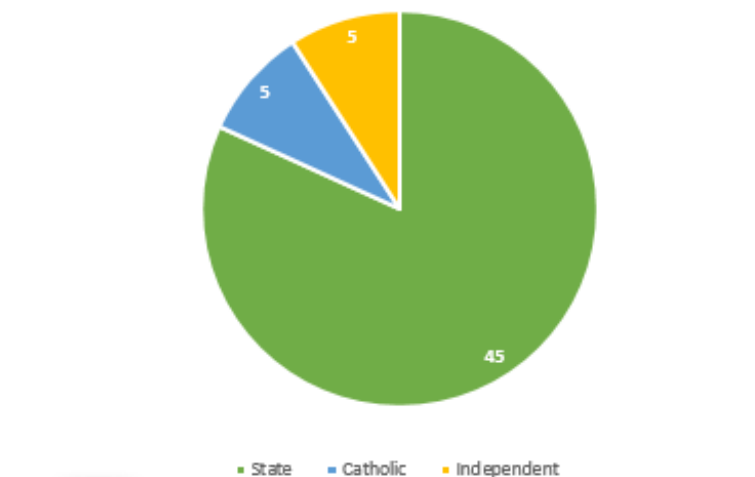


Figure 14 – Participation covered almost 40% of Queensland’s electorates.

### j) Entry submission:

A separate OneDrive folder was created for each entrant school to facilitate secure upload of the following required items by the due date:

- Minecraft world containing the model (.mcworld file);
- Narrated walk-through video of up to 60 seconds’ duration;
- Slide show or PDF documenting the build process (see Figure 15); and
- Photo consent form for each student whose face appeared in submission materials.

## Collaborative process (teamwork)



Because we are in different classes, we couldn't always work on our build at the same time. We used command blocks to make notes to each other. These are the placeholders we used to mark where certain blocks would go.

## Speaker's Desk

The desk is made of oak stairs, a lectern, spruce trapdoors, one oak trapdoor and oak blocks. It was a very complicated process putting an armour stand into the blocks.

## Innovative work



We tried to incorporate lots of detail. For example, we noticed the cameras that film and record on parliament days. We thought these were security cameras, but Trevor Watts explained they are for recording what happens and what is said.

Figure 15 – As part of their entry submission, teams were required to include a document detailing their building techniques and collaborative process.

### k) Judging:

Entries were evaluated based on creativity, accuracy, complexity, and presentation. The judging rubric in the Competition Handbook provided a clear framework for scoring entries. All 107 submitted entries were viewed, evaluated, and scored according to the published judging rubric (see Figure 16). Panel members were invited via the Parliament’s Heritage Management Group or volunteered themselves due to personal interest.

Judges employed various methods to score, select and/or eliminate entries to identify finalists. Three of the judges were experienced Minecraft players and provided valuable insights into the intricacies of build techniques that were not immediately obvious to a Minecraft novice. The judging panel met to share their individual findings and selected one winner by mutual agreement.

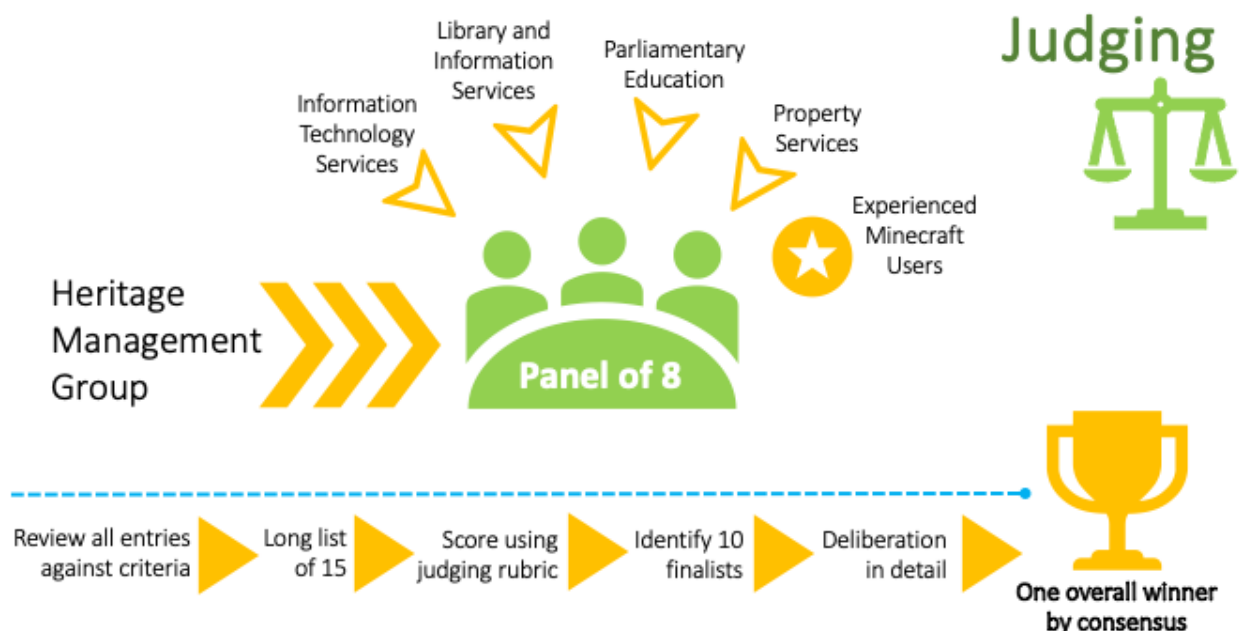


Figure 16 – The Judging process involved eight staff members over a period of two weeks.

**l) The winning team:**



*Figure 17 – The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and Member for Mulgrave, Hon Curtis Pitt MP, Member for Toowoomba North, Trevor Watts MP with competition winners on Monday 5 August 2024 during Minecraft Presentation Day at Queensland’s Parliament House.*

Competition winners, Jaxson and Louis, from Year 5 and Year 6 respectively at Fairview Heights State School, Wilsonton, were honoured during a special Presentation Day at Parliament House, during which they enjoyed a VIP tour of the precinct, visiting areas not normally accessible to the public such as our heritage carpenter’s workshop.



*Figure 18 – Winners of the Minecraft Competition unwrap their prizes.*

The presentation event included a formal prize presentation in the Green Chamber (see Figure 17 and Figure 18), witnessed by an audience of enthusiastic and supportive Parliamentary Service staff. The formal presentation was followed by lunch for the winners and their guests at the Queensland Parliament’s heritage Strangers Restaurant (see Figure 19 and Figure 20).



*Figure 19 – The winners enjoyed a mocktail with the Speaker in the historic Lucinda Bar before their meal.*

The young winners were delighted when the Hon Curtis Pitt MP, elected to join them in their chosen lunch of pizza and ice cream while the other adult invitees, including the boys' parents, enjoyed an artistic array of culinary delicacies from Strangers' gourmet menu (see Figure 20).





*Figure 20 – Winners’ lunch to order in Queensland Parliament’s Strangers Restaurant.*

**m) Other finalist prizes:**

Prize packs for the remaining nine finalist teams were shipped by courier to their schools and included:

- **For the school:** A framed certificate, a jigsaw puzzle from the Parliament gift shop and a Green Chamber diorama to assemble.
- **For each student:** A drawstring backpack, notebook, stationery set, and canvas zippered pencil case, all featuring exclusive ‘Queensland Parliament in Minecraft’ design along with a cherry wood plaque engraved with the student’s name.

The total cost of prizes and promotional items was \$1,910.55. This total does not include the cost of the wooden plaques, which were surplus remaining from a previous event held some years earlier.

**n) Impact on engagement:**

The competition increased civics education engagement by 34% for the 2023 / 2024 reporting period, reaching 1,290 students across the state who might not have otherwise participated in civics education. The impact will be ongoing with the production of a virtual scale replica of Queensland's Legislative Assembly Chamber, now available for download from our website. This VR resource will continue to enrich civics activities for teachers and students across the state into the future.

Comments from teachers who registered teams for the Competition, described positive outcomes for participating students:

*"It has been wonderful to see my teams working together and problem solve. Some students' confidence growth was so great to witness!"*

*"Students love purposeful building and to add the research side of learning about the space, was an extra bonus."*

*"Students learnt about the parliament, and they worked together within a team environment."*

*"The students loved participating and grew from the challenge."*

*"My students absolutely loved the stickers you sent. They've become a much-envied item and have really spurred the team on!"* (see Figure 21).



Figure 21 – Promotional stickers were mailed to each registered school to encourage and motivate student builders in their endeavours.

Many students included similar comments in their entry documentation (see Figure 22):

*“We would like to request another Minecraft challenge because we loved this one. Our most favourite part about it was the teamwork.” (Coolum State School)*

*“All my team would like to thank you for the wonderful experience with this competition. We have enjoyed working out the scale and learning to cooperate as a team. We never knew much about the legislative assembly chamber but this experience has made it so we always new [sic] it!”*

*“As a group we had to make crucial decisions. Team members each had their own ideas, it was hard to pick just one. When working in teams you need to make sure everyone’s voice is heard. We decided to settle on an idea with a democratic vote; majority rules. We assigned jobs to each member to help get everything done, although*

*we did end up working as a group due to the enjoyment of being able to collaborate.*

*Thank You to Queensland [Parliament] for organising this Challenge. We really enjoyed it, and it was a great way to practice teamwork and collaboration. Building the Green Chamber gave us a chance to learn a lot about it as well. We hope you continue organising competitions like this.” (Kin Kora State School)*

*“We made multiple mistakes but learned from them as we completed our build. We shared tasks around to ensure that everyone contributed equally.” (Sherwood State School)*

*“We spent hours and hours putting in the work to make this masterpiece. This wasn’t just a challenge for us, this was an experience that brought us together and made us stronger as a team. Thank you!” (Peregian Springs State School)*

*“Our team learnt that communication is key to success. When we got over the barriers we were an amazing team and created amazing things together.” (St Pius V Banyo)*

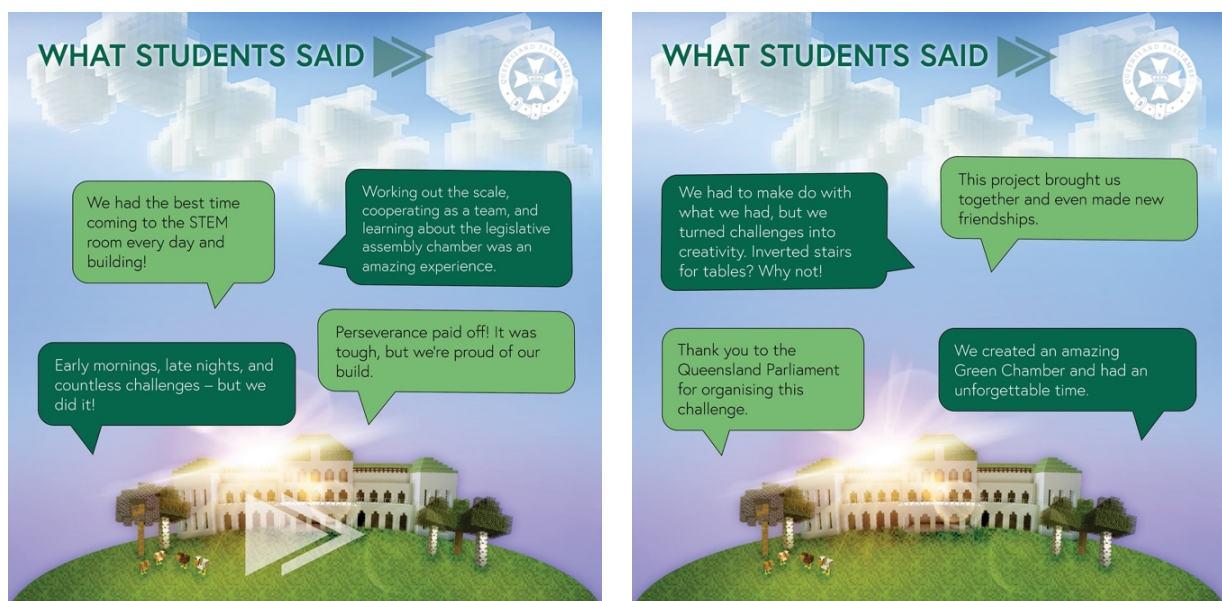


Figure 22 – After entries were submitted, some of the students’ comments were posted on social media.

**o) Resulting resource:**

It is hoped that the high level of engagement seen during the competition phase of this project continues with the publication and promotion of the winning model on the Queensland Parliament's website. The Minecraft chamber model is accompanied by a Teacher Guide produced by the Parliamentary Education team. This guide helps teachers integrate the Minecraft chamber replica into their civics programs in a way that realises its potential as an open and interactive VR resource. The Teacher Guide includes a detailed lesson sequence and suggestions for extension activities to further utilise the model.

**p) Learnings and recommendations:**

- **Elements of the Competition project that worked well**

Early communications with key curriculum leaders proved effective in extending reach, achieving buy-in from schools that exceeded expectations. The provision of attractive graphic assets facilitated effective promotions and marketing.

The weekly supply of a 'Tips for Teams' document (see Figure 23) was greatly appreciated by teachers. This initiative provided essential support for teachers unfamiliar with the Minecraft platform, enabling them to guide their teams effectively through the project. It also promoted the development of self-management and teamwork skills among students. Additionally, when individual teachers sent questions, responses were shared with all participants, ensuring consistent and equitable support throughout the build phase.

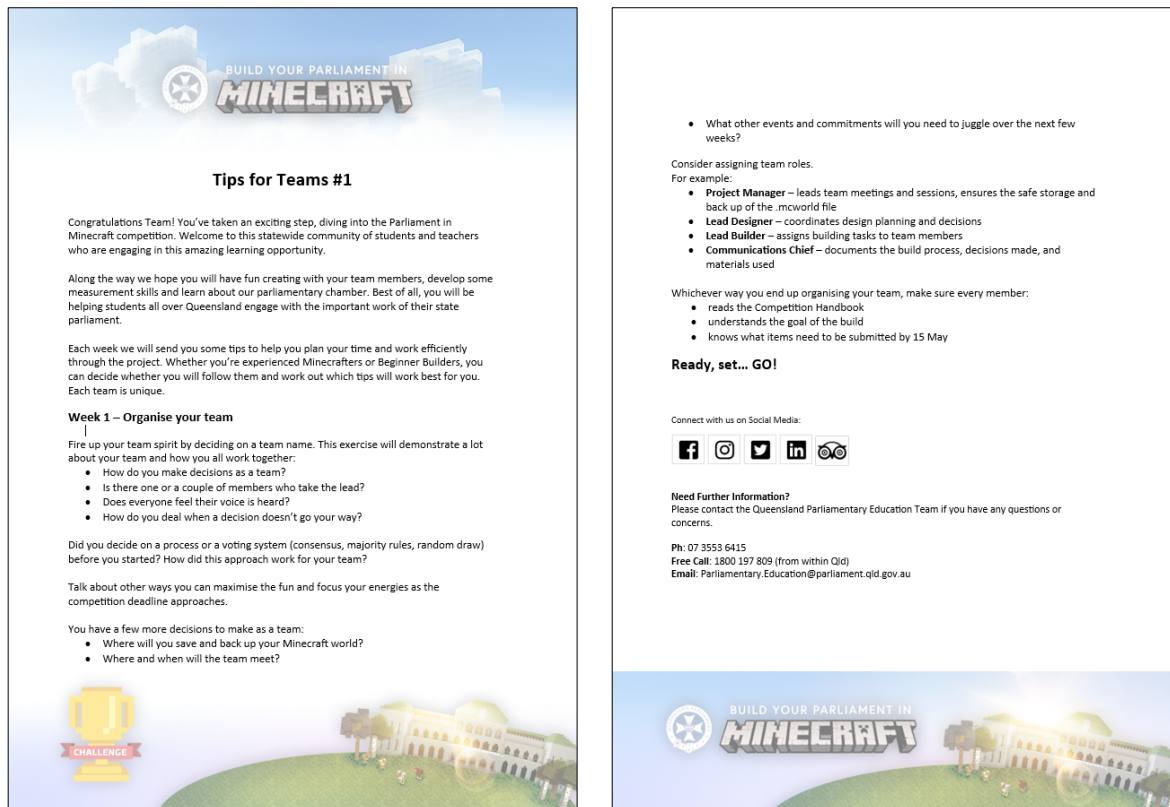


Figure 23 – A 'Tips for Teams' document with timely advice, reminders, and responses to questions from participants was emailed to entrants each week.

- **Elements to be reviewed**

The provision of Junior and Senior sections proved unnecessary. No completed entries were submitted in the senior category. An imbalance of entry numbers across categories would have made judging more complex and offered an unfair advantage to teams in the under-represented section.

Contact with key Information Technology Support personnel within Education Queensland (EQ) prior to the Competition launch would have mitigated the negative impacts of unanticipated technical issues. Two weeks into the build time, Microsoft rolled out an update to Minecraft Education which blocked the sharing of Minecraft worlds in many state schools. This update necessitated a change to EQ networks to

allow the students to continue sharing and collaboration in their builds. Precious competition days were lost while links were being drawn between the multiple and increasingly frantic reports of connection issues. Once key personnel within EQ were identified and the issue diagnosed, the necessary change was quickly escalated and implemented overnight. Had those key contacts been ascertained prior to launch, the impact of this outage would have been minimal.

**q) Next steps:**

The Parliamentary Education team plans to establish an annual 'Parliamentary Education Cup' competition, continuing in 2025 with a challenge for schools to add the Red Chamber, formerly used by Queensland's Legislative Council to the existing Minecraft model. This expanded VR resource will serve to enhance students' understanding of the Council's abolition in 1922 and the state's current unicameral system. Future competitions could broaden engagement by incorporating creative fields like song writing, game design, or digital animation to showcase parliamentary functions, attracting students with skills and interests beyond civics classes, thereby reaching a wider audience.



## **I. Firing on All Civics Cylinders: Ongoing Maintenance for the Flagship Model**

Gamifying civics education with Minecraft Education offers a multitude of opportunities for enhancing student engagement and learning. Students can design their own virtual parliaments, comparing examples from other jurisdictions and creating bespoke chambers for hypothetical constituencies such as ‘future-proof’ or hi-tech parliaments. In-game legislative challenges simulate real-world scenarios, such as debating bills or negotiating to form coalitions, investigating the challenges and benefits of a hung parliament scenario, navigating committee processes and debating and amending bills. Role-playing deepens understanding, while quests and missions provide targeted learning about parliamentary functions. Additionally, achievement systems with badges incentivise learning, and simulated elections offer hands-on experience with the electoral process. Staging community engagement projects can raise awareness of current civic issues in a protected, supervised space. By leveraging the collaborative and immersive nature of gaming platforms with these extensions, educators harness the ‘thick’ approach to civics education, fostering active citizenship through deeper understanding.

## **J. Conclusion: Ensuring Democracy’s Continued Resilience on the Road**

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and societal transformations, the resilience of parliamentary institutions is vital to the sustainability of democratic institutions. ‘Build Your Parliament in Minecraft’ has explored the transformative potential of gamified learning and digital engagement in civics education. By embracing innovative educational approaches, parliamentary institutions can ensure that young people “see their citizenship as a practice, not an outcome. By not only placing the



student at the centre of their learning but also acknowledging they command their citizenship, an approach to [civics education] is developed that empowers young people as citizens” (Brodie-McKenzie, 2020).

Investing in educational strategies that foster civic engagement is crucial for ensuring democracy's resilience against emerging challenges. “Democracy is not a natural condition. It has to be learnt.” (Print, 2015). Nurturing an informed and engaged citizenry through agile, future-focused approaches, will safeguard the vitality and effectiveness of modern democracy into an uncertain future.

### **Author’s Note**

In the preparation of this paper, references and source materials were located using ChatGPT, a large language model developed by OpenAI (OpenAI, 2024).

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