



Summary note: engagement with schools and young people

1. As part of the Committee's inquiry into the rule of law, the Committee organised a set of engagement activities with schools and young people between May and July 2025. The first part of this was a survey for teachers, about their experience of teaching the rule of law in schools. The second part was an activity pack for school-age young people to discuss their understanding of the rule of law and why it is important, which was then summarised and sent to the Committee. The activity was done both in schools, and in Parliament's Education Centre with visiting groups.
2. In total, 50 schools took part, with 28 schools taking part at the Education Centre and 22 running the activity in their school. In addition, 33 teachers responded to the survey. The schools represented a wide geographic spread, including 7 from London, 10 from the Northwest, 6 from the Southwest and 5 from Yorkshire and the Humber. There was also a wide range of school types and age groups, covering primary, secondary and post-16 education; and academy, independent and maintained schools.
3. This note provides an analysis of the feedback from the survey and activity.

Themes from the activity pack discussions

4. There was some variety between activity groups, however there was generally limited initial understanding or knowledge when students were asked to explain what the rule of law means. Similarly, when asked whether they had learnt about the rule of law at school, there were often large numbers of students in each group who said they had not.
5. In older age groups, there was better recognition and understanding of the rule of law. This was particularly the case among A-Level Politics students, who had usually learnt about the rule of law and were able to identify common key aspects of it, such as equality before the law and the right to a fair trial.
6. Across all age groups, once students were given a basic definition of the meaning of the rule of law, they expressed a fairly strong understanding of the core tenets and values associated with the rule of law. This remained the case even when they had initially said they did not recognise and had not learnt about the rule of law. There was much stronger recognition of the concept when it was linked to phrases which are taught in the 'Fundamental British Values' curriculum.
7. When students were asked why the rule of law was important, equality before the law (often framed as "no-one is above the law") was repeatedly raised, especially in the context of fairness. Students also discussed how the rule of law keeps people safe, and protects people. This was often in the context of specific and recognisable examples

that students raised, such as theft and violent crimes. Students also often made comparisons between the rule of law in society, and how that is mirrored in school rules and at home. For example, a recurring example was describing how the rule of law meant a teacher had to treat all students fairly as well as students having to follow the rules that the teacher sets.

8. Broadly, therefore, the overriding theme from the discussions was that, while many students, especially in younger age groups, had limited recognition of the phrase 'the rule of law', most had an instinctive understanding of the meaning and the values associated with it, and were able to discuss it in phrases and contexts that were familiar to them.

Themes from the teachers' responses

9. A majority of respondents (17 out of 33) said that the rule of law was taught in specific year groups in their school. However, a significant minority (12 out of 33) said the rule of law was taught to all age groups. Of the schools that did not teach the rule of law, the most common reason was that teachers felt that it was not seen as a priority topic.
10. From the responses, the rule of law was most commonly taught in Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) classes, with some teaching it in separate politics, citizenship or history lessons. In older age groups, Politics A-Level was the most common format in which the rule of law was taught.
11. The teachers surveyed broadly agreed that the rule of law is important and should be taught in schools. However, there was a lower average response, with significant deviation, when asked whether teachers felt supported and had the necessary resources to teach it.
12. Some teachers expressed concern that there was insufficient dedicated time or lessons in the curriculum to teach the rule of law, especially in older year groups when subject option choices may mean students have no lessons about the rule of law.