

EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT
UNITED KINGDOM



Harmony 2025



As the end of term draws near, energy levels peter and the idea of travelling hundreds of miles to spend an intense four days, including a weekend, seemed less than appealing. Yet, at 5.30am, there we all were, en route on a high speed(!) train to Liverpool Hope University to take part in the Youth Parliament Finals.

On arrival, the programme began. It was an intense schedule with directed time until 10pm every night. Day 1 involved team building activities as students were thrust into 'committees', groups of about 12, with complete strangers. With 100 delegates in attendance, our 4 students had to assimilate quickly to stand a chance of being noticed. Our students also quickly realised that they were amongst some of the most

talented students- confident, articulate, knowledgeable and highly competitive. As one student observed, "We are good, but everyone is good."

After a hard day's work, students were housed in halls of residence, living like undergraduates. Such an opportunity transported teachers way back in time but gave our Sixth Formers great insight into what the future could hold, should they decide to go to university. I have to say the food was excellent and, after a long day, we slept well, ready for Day 2: the delegates' preparation day.

Each group of students had been allocated a series of topics affecting the future of European citizens. Topics were diverse, ranging from incel culture, the housing crisis, the defence budget, domestic abuse, just to name but a few. Each group had to present a perspective and create resolutions that the rest of the delegates could explore, question and assess their validity. Research was key, as was effective time management and teamwork, a hard call when you have barely just met the other delegates in your team. Our students' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills were tested to the maximum. Each team of delegates was also supported by a nominated Chairperson, provided by the Youth Parliament. These individuals were, on the whole, university students or recent graduates. Again, this was a fabulous opportunity for our students to understand life as an undergraduate. Students were required to plan, write and submit their speeches so that judges could not only judge the calibre of the content, as well as its delivery. In essence, their every contribution would be scrutinised. As well as preparing their own resolutions, they were required to consider the other resolutions being proposed by other committees, ready to question and debate the efficacy of their ideas. I remember on the first night feeling proud that our students had formed such effective bonds with others but also feeling a little sad that they had lost each other on the way, no longer hanging out with their fellow NSBers. However, this fear would be short lived...

Day three and four saw the battles commence. It was brutal and brilliant, a white-knuckle ride, comparable to sitting your driving test without being able to control the pedals or the steering wheel. I could barely eat. The first debate did not see any of our students present a resolution, and none of them contributed to the general debate; I was worried that we had travelled all this way and they were going to remain mute, inactive, paralysed by the same fear I was experiencing. This was not the case; they were biding their time, finding their feet, working out the formality of the situation so that, by the time they entered the fray, they were ready for it. I could see them actually harnessing their nerves and enjoying the ride. They were spectacular. Donnacha coped well with the crazy feedback from the microphone attached to the lectern. He didn't need it and was audible, measured and thoughtful in his proposal. Edward responded to a series of propositions, revealing a wealth of knowledge, a calm assuredness, and an ability to move the debates forward, thus underpinning perfect listening skills.

Madeleine's response to incessant questioning was impressive, compelling and engaging. Karl, measured, articulate and comprehensive in his responses, was decisive and cut through flawed arguments seamlessly with maturity and intelligence. At the end of each debate, each resolution received votes from the general assembly to determine whether they would be passed. From memory, every resolution proposed by our students' committees passed.

During the breaks, I observed how our little group of four congregated together, offering support and advice, there for each other. This kindness cannot be taught. Being competitive, honest but kind is an art and one that our four possess. How I could feel so exhausted after these two days seemed bizarre, given that I hadn't taken part in any debate at all.

The four days ended with a closing ceremony, no results and a long wait ahead to see if any of our students had managed to secure one of the 8 places at the international events. The train journey home was also a bit chaotic but we all eventually arrived back home in Northampton, safe, sound, exhausted.

The wait of a mere five days seemed interminable, like waiting for the summer term to finally end. On Thursday evening, I opened my emails and saw that I had been cc'd into one of our student's emails; he'd been selected to attend the international event; I was an emotional wreck, and I don't mind admitting it. In essence, I was beyond chuffed. He deserved it. They all deserved it, but we can't always have what we want so we will feed off his success and can't wait to find out how things pan out in September in Croatia. Congratulations to the whole team: Edward Rushmore; Madeleine Gowler; Karl Edochie and Donnacha MacManus (who has been selected!)







