



clear structure. At our most recent event, more than 100 pupils from 11 schools gathered. Bryanston's Year 7s represented Algeria, Year 8s the United Kingdom and were joined by delegations from a range of prep and primary schools, some attending a conference of this kind for the very first time.

**From the opening speeches, the maturity was striking.**

Chairs called the house to order, points of information were raised, amendments proposed, and **debates quickly developed energy and purpose**. As the day progressed, alliances formed, motions were tested, and many initially hesitant pupils grew visibly more confident.



# YOUNG MINDS TAKE A GLOBAL STAGE

AT BRYANSTON'S MINI MODEL UNITED NATIONS

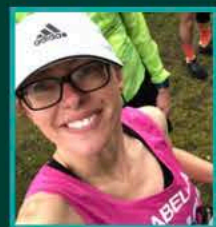
In this feature, Bryanston School History teacher and Model United Nations Co-ordinator Arabella de Steiger Khandwala charts the remarkable impact of the school's Mini Model United Nations conference, now more than a decade in the making. Bringing together over 100 pupils from 11 schools, the event immerses children as young as Year 7 in structured debate on climate change, press freedom, and nuclear disarmament. With Sixth Form students mentoring younger delegates and even staging a high-stakes UN crisis session, Mini-MUN helps develop empathy,

critical thinking, and confident public speaking, showing how powerfully young minds can engage with the complexities of global diplomacy.

When we first organised Bryanston's Mini-MUN over a decade ago, we wondered whether pupils so young could truly engage in diplomatic debate. The answer has proved to be an emphatic yes. Our conference is one of many Model United Nations initiatives flourishing in schools, demonstrating how ready young people are to tackle complex global questions when trusted, supported, and given

Three challenging themes framed the day: climate change, press freedom, and nuclear disarmament. Delegates were expected not to repeat slogans but to weigh evidence, competing interests, and ethical implications. This seriousness was reinforced by our mentorship model. Senior Sixth form pupils acted as chairs and helpers, modelling good procedure, stepping in when rules faltered, and actively drawing quieter voices into the discussion. When younger pupils stumbled over terminology or lost their line of argument, older students supported them and helped them refocus their case. This gentle scaffolding helped children take intellectual risks without fear of failure.

For the first time this year, we ran a full UN General Assembly crisis session, centred on a fictional narrative devised by our Sixth Formers of an asteroid heading for The Hague with a 72 hour estimated impact time. With little preparation time, delegations had to respond to a fast-moving political and humanitarian emergency. Research skills alone were not enough; pupils had to show agility, collaboration, creativity, and negotiation under pressure. Each delegation drafted a clause, secured co-signatories, and the best were then selected by the Chairs to be presented as emergency resolutions to the Assembly. Watching them move from rapid consultations to coherent coalition-building was remarkable. Delegates listened intently, interrogated



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the implications of each clause, and refined their proposals to win broader support. Appropriately, the crisis remained unresolved, mirroring the complexity of real-world diplomacy and demonstrating that not all urgent problems can be neatly solved in a single sitting.

The value of Mini-MUN extends far beyond the excitement of a single day. For quieter pupils, it offers a structured opportunity to step into the spotlight, present arguments, handle questions, and feel that their voice matters. The formal framework of resolutions, points and procedure gives purpose and security, turning anxiety into agency. Preparation is undoubtedly demanding. Delegates have to research their nation's history, politics, economy, and foreign policy to speak credibly for a viewpoint that is often not their own. In doing so, they practise empathy. Representing another country forces them to consider interests beyond personal instinct or national bias and to understand why different nations approach shared challenges in different ways. Many genuinely adjust their positions when confronted with persuasive counterarguments.

***Those moments of honest reconsideration are, in essence, diplomacy in action.***

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Over time, a culture has emerged in our MUN society. Pupils who once spoke nervously return in later years as assured chairs or move on to senior MUN conferences elsewhere, carrying with them both skills and enthusiasm. Collaboration between schools strengthens this shared practice and builds a supportive regional network of young debaters who champion thoughtful discussion. Staff, too,



see fresh dimensions of their pupils. Leadership is shown by those who quietly organise their delegations, compassion from those who encourage a wavering delegate, and resilience when a resolution does not pass.

The closing speeches from the Chairs at the awards ceremony reflected on key highlights from their committee sessions and shared lessons learned throughout the day. Underneath the formalities, one truth stands out. Structured debating experiences like Model United Nations are an essential part of education. They train young people to think critically, listen carefully, speak thoughtfully, and recognise that global challenges resist easy answers.

Behind the statistics of participants, schools, committees, and awards lies something far more significant. Young people venturing beyond their comfort zones, forming alliances, crafting arguments, and discovering that they can influence conversations much larger than themselves. We have watched shy pupils become confident orators and cautious thinkers become discerning analysts.

***By offering them such opportunities, schools help to nurture a generation not only well-informed, but equipped with the empathy, imagination, and integrity to use their knowledge wisely, and to see themselves as responsible actors in an interdependent world.***