national children's office

oifig náisiúnta leanaí

SECOND-LEVEL STUDENT COUNCILS RESOURCE PACK

Second-level Student Councils Resource Pack

January 2006

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INTRODUCTION

Student councils give students a voice and the opportunity to work in partnership with management and staff to improve their schools. Students, principals and teachers in schools with democratic and effective student councils report that enormous benefits are gained through the work of student councils.

Young people are afforded freedom of expression and appropriate participation in policy-making under both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Ireland's National Children's Strategy. Student councils are provided for in the Education Act, 1998 as a means of students being involved in the affairs of the school.

There are some excellent student councils in second-level schools around the country. But there are also schools that have no student council or have ineffective councils.

A Working Group was established in June 2003 by the National Children's Office (NCO), with the agreement of the Department of Education and Science, to promote the establishment of democratic student councils in second-level schools. This working group was comprised of the partners in education – second-level students, the Department of Education and Science, and the National Children's Office. The working group has produced this Resource Pack to help teachers and students to establish or improve the student council in their school.

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1. USING THIS RESOURCE PACK

This Resource Pack can be used by all second-level schools, whether they have a student council or not. Schools that do not have a student council will find the information helpful in establishing a council, while schools that do have a council that they want to improve will also find the information useful.

The Resource Pack outlines:
- the importance of student participation in schools;
- why schools should have student councils;
- how to set up and run effective student councils.

The Resource Pack contains:

1. PRACTICAL EXERCISES TO HELP STUDENTS IN SETTING UP, RUNNING AND EVALUATING A STUDENT COUNCIL.
2. TEMPLATES OF DOCUMENTS THAT CAN BE USED TO SET UP AND RUN A STUDENT COUNCIL.
3. INFORMATION THAT WILL BE USEFUL IN SETTING UP AND RUNNING A STUDENT COUNCIL.
4. EXAMPLES OF STUDENT COUNCILS THAT ARE MODELS OF GOOD PRACTICE.

The Resource Pack can be used by students, teachers, school management and others interested in establishing or improving a student council. Students can use the pack with or without the assistance of a teacher. Most of the practical exercises take 30-40 minutes to complete and need someone to lead or facilitate. The leader or facilitator can be a teacher, a former member of the student council, an experienced member of the student council, a senior student or a parent. Students can choose to use the templates provided in the pack or design their own.

Examples of schools with student councils that are working well are included in the pack. These are taken from the 2005 report by the Children's Research Centre, entitled *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland – A Study of Enablers, Barriers and Supports.* It is important to note that each example is quite different and schools using this pack are recommended to design a student council that is suitable for their own school, using appropriate aspects of the examples given.

The Resource Pack is divided into 12 sections addressing different aspects of student councils. Some areas of the pack are more relevant to junior cycle students, while others are more relevant to the senior level. Since schools are at different stages of development, it is not necessary for every school to work through each section. Schools are encouraged to select those areas of the pack that are most useful to them and to work through those exercises and documents.

This Resource Pack is available on CD so that practical exercises and templates can be downloaded for easy use. The pack can also be found on the following websites:
- www.studentcouncil.ie
- www.education.ie
- www.scoilnet.ie
- www.nco.ie

2. SETTING THE SCENE FOR STUDENT COUNCILS

INTRODUCTION

This section provides some background information on citizenship, participation by children and young people, and some of the relevant Government policy and legislation. It also includes some practical exercises to demonstrate these issues.

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) is a core subject in the Junior Cycle curriculum. The course aims to educate students about, for and through citizenship by encouraging and developing the practical skills needed in order to engage in active, participatory social interaction and to adopt responsible roles within a democratic society. *Rights and Responsibilities* and *Democracy* are two of the key concepts explored in the course.

Among the features of the CSPE course is the promotion of the active engagement of students in their own learning. There are two key approaches to enable students to *learn by doing* – the use of active learning/teaching methods in the classroom and the undertaking of Action Projects. Student councils give young people a chance to become active citizens in their school community, with real opportunities to experience citizenship for themselves.

EDUCATION ACT, 1998

The Education Act, 1998 provides for the education of every person in the State, including any person with a disability or who has other special educational needs. It also ensures that the education system respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and that it is conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers, other school staff and the community.

Section 27 of the Education Act states that 'students of a post-primary school may establish a student council and that the board of management of the school will encourage and assist the establishment and operation of student councils' (*see Appendix 1*).

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UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Ireland in 1992. It gives children and young people rights on a wide range of issues, including:
- the right to an education;
- the right to be free from violence, exploitation and abuse;
- the right to have food and shelter;
- the right to play;
- the right to have their voice heard on issues which affect them (Section 12).

THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STRATEGY

The National Children's Strategy, published in November 2000, aims to improve the lives of all children and young people under the age of 18. There are three goals in the Strategy:
- GOAL 1: Children and young people will be given a voice in matters which affect them.
- GOAL 2: Research will be undertaken to understand children's lives.
- GOAL 3: Children and young people will receive the relevant supports and services.

Goal 1 means that students should be given the opportunity to participate in society and this includes being given a voice in their schools. This is Government policy. Student councils are an ideal way to give students a voice in their schools.

ACTIVITY

2.1 CITIZENS OF IRELAND AND THE WORLD

Information

Ireland is a democracy, with a democratically elected government. As citizens of the country, we have rights and responsibilities. Similarly in schools, everyone has rights and responsibilities. This activity looks at the links between the rights and responsibilities of citizens in order to set the scene for looking at the rights and responsibilities of everyone in schools and the establishment of a student council, which will have not only rights but also responsibilities.

Instructions

- Leader speaks about citizenship being the link between our rights and responsibilities. As a citizen:
  - We expect those around us to give us our rights.
  - Other people expect us to carry out our responsibilities.

> **FOR EXAMPLE: If you have the right to be safe crossing the road, you also have the responsibility to cross the road safely, e.g. in a safe place.**

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- Leader asks main group to identify their rights, e.g. education, safety, health.

- Divide into smaller groups and each group takes one or more rights. Each group identifies for their rights:
  - Who is responsible for providing that right?
  - What are our responsibilities?

> **FOR EXAMPLE:**
>
> **Our right:** Good healthcare
>
> **Who is responsible:** Government is responsible for providing hospitals; doctors and nurses have the responsibility for looking after us if we are sick, etc.
>
> **What are our responsibilities:** We have the responsibility to look after our own health by eating properly, exercising, etc.

- Feedback from small groups to the main group and discuss.

ACTIVITY

2.2 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Information

This activity focuses on the education system. It aims to get students to think about all the people who are involved in the education system and what their role is. This includes the role of the student. This activity aims to provide background information to students before they start looking at the role of their student council.

Materials

Handout 2.3.

Instructions

- Discuss Handout 2.3: Who is involved in the education system?

- Break into smaller groups to discuss the role and function of each person or group of people involved in the education system.

- Discuss how these people or groups link to each other and who consults whom and about what. Who has the power?

- Feedback from small groups to the main group and discuss.

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2.3 WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

PARENTS

LOCAL COMMUNITY

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

STUDENTS

PRINCIPAL

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

CLASS TEACHERS

YEAR TEACHERS

STUDENT COUNCIL LIAISON TEACHER

SUBJECT TEACHERS

SUPPORT STAFF

OTHERS

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ACTIVITY

2.4 CITIZENS OF THE SCHOOL

Information

This activity follows on from Activity 2.1 (Citizens of Ireland and the world) and Activity 2.2 (The education system). Having looked at the rights and responsibilities of citizens of Ireland and the world, and who is involved in the education system, the students can now discuss the rights and responsibilities of everyone in the school. This activity aims to set the scene for establishing a student council, which respects the rights and responsibilities of everyone in the school.

Instructions

- The full group lists who are the relevant people when talking about rights and responsibilities in school (e.g. students, teachers, principal, board of management, parents, other staff, etc).

- Break into small groups and each group takes one of the people and lists their rights and responsibilities (e.g. respect, clean classrooms, proper equipment, nice food, safety, etc).

- For each of the rights and responsibilities, decide if the student council should be involved and how it should be involved.

- Feedback from small groups to the main group and discuss.

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ACTIVITY

2.5 PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY – POST YOUR IDEAS

Information
This activity focuses on participation of all young people in a group. It provides a framework to get information and ideas from a large number of students.

Materials
Different coloured Post-Its, pens or markers.

Instructions
- Divide into groups. Each group is provided with Post-Its and pens or markers.
- Write the question to be discussed on a whiteboard, e.g. Why do we want to set up a student council? What would make a good student council? What aspects of school would we like to get involved in?
- Ask each group to write/draw their ideas onto Post-Its – one idea per Post-It – and get as many ideas as the group can come up with.
- The facilitator collects the Post-Its as soon as they have been written/drawn and sticks them onto the whiteboard, grouping similar ideas together.
- Once the ideas are all displayed, students are invited to view the Post-It gallery to see all of the ideas they have generated.

Benefits
This activity allows every student to have a say without having to voice an idea in front of the whole group. Putting similar ideas together makes the shared ideas stand out. You can follow up with a particular group by noting the colour of the Post-Its. Any ideas can be easily moved around the board.

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3. THE ROLE OF STUDENT COUNCILS

INTRODUCTION

This section provides some practical exercises on why schools should have a student council and the role of student councils.

WHY HAVE A STUDENT COUNCIL?

Student councils give students the opportunity to be actively involved in the school. This is of benefit to the whole school community.

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* identified the following advantages to having a student council:

- creates a positive school atmosphere;
- creates a caring school environment, which is supportive and inclusive;
- a vehicle for student participation;
- beneficial impact on issues such as discipline, bullying and staff-student relations;
- creates educational opportunities for students;
- provides an interactive learning environment;
- students can develop communication and leadership skills, responsibility and accountability;
- valuable resource to management, teachers and other students.

WHAT IS A STUDENT COUNCIL AND WHAT IS ITS ROLE?

The Working Group on Student Councils in Second-level Schools has defined a student council as follows:

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> **A student council is a representative structure for students only, through which they can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management, staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students.**

Each student council will decide on its own role and what activities it will carry out, in accordance with the rules laid down by the board of management. It is important that students, teachers, principal, board of management and other staff are clear what the role of the student council is. It is useful for the student council to look at its role each year and amend it if necessary.

3.1 ADVANTAGES OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL IN THREE SCHOOLS

The following advantages of having a student council were identified in the 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland.*

SCHOOL A

Supports and smoothes day-to-day running of the school

The student council helps to keep the day-to-day running of the school smooth and can help make the school a more pleasant place to be for students. As one student put it:

> 'It can help sort out problems that someone might encounter every day coming to school. Even just being able to buy a drink downstairs … It helps the students.'

Representing the school

The Principal described how the student council represented the school. For example, when the Lord Mayor came to visit the school, he was welcomed by the Head Girl and the student council members.

Learning experience for both students and staff

Having a student council provides many opportunities for learning for students and staff. They learn that they must compromise and that there is a process through which decisions must be made. The election process gives the students experience of voting. They learn how to vote and that they can spoil their vote (e.g. by writing a comment on their ballot paper). As the liaison teacher put it:

> 'It's a fantastic introduction to democracy for them.'

Members of the student body also learn responsibility. For example, if a student requests something, he or she is urged by their prefect to do some more research on it before it is brought before the council. Similarly, one issue that constantly arises is the state of the cloakrooms. The council brings this back to the students because it is their responsibility to keep the cloakrooms and toilets tidy.

The council members have learned how to lobby. The students must fully prepare their arguments and have all the answers ready – have their market research done, know how many people wanted it, how it could be done, when it could be done, etc.

Council members talked about what they have learned from being on the council:

> 'It teaches negotiation … that if there's a problem you can solve it in some way. Compromising … not everything, but there are things where you can meet half way.'

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Provides opportunities to unite the student body

The council also provides opportunities for students to get to know each other. If they did not have a council:

> 'Students might not meet people from other classes, but in the council we actually meet together.'

Having a council makes students feel that they are supported and have 'somebody behind them':

> 'As a group of students, you can make a change if you want to.'

Whether it works or not, it's the process that is important

Although having an effective student council is time-consuming, everyone learns from the process of consultation and negotiations – and from trial and error. An example of how the process is important is the history of acquiring two vending machines for the students, one to provide drinks and the other chocolate bars. The process involved the student council doing their market research on the price of vending machines, where they would get them, where they would put them in the school, etc. This was one of the occasions where members of the council addressed a staff meeting with their request. They presented their arguments and provided the staff with handouts. They made suggestions about where the machines could be plugged in, what happens if 400 girls want to get a drink or bar of chocolate at the same time, etc.

The liaison teacher described how there was absolute silence among the staff when the three council members left the staff room. Then somebody said, 'We have to give them a chance. They've worked so hard at it'. So the vending machines came in on trial and members of the council would take it in turn to keep order during break-times. It worked out very well at first; however, the chocolate machine has now been sent back because the level of litter in the school increased and also students were eating chocolate all the time. It began to cause disruption. There has not been any negative reaction from the student body to it being returned. As one teacher put it:

> 'Only last week some of the students were telling me that they felt much happier now that the chocolate machine was gone. They're now eating fruit again ... They'd never have come to that realisation if they hadn't been given a chance to experience it themselves.'

SCHOOL B

Professionalism

The Principal felt that the student council lends to the professionalism within the school. The meetings are properly run and the Chairperson and Secretary are 'as good as you'd find anywhere'.

As the Principal said:

'I think the student council at the moment is very professional and it's run on a professional basis, and anything that's done on that level will add to the quality of professionalism around the school and that adds to the quality of academic performance … it adds to the tone … doing the work and getting on in life and looking forward to going to college.'

The council's involvement in policy-making also contributes to developing good practice in the school. For example, the council's involvement in setting up the anti-bullying committee and consultation on substance abuse policy were both very helpful. As one council member put it:

'Yeah, management might have an idea like, but if they didn't consult us, they could go wrong. We could have a better outlook on it than them.'

Although the council has been consulted to a certain extent regarding school policies, the Principal stated that he would like to see student consultation becoming standard practice, 'even if this means taking risks and making mistakes along the way'.

Giving students a voice

There was a general perception in the school that having a council gives the students a sense of worth. As one student put it, the aim of the council is:

'To give students a voice, rather than have the teachers make a decision for us that's not going to affect them, so they don't know what we want.'

The presence of a student council in the school certainly adds to a positive atmosphere. The Principal talked about how it is encouraging to work with students who are very positive about the school and 'stand up for it in a nice, pleasant way'. A council improves relationships between students and staff and between students themselves. As one student put it:

'We let people know what's going on because if there was nobody there doing that, half the people in the school wouldn't have a clue what's going on. You hear people going around complaining about stuff that's wrong, but unless you have someone to go forward …'

Particularly in this school, where overcrowding is a problem, it is essential that there is a cooperative spirit in the school. The Principal felt that 'you can't run a school on a controlling basis anymore. You couldn't control 770 fellas'.

Particular benefits for students on the council

Council members talked about their experience of being on the council and what they have learned from it. They talked about how they felt that they were appreciated by management and were listened to:

> 'You get more involved and you realise how things work.'
>
> 'You realise things take time and that. It's good to know all the issues and what's going on.'
>
> 'You wouldn't be shy about approaching people after it!'
>
> 'You learn how to go through procedures and elect people and do things properly.'

The Principal felt that it was particularly beneficial for some students who otherwise may not participate in school:

> 'I think it's great for some people who might never find their way through, they won't be academic in a very strong way … some extraordinarily good people come through the council and it was their only way of being good in school and doing things in the student council.'

SCHOOL C

Rewarding for council members

Council members talked about how being on the student council was a rewarding experience, as well as being 'good craic':

> 'It's great like after working so hard on something and it's just been successful.'

Members also talked about how being on the council is a good learning experience:

> 'We learn a lot of people skills anyway… it teaches you how to talk things out especially.'

The Principal also discussed how sitting on the student council has many benefits for individual students. In terms of their academic results, she feels that many council members perform better because it helps them realise their potential not only as individuals, but in the classroom as well:

> 'They have greater responsibility, their sense of responsibility for themselves, it's that whole business of making them aware of their potential. That is a role of the student council. Being on the student council makes them aware of their potential.'

Improving school environment

Students talked about how the council has been involved in improving the school facilities and making the school a more pleasant environment. There are vending machines, benches for students to sit on, the uniform has changed and the toilets are more pleasant. As well as being involved in developing the anti-bullying policy, the council will also be involved in developing and implementing the health and safety policies. The liaison teacher described how:

‘The council members themselves are very observant; they know what's going on – litter problems, graffiti problems, toilets – and they address these issues.’

Another way that the council has been integral to improving the school environment is that it improves the quality of communication in general within the school. The council provides a voice for the students and gives students a chance to have their say. Through the council, senior management and staff can be kept informed about the views and needs of the student body.

Improving staff/student relationships

The Principal described how the council has improved staff/student relations, especially with council members:

‘One of the greatest benefits for me as Principal of having such an active student council is the shift in relationship between staff and students. The staff treat the student council more as equals; there's a mutual respect there that may not always be evident in their other meetings with students. Because the students are meeting them head on, it's very much "these are issues we're trying to work out together".’

The positive relationships between staff and student council members does permeate through to the student body in general.

‘Students enjoy having that kind of easy relationship with staff and they aspire to that.’

The liaison teacher also described how some members of staff make good use of the council by asking for their help in carrying out different projects.

ACTIVITY

3.2 WHY THIS SCHOOL SHOULD HAVE A STUDENT COUNCIL

Information

This activity looks at why the school should have a student council. It is a useful exercise for students, staff and boards of management to carry out on a regular basis. It may also be useful for a group of students, staff and representatives from the board of management to do this exercise together and try to reach consensus. It is important for everyone in the school to know why the school should have a student council and, once this has been identified, students, staff and boards of management can then begin to look at the role of the student council.

Instructions

The participants should form small groups and discuss why the school should have a student council.

Here are some reasons that might be relevant for your school:
- to create a positive school atmosphere;
- to allow students to participate more fully in the school;
- to support and include students;
- to help school discipline;
- to improve staff-student relations;
- to create educational opportunities for students;
- to provide a better learning environment;
- to help students develop important life skills through initiating projects and solving problems;
- to help students develop communication and leadership skills, responsibility and accountability;
- to develop a genuine partnership between staff and students;
- to show respect for the views of students.

Have an open discussion on the issues raised.

ACTIVITY

3.3 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL?

Information
This activity looks at the role of the student council. It follows on from establishing why your school should have a student council. It is a useful exercise for students, staff and boards of management to carry out on a regular basis. It is important for everyone in the school to know what the role of the student council is. It is vital for an effective student council that everyone has a shared understanding of what the role is. It would be useful for a group of students, staff and representatives from the board of management to do this exercise together and reach consensus on the role of the student council in the school.

Materials
Handout 3.4.

Instructions
- Divide into small groups. Each group should have a short discussion about what should be the role of the student council.

- Discuss each of the roles listed in Handout 3.4: Role of the student council. Should your student council adopt any of these roles?

- Feedback from small groups to main group.

- Agree the role of the student council arising from your discussion.

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3.4 ROLE OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL

The following possible roles for the student council were identified in the 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland*. Some of these roles may be suitable for your school.

Listening to students

A student council can listen to the views, opinions and ideas of all students in the school.

Representing students' views

A student council can represent students' views and it can be a forum for students' concerns to be addressed. It can also air students' difficulties, on behalf of individuals or groups, which might not otherwise come to light. It can bring the views and concerns of students forward to management and teachers in a diplomatic way.

A consultative body

A student council could have a consultative role. Students could be consulted prior to implementation of new school policies, e.g. uniform, drugs, bullying, games, sports and activities. This would be useful in terms of collaboration and all-inclusive orientation.

Contribution to developing policy

A student council can contribute to the development of school policies, including the development of school rules. It can have a say in the running of the school.

Providers of information

A student council could provide management with information. It could alert management to student concerns of which they might not be aware and also provide management with ideas and solutions to problems that students have, e.g. peer pressure, bullying, etc.

A resource

A student council can be a resource similar to the parents' association and can work in tandem with the management.

A communication channel

A student council can be a vital channel of communication in the school. It can provide management with information about the opinions of the student body and can also give feedback to the student body from management. It can provide a link between the students and the management, teachers and non-teaching staff.

Peer support

A student council can act as a peer support group. It can provide support on a confidential basis for students with problems, e.g. personal, social or teacher/student relationships.

An educational opportunity

A student council can be a learning tool. Students can learn to think critically through involvement with the student council.

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Improving school atmosphere

A student council can create a positive school atmosphere by providing students with a sense of ownership of their school. It can make school more pleasant and fun.

Establishing links with the wider community

A student council can establish links with the wider community.

Bullying

A student council can have a role to play in dealing with bullying within the school.

School social issues

A student council can ensure that there is equality of treatment between boys and girls, and senior and junior cycle students.

Improving student/teacher relationships

A student council can improve student/teacher relationships.

Improving school conditions for students

A student council can improve the day-to-day conditions for students, e.g. school uniform, food, drinks, toilets, breaks, etc.

Improving school facilities

A student council can have a role in improving school facilities, e.g. lockers, benches or seating areas for break-times, sports facilities, better school equipment (e.g. AV equipment, tape recorders), school décor (e.g. brighter walls, fixing the heating system, making the school accessible for students with disabilities).

Improving the learning environment

A student council can help to improve the learning environment by achieving a good school environment suitable for all staff and pupils to work to their maximum ability.

Raising students' awareness of 'bigger' issues

A student council can raise students' awareness of social issues, such as poverty, the environment, health and peer pressure.

A partnership

A student council can be a partner with management, staff and parents in running the school.

ACTIVITY

3.5 STUDENT COUNCIL WORD SEARCH

Information

This word search may be suitable for junior cycle students. It will introduce them to some of the words associated with a student council. The role and functions of a student council should be explained to them before they do this puzzle.

Instructions

Find the following words hidden in the puzzle (words can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal, and they can be spelt backwards or forwards):

COMMUNICATION	ELECTION	OPINIONS
LEADERSHIP	TEAMWORK	MOTIVATION
INDEPENDENCE	AIMS	GOALS
COOPERATION	ACTION	AGREEMENTS
STUDENT COUNCIL	IDEAS	COMPROMISES

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U S S R M O T I V A T I O N N I A P L O
T O T F G Y V I K M W A S D A L G P L M
I C O U C P L E A D E R S H I P R A D O
U K D I D R F V S Z W K J J M C E Q I A
I M M O D E L E C T I O N L S I E F G J
O S X W D A N C Y U E G Y U J N M S D F
Y B K I N D E T E N D A N C C B E K Y T
B N T E E A B I C C H J M H L P N B U D
G O A L S O D A O O G H T W I F T A Y V
L I B H L I W Z O G U E T U O Y S C B O
U T C O M N U N P G I N O X N R U T S G
T A E D C Q A Z E L U J C L A V K I N U
G C P A M P L E R I T I P I F W L O O E
B I G H A S P M A O B E D S L G I N I P
I N I F G J I O T I Y E S W E A M U N L
K U U T V N Y U I L A X E M U R D E I K
B M Z I E O F S O S I K O B C D E R P J
H M S W E R F S N S E S I M O R P M O C
T O R K L O B E E Z X Y H J U I O X C A
E C N E D N E P E D N I C H A I P O E T
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4. SETTING UP A STUDENT COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

This section shows you how to set up a student council.

HOW DO I SET UP A STUDENT COUNCIL?

1. Gather support for the establishment of a student council from as many people as possible – students, teachers, parents, management and other staff.

2. Read the 2002 guidelines from the Department of Education and Science, entitled *Student Councils: A voice for students* (available on **www.studentcouncil.ie**) and other relevant publications *(see Appendix 2).*

3. Tell the Principal of the school that you want to set up a student council in accordance with Section 27 of the Education Act, 1998 *(see Appendix 1).*

4. Request a copy of the rules for the establishment of a student council from your school's board of management. While the board of management is not obliged to consult students when drawing up these rules, it is preferable that students are consulted, as well as teachers and parents, since this will ensure a more effective student council.

5. Examine why you want a student council and what its role should be *(see Section 3).*

6. Agree the size and structure of the student council *(see Section 6).*

7. Organise and run elections *(see Section 7).*

8. Arrange training for members of the student council *(see Section 8).*

9. Arrange the first meeting of the student council *(see Section 9).*

10. Write the Constitution of the student council *(see Section 9).*

11. Elect the officers of the student council *(see Section 9).*

12. Agree the activities of the student council *(see Section 10).*

13. Put in place effective communication systems *(see Section 11).*

5. EVALUATING AND IMPROVING YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

This section looks at how you can evaluate and improve your existing student council.

HOW DO I IMPROVE THE STUDENT COUNCIL IN MY SCHOOL?

1. Ask all students (both council members and non-council members) and teachers, management and other relevant groups to complete Template 5.1: Student council evaluation. Look at the answers to this evaluation and identify any areas where the student council should be improved.

2. Ask student council members to complete Template 5.2: Student council – self-evaluation at the end of the year. Look at the answers and identify any areas where the work of the student council should be improved.

3. Examine all the areas for improvement and prioritise them. Be realistic – it may not be possible to fix everything at the same time.

4. Use the relevant sections of this Resource Pack to get information on how to improve the problem areas.

5. If necessary, read the 2002 guidelines from the Department of Education and Science, entitled *Student Councils: A voice for students* (available on **www.studentcouncil.ie**) and other relevant publications *(see Appendix 2)* for further information.

6. A realistic plan should be put together on how to address the problems with the student council. Back up the plan with the benefits of the new arrangements and other material, such as extracts from this resource pack, the 2002 guidelines from the Department of Education and Science, and the 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* (all available on www.studentcouncil.ie).

7. Discuss the plan with the student council liaison teacher.

8. Arrange a meeting with the Principal. Present your plan, with the supporting documents. Get the agreement of the Principal to the requested changes.

9. Make the changes to your student council.

10. Evaluate your student council every year and make any necessary changes to improve it.

5.1 STUDENT COUNCIL EVALUATION

This evaluation should be completed by student council members, students who are not members of the student council, the student council liaison teacher, other teachers, parents and members of the board of management. The answers to the evaluation should be used to identify areas for improvement to the student council.

Role of the student council
- Is the role of the student council clear?
- Do students, staff and management agree on the role of the student council?
- Does the student council fulfil its role?

Recognition for student council
- Is the student council considered an important part of the school by everyone?
- Is the student council consulted on issues which affect students?
- Is the student council involved in decision-making on issues that really matter?
- Are the views of the student council taken seriously?
- When the student council puts forward a proposal or asks for something, is the matter given proper consideration?
- If the Principal/board of management does not agree to a proposal/request by the student council, are valid reasons given?

Student council profile
- Do students know that they have a student council and what it does?
- Do students know who their representative on the student council is?
- Do teachers know that there is a student council and what it does?
- Does the Principal know that there is a student council and what it does?
- Does the board of management know that there is a student council and what it does?
- Does the parents' council know that there is a student council and what it does?

Student council structure
- Is the student council representative of all students in the school?
- Is the student council made up of students only?
- Is there a definite structure for the student council?
- Is the student council easy to operate, i.e. not too many or too few members?
- Is it easy for a student to get access to a student council member to discuss issues?

Elections
- Is an election held to elect the student council members?
- Is this a democratic process?
- Can only students vote in the election?
- Does every student in the school have one vote only?
- Is the election procedure agreed in advance?
- Are all students aware of how and where voting will take place?
- Is voting by secret ballot?
- Is the counting of votes carried out in a clear and transparent manner?
- Is the system for nominating students for election fair?

Operating the student council

- Does the student council have a Constitution that is easy to use?
- Are the posts of the student council officers filled, e.g. Chairperson, Secretary, etc?
- Are the roles of the student council officers clear?
- Are the posts of the student council officers filled in a democratic manner?
- Are there effective sub-committees?
- Does the student council work well together as a team?

Student council meetings

- Are student council meetings held regularly?
- Is there a good attendance at the meetings?
- Are there ground rules for meetings and are they adhered to?
- Do student council members get adequate notice of meetings?
- Is an agenda given in advance to all student council members?
- Are all the items on the agenda discussed at the meeting?
- Does everyone get a chance to speak at the meeting?
- Is there a fair process for reaching decisions?
- Are minutes taken at each meeting and do they reflect the discussion and decisions taken?
- Are the minutes circulated to all members of the student council and agreed at the next meeting?

What has the student council done

- Did the student council set out what it wanted to achieve during the year?
- Has the student council achieved its aims in the past year?
- Is there a good mix between doing things, asking for things and raising awareness?
- Are students, staff and management aware of the achievements of the student council?

Student council liaison teacher

- Is there a student council liaison teacher?
- Does everyone know who he or she is?
- Is the role of the student council liaison teacher clear?
- Is the student council liaison teacher an effective link between students, teachers and management?

The student council and students

- Do the student council members understand their role?
- Is the student council seen as relevant to everyone in the school and representative of everyone in the school?
- Does the student council representative regularly tell the group that he or she represents what the student council is doing?
- Can students give suggestions/ideas/problems to the student council and are they looked at and given an answer?
- Is there a student council suggestions box?
- Is there a student council noticeboard?
- Is there a student council newsletter or website?
- Is there a student council Annual General Meeting which may be attended by all students?
- Are students supportive of their student council?

The student council and teachers

- Does the student council liaison teacher update other teachers about the student council?
- Do members of the student council address staff meetings to update teachers on issues?
- Can student council members meet teachers and other staff for advice and support on issues?
- Are the teachers supportive of the student council?

The student council and management

- Does the student council meet the Principal regularly to provide updates on its activities and to agree issues?
- Can the student council put issues on the agenda for meetings of the school's board of management and are these issues discussed fairly?
- Does the student council provide updates to the board of management on its activities and plans on a regular basis?
- Does the board of management provide information to the student council on issues which affect students?
- Does the student council ever invite the Principal and members of the board of management to attend meetings?
- Is the Principal supportive of the student council?
- Is the board of management supportive of the student council?

The student council and parents

- Do the student council and parents' council meet regularly to update each other on their activities and plans?
- Is the parents' council supportive of the student council?

Training

- Is training provided for all officers of the student council?
- Is training provided for all members of the student council?
- Is training provided for the student council liaison teacher?

Resources

- Has the student council got a budget?
- Has the student council got access to resources, e.g. computers, photocopiers, etc?

5.2 STUDENT COUNCIL – SELF-EVALUATION

This evaluation form should be completed by the student council members at the end of the year. It is a way of evaluating the work of the student council and identifying areas for improvement, if any, for the following year. The student council should examine its work plan when carrying out this evaluation.

What did we achieve during the year? _____
_____
_____
_____

What helped us to achieve the above? _____
_____
_____
_____

What did we not achieve during the year? _____
_____
_____
_____

Why didn't we achieve it? _____
_____
_____
_____

What can we do to try to achieve these issues in the future? _____
_____
_____
_____

What was the most memorable moment during the year? _____
_____
_____
_____

What lessons did we learn during the year that could help a future student council?
_____
_____
_____

What issues would we like a future student council to address? _____
_____
_____
_____

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6. STUDENT COUNCIL STRUCTURES

INTRODUCTION

This section provides some practical exercises on deciding about the appropriate size and structure of the student council.

WHO IS ON THE STUDENT COUNCIL?

- Only students should be members of the student council.
- The student council must be representative of all students in the school, but it should not be so big that it cannot operate effectively.
- The composition of the student council and the procedures for electing members will usually depend on the size of the school (*see* Handouts 6.3 and 6.4 for the different models).
- Some schools do not have 1st year students on their student council and they are represented on the council by senior students. It is preferable that 1st year students are included as members of the student council.

OFFICERS

- The student council should appoint officers to run an effective council.
- The suggested officers are Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Public Relations/Communications Officer.
- Job descriptions, tips and skills for these roles are given in Section 9 (*see* Handouts 9.6, 9.7, 9.8 and 9.10).

STUDENT COUNCIL LIAISON TEACHER

- A liaison teacher will normally be appointed to assist the student council.
- The role of the liaison teacher is outlined in Handout 6.5.

ACTIVITY

6.1 STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL

Information
This activity looks at how the voice of the student can be heard in your school. This activity starts the process of looking at the best structure for the student council in your school.

Instructions
- Divide students into small groups.
- Some of the places where students can get their voice heard in the school are at:
  - Class meetings
  - Year meetings/councils
  - Student council
  - Sub-committee of student council
  - Year head meetings
  - Staff meetings
  - Parents' council
  - Board of management meetings
- Discuss:
  - How can students get their voice heard in each of these structures?
  - Which of these structures are best for students to get their voice heard in your school?
- Feedback from small groups to main group and discuss.

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6.2 DESIGN THE STUDENT COUNCIL STRUCTURE FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Information

This activity will help to identify the most appropriate structure for the student council in your school. It can be used to set up a new council or to change and improve the structure of your existing council to make it more efficient. The student council can have many different structures. The most appropriate structure for your school will depend on the size of the school and what you think will work in your school.

Materials

Handouts 6.3 and 6.4.

Instructions

- Look at the following two handouts:
    - Handout 6.3: Sample structures of student councils
    - Handout 6.4: Student council structure in three schools

- Identify which structures might be appropriate for your school.

- Identify the advantages and disadvantages of each of the identified structures.

- Design the student council structure in your school.

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6.3 SAMPLE STRUCTURES OF STUDENT COUNCILS

This section outlines different models of student councils. You should select the most appropriate model for your school. The models can be combined or a completely different model can be designed which will suit your school better. However, whichever model is chosen, it should *represent all students* in the school and it should be *democratic.*

MODEL 1 – SMALL SCHOOL

Number of Year groups: 6 (1st to 6th year)

Number of Classes: 6 (one class in each year)

Representatives: 2 representatives from each class

Student Council: 12 members

MODEL 2 – MEDIUM-SIZED SCHOOL

Number of Year groups: 6 (1st to 6th year)

Number of Classes: 18 (3 classes in each year)

Representatives: One representative from each class

Student Council: 18 members

MODEL 3 – LARGE SCHOOL

Number of Year groups: 6 (1st to 6th year)

Number of Classes: 36 (6 classes in each year)

Representatives: One representative from each class elected. Each year then elects 3 representatives to the student council from the 6 elected for their year.

Student Council: 18 members

MODEL 4 – LARGE SCHOOL

Number of Year groups: 6 (1st to 6th year)

Number of Classes: 36 (6 classes in each year)

Representatives: One representative from each class elected

Student Council: A junior student council and a senior student council is formed, each comprising 18 members. The two student councils look at the same issues. Five members of each student council meet regularly to agree the issues to be examined and to divide the work.

MODEL 5 – LARGE SCHOOL

Number of Year groups: 6 (1st to 6th year)

Number of Classes: 36 (6 classes in each year)

Representatives: One representative from each class elected

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Student Council:	36 members. A steering group of 6 members is formed, comprising one member of each year. This steering group oversees and directs the work of the main student council. This group meets more regularly than the main group. The main group is divided into sub-committees to work on different activities.

MODEL 6 – LARGE SCHOOL

Number of Year groups:	6 (1st to 6th year)
Number of Classes:	36 (6 classes in each year)
Representatives:	2 representatives from each class elected
Student Council:	6 year councils formed, each having 12 members. The year councils meet on a regular basis to discuss issues related to their year and the school. Two members from each year council form the student council. The student council oversees the work of each year council and selects common themes for discussion and action. Sub-committees are also formed on different activities/issues.

CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS

In co-educational schools, there should be an appropriate balance of males and females on the student council. This can be done by nominating equal numbers of males and females from each class or year to the student council or by adding additional students onto the council once it has been set up.

6.4 STUDENT COUNCIL STRUCTURE IN THREE SCHOOLS

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. The structure of the student council in each of these schools is detailed below.

SCHOOL A

School A is a medium-sized voluntary secondary girls' school with approximately 450 students and 37 teachers. The student council is the only student body within the school. The student council members are known as prefects and all wear 'prefect' badges. In this school, the student council is considered part and parcel of the school.

The student council is made up of 36 members, including the Head Girl. Each class has a prefect and a vice-prefect to represent them. To ensure that the junior cycle students are properly represented, each junior cycle class has a prefect from senior cycle who provides support to the class prefects and the class. This support system is overseen by the liaison officer.

To make the council more workable, there is a Senior Executive Council made up of the senior prefects and the Head Girl. Reservations were expressed about the fact that only senior cycle students were involved. The council is considering whether the Executive Council should be elected from within the council.

The Head Girl chairs the council and also acts as Communications Officer. Other officers on the council include a Secretary, Public Relations Officer, Treasurer, Attendance Officer and Liaison Officer, all of whom are elected from within the Senior Executive Council at their first meeting each new school year.

SCHOOL B

School B is a large voluntary secondary boys' school with 770 students, 53 teachers and a school counsellor. There are three student bodies working within the school – the student council, a prefect system and Meitheal. The prefect system consists of 20 6th year students who are selected through an application and interview process. The prefects take responsibility for the lockers and the shop; they also produce a newsletter every two weeks. Meitheal is a buddy system for 1st year students provided by 6th year students.

The student council is made up of 13 members. Two student representatives are elected from each year group from 2nd to 6th year. Two Meitheal representatives stand for the 1st year students. There is also a prefect representative. Officers on the council include a Chairperson, Secretary, Public Relations Officer and Delegation Officer (liaises with the school Principal), all of whom are elected from within the council after they have had their training weekend. As the elections are held in May, there are no 1st years on the council. Consideration had been given to electing 1st year representatives in October; however, it was felt that this would delay the training of the council. Also, since the representatives are elected from the year group, 1st year students would not know each other very well.

SCHOOL C

School C is a large co-educational community school with approximately 960 students and 63 teachers. There are two student representative bodies within the school – a class representative system and the student council. Each class elects two representatives, who are called 'class reps'. These representatives are responsible for practical day-to-day issues; for example, they call the roll, collect money from students when necessary, deal with issues students may raise and liaise with the class tutor and Year Head.

The student council was established, in its current format, in 2001. The council has its own office, bank account, letterhead and e-mail address. Currently, there are 24 students on the student council – 12 from junior cycle and 12 from senior cycle. Council members remain on the council for as long as they wish. If a council member resigns or leaves the school, then the position is advertised and filled through an interview process. This means that there are always experienced members on the council, which provides continuity from year to year. New council members are also trained in by experienced members. This structure was agreed by the council when it was formally established.

There are many officers on the council, including a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer, Public Relations Officer, Anti-bullying Officer and Office Manager. In addition, there are a number of 'special officers' who are elected within the council to take responsibility for ongoing issues; for example, there is an Anti-bullying Officer, a Vending Machine Officer, a Mentoring Coordinator and a 'Battle of the Bands' Coordinator.

The structure of the student council changed about three years ago. There had been a junior and a senior council, which would take responsibility for issues raised by junior cycle and senior cycle students, respectively. The junior and senior council would convene once a week. However, it was argued that the council was too big using this format. Now, there is only one council with a maximum of 24 members. The council members described this as being more efficient and manageable.

6.5 ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL LIAISON TEACHER

The main role of the student council liaison teacher is:

- to promote the interests of the student council;
- to assist and advise the student council;
- to be the link between students and teachers and management.

The main responsibilities of the student council liaison teacher include:

- Attending student council meetings and providing guidance, advice and information if requested.
- Providing training and team development activities for the student council.
- Assisting the student council in liaising with management.
- Liaising between the student council and staff by putting student council issues on the agenda at staff meetings.
- Encouraging staff to invite members of the student council to attend staff meetings and encouraging the student council to invite staff members to its meetings.
- Helping to raise the profile of the student council.
- Helping to ensure the student council becomes part of the structure of the school and that it is involved in all aspects of school life.
- Ensuring that student council issues are on the agenda at board of management meetings.
- Monitoring and evaluating the development of the student council with student members.

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7. ELECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

This section includes practical exercises and handouts on electing representatives to the student council. It also includes some useful templates.

ELECTING REPRESENTATIVES

There are many ways to elect students to the student council and this will be influenced by the structure of the student council *(see Section 6).* However, the following rules should apply in any election:

- The student council is equally representative of all students in the school.
- Only students can be elected to the student council.
- Only students can vote in the election.
- Every student in the school has one vote.
- The election procedure is agreed in advance.
- All students are aware of how and where voting will take place.
- Class time should be allocated for election, where possible.
- Voting is by secret ballot.
- Counting of votes is carried out by students under the supervision of a teacher or parent.

There are two kinds of voting system:

- **'first past the post'**, where each person votes for one candidate only and the candidate with the most votes is elected; the candidate with the second most votes is second, and so on;

- **proportional representation (PR),** where each voter ranks the candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3, etc) and the candidate who reaches the quota is elected.

  NOTE: PR is a more difficult way of electing candidates than the 'first past the post' system. Students and teachers should be certain that they understand how to count the votes properly before deciding to use the PR system (*see* Handout 7.7).

NOMINATIONS

It is good practice that students who want to be elected to the student council should be proposed by at least two other students. Written nomination forms should be submitted before the election. All students should be informed well in advance that nominations are being sought. Nomination forms should be freely available in the school.

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7.1 ELECTIONS IN THREE SCHOOLS

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. The election process in each of these schools is detailed below.

SCHOOL A

Election of student council members

Student council members are elected in September. Two students from each class are elected by their class through a secret ballot. The vote is facilitated by the class tutor. Each year, the liaison teacher puts up a notice in the staff room with suggestions about how the class tutors should facilitate the election. The class tutors are recommended to prepare students for voting over a period of sessions, beginning with discussion of what kind of characteristics a prefect should have. The students have to nominate and second students. Normally, there are 5 or 6 nominees from each class. At this stage, the nominees are told in detail about what is expected of them as a prefect and they must decide if they would be willing to commit. The students then vote in a secret ballot. The votes are counted by the class teacher; however, the students are given the option of requesting that another teacher assists with the counting of the votes. The student who gets the most votes becomes prefect and the second becomes vice-prefect.

Election and selection of Head Girl

The Head Girl is elected by the staff and students from 2nd year upwards. All students who put themselves forward for Head Girl must canvass for votes and also submit an application for the post to the Principal. All are interviewed by the liaison teacher and the Principal, usually the day before the election. They are rated on the basis of the interview. This rating is added to their rating attained in the election. The student with the highest rating becomes Head Girl. For the last number of years, the student selected through the interview process and the student with the most votes has been the same. It seems that the student body is becoming more experienced at voting for a suitable candidate. Originally only senior students voted for Head Girl, but the 1st and 2nd year students began to lobby for a vote. The student council debated it and decided that 2nd year students should be given a vote, but not 1st year students. Every year, the 1st year students lobby to be allowed to vote and every year it is brought before the student council, which decides that they are not in the school long enough to vote.

SCHOOL B

The student council members are elected in May. Two students from 2nd to 6th year are elected by secret ballot within their year group (150 students). Before the election, council members speak at the year group assembly and explain to the students about the council and encourage them to think about joining. Students who are interested then fill out a nomination form. They have to be proposed by two of their year group and have the form signed by their form teacher. They must also write on the form what ideas they have for the council. Those who have not been on the council before are interviewed by 2 or 3 outgoing council members. The interview includes questions about why they want to join the council, what they would bring to it and whether they are prepared to commit. The liaison teacher is not on the interview panel, but moves in and out between the interview rooms.

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After the interview, the election takes place. One of the teachers interviewed felt that the students mostly seem to make wise choices and elect students whom they know will represent them. Representatives must sign a contract once they have been elected.

SCHOOL C

This student council is different to the other case studies because members of the council are selected by an application and interview process. When a position on the council becomes available, the post is advertised. They must fill in an application form, which is signed by their tutor. They are then interviewed. Interviews are carried out by 4 members of the council (2 junior, 2 senior, 2 boys, 2 girls) under the supervision of the liaison teacher. The liaison teacher does not ask any questions, but is present to ensure transparency. This is a vigorous process, which students take very seriously. Any student can apply to join the council regardless of what year they are in or their gender, although consideration is given to making sure each year is represented. The council considers it more important that prospective members are willing and committed. At the time of the research, one position on the council had become available and 14 students had applied for the post. This gives an indication of how many students aspire to sit on the council.

7.2 CLASS REPRESENTATIVE ON THE STUDENT COUNCIL

The responsibilities of the class representative
- As a class representative on the student council, your job is to listen to the views and ideas of your class and pass them on to the student council.
- You also have to let the class know what the student council is doing.

Representing the views of your class
- During class or other meetings, the students decide what issues they want you to take to the student council.
- Individual students in the class should also be able to ask you to raise issues if they do not want to speak in front of the class.
- Make clear notes at class meetings and take them with you to the student council meeting or give them to the council's secretary before the meeting so that they can be put on the agenda.
- You must report back to the class, as soon as possible after the meeting, on the issues raised at the student council and the decisions taken.

Reporting back to the class
- Read the notes of the meeting to the class and put them on the board for people to read.
- Answer questions from class members.

What makes a good representative?
- When choosing class representatives, it is important to think about who will do the job well and fairly. The election should not be a popularity contest.

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A class representative should have the following qualities:
- **Reliable:** Will you do everything you have promised to do? Will you remember to go to meetings? Will you report back to the class?
- **Fair:** Can you represent the views and ideas of your class clearly at council meetings, even if you don't agree with them? Will you give everyone in the class the same opportunity to give their opinions and will you value all views equally?
- **A good leader and negotiator:** Can you lead a group in a discussion, listen to everyone's point of view and give advice. Can you negotiate a compromise where there are different views and get agreement on the issues to be brought to the student council?
- **A good listener:** Can you listen to everyone's point of view and summarise the issues?
- **A good speaker:** Can you speak clearly and concisely to get your point across and take an active part in discussions?
- **Accurate and efficient:** Will you make accurate notes at class and student council meetings? Will you report the ideas and views of the class accurately to the student council and report back from the student council to your class? Will you keep accurate records and not lose important documents?
- **Trustworthy:** If you are told something in confidence, or if confidential issues are discussed at a student council meeting, can you keep them confidential?

7.3 ELECTING CLASS REPRESENTATIVES

Information

It would be useful to carry out this activity before the election for a class representative takes place. The election procedure should be explained first and then the activity looks at the job of class representative and discusses the qualities needed to do it effectively. This activity will give the students an opportunity to decide whether they really want to be a class representative.

Materials

Handout 7.2.

Instructions

- The leader should explain the election procedure in the school. This will vary for every school and it could include explaining the following terms:

  Nominations: Anyone in the class/group can nominate someone by asking them if they would like to stand for election. When someone agrees to be nominated, their name goes on a list. You can vote for anyone in the class/group whose name is on the list.

  Candidates: Students who have accepted a nomination for election as a member of the student council.

  Manifestos: The promises that candidates make to their class about what they will do if they are elected.

  Voting: Everyone votes for the candidates they want to be their class representatives by completing the ballot paper. Ballots are secret.

  Returning officers: The people who count the votes and announce the results.

- The group discusses the role of class representative.

- Break into small groups and discuss the role of the class representative by using Handout 7.2: Class representative on the student council.

- Ask each student to consider:
  - whether they would like to be a candidate;
  - the commitment they would make to their class. Complete the sentence, 'If I was a candidate, I would promise my class to …';
  - the qualities they would like to see in people they vote for. Complete the sentence, 'I would like the person I vote for to …'.

- Nomination forms could now be made available to those who want to go forward for election.

TEMPLATE

7.4 NOMINATION FORM FOR STUDENT COUNCIL

SCHOOL _____

CLASS _____

- ■ All candidates must have nominations from at least two other students or proposers (excluding themselves).

- ■ Please return the form before _(date)_____
  to the Returning Officer or Class Teacher.

- ■ Elections will take place on _(date)_____ at _(time)_____

CANDIDATE:

Name _____ Class _____

Signature _____

PROPOSERS:

Name _____ Class _____

Signature _____

Name _____ Class _____

Signature _____

I accept this nomination form:

_____   _____
Signed, Class Teacher   Date

7.5 SAMPLE BALLOT PAPER FOR STUDENT COUNCIL – 'FIRST PAST THE POST' SYSTEM

SCHOOL _____

CLASS _____

X candidate(s) will be elected from the following group of candidates. Place a tick in the box opposite your favoured candidate. Remember, you can only vote for *one* of the candidates on the list. The X candidate(s) with the most votes will be deemed elected to the student council.

Note: Candidates are listed in alphabetical order.

☐ **Name of Candidate 1** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 2** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 3** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 4** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 5** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 6** _____

TEMPLATE

SCHOOL _____

CLASS _____

X candidate(s) will be elected from the following group of candidates. You can vote from 1 to 6 in order of preference. Vote No. 1 for your most favoured candidate. Please indicate your preference in the box opposite candidates' names. Votes will be counted using the proportional representation system. The top X candidates under this system will be deemed elected.

Note: Candidates are listed in alphabetical order.

☐ **Name of Candidate 1** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 2** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 3** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 4** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 5** _____

☐ **Name of Candidate 6** _____

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7.7 COUNTING VOTES USING PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Proportional representation

The voter ranks the candidates in order of preference, e.g. if 6 candidates are running for election, the voter indicates his or her preference for each candidate by ranking them from 1 to 6. The voter does not, of course, have to vote for all the candidates and can stop at any number between 1 and 6. This system means that if your first choice candidate does not get elected, your lower choice candidates can benefit from your vote.

The quota

The quota is the number of votes that are needed to get elected. This figure is calculated using three steps:

1.   **TAKE THE NUMBER OF POSITIONS AVAILABLE AND ADD ONE.**
2.   **DIVIDE THE NUMBER OF VALID VOTES BY THIS FIGURE.**
3.   **ADD ONE.**

Example: A class of 30 students votes to elect one representative, giving a quota of 16 votes, as follows:

1.   **There is one position available: 1 position + 1 = 2**
2.   **The number of valid votes is 30 votes: 30/2 = 15**
3.   **Add one: 15 + 1 = 16**

The mathematical equation is: [Total valid votes/(No. of seats + 1)] + 1 = Quota
in this case, 30/2 + 1 = 16

Elimination of candidates

It often happens that no candidate reaches the quota when the votes are counted. When this happens, the candidate with the least amount of votes is eliminated. His or her second preference votes (No. 2s) are distributed among the remaining candidates. This keeps going until someone reaches the quota.

If the candidate listed in the No. 2 vote has already been eliminated or elected, then you keep going down the preferences – to No. 3, 4, 5, etc.

Example: One seat is being filled. The number of votes cast is 30. There are no spoiled votes. Thus the total number of valid votes is 30. The quota is 16.

First Count:

Kelly	4
O'Sullivan	14
Murray	5
Smith	7

Nobody reaches the quota of 16.

Second Count:

Since Kelly has the lowest number of votes (4), he is eliminated. His 4 votes are as follows:

BALLOT PAPER	
Kelly	1
O'Sullivan	2
Murray	4
Smith	3

BALLOT PAPER	
Kelly	1
O'Sullivan	4
Murray	2
Smith	3

BALLOT PAPER	
Kelly	1
O'Sullivan	2
Murray	3
Smith	4

BALLOT PAPER	
Kelly	1
O'Sullivan	3
Murray	4
Smith	2

The second preference votes (No. 2s) are counted and transferred to the other 3 candidates as follows:

Kelly	(eliminated)
O'Sullivan	14 + 2 = 16
Murray	5 + 1 = 6
Smith	7 + 1 = 8

O'Sullivan reaches the quota (16) and is elected.

Surplus votes

In elections where there is more than one position, the issue of a surplus arises. The surplus is the number of votes over and above the quota that a candidate receives. These extra votes are transferred to the other candidates still in the race.

Example:
- If the quota is 100 votes and the candidate gets 120 votes, the surplus is 20 votes.
- The 20 votes to be transferred to the other candidates cannot be randomly picked.
- All 120 votes would have to be checked and distributed proportionately. So, if another candidate was the next choice on 60 of the 120 votes (half), they would get the same proportion of the surplus – 10 votes from the surplus of 20 (half).

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7.8 ELECTION RESULTS – CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOL

CLASS OR YEAR _____

Names (female candidates)   Votes

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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Names (male candidates)   Votes

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Returning Officer _____

Witness _____

Teacher _____

Date _____

7.9 ELECTION RESULTS – SINGLE SEX SCHOOL

CLASS OR YEAR _____

Names of candidates   **Votes**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Returning Officer _____

Witness _____

Teacher _____

Date _____

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8. TRAINING FOR A STUDENT COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

Training on student councils would be helpful for everyone in the school – students not on the student council, student council members, student council liaison teacher, other teachers, Principal, other board of management members and parents. Most of these groups only need some basic information. However, the student council members and the student council liaison teacher need more in-depth training if they are to carry out their roles effectively.

TRAINING FOR STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBERS

The members of the student council will determine what is achieved by the council during the year. It is imperative that they know what their role is and how to carry it out effectively. A sample training programme is included in this section.

TRAINING FOR STUDENT COUNCIL LIAISON TEACHER

The student council liaison teacher is responsible for being the link between students, teachers and management. They are also responsible for training and giving advice to the student council members, so it is important that they are familiar with the role of the student council and how it can carry this out effectively. They also need to be familiar with how the school operates. This Resource Pack should be of assistance to the student council liaison teacher in making themselves familiar with student councils and their operation.

TRAINING FOR OTHER STUDENTS

Class teachers can provide training to other students in the school on different aspects of student councils as the need arises. For example, before the election of student council representatives from each class/year, it would be helpful if a teacher used activities from Sections 3 and 6 of this Resource Pack. It is also important that the student council members provide regular feedback to the students in the school to let them know what they are doing. This will ensure that the students know about the student council, how it operates, what its objectives are and what it has achieved.

TRAINING FOR TEACHERS, PRINCIPAL, BOARD OF MANAGEMENT AND PARENTS

It is very useful if these groups are provided with information on what the student council is, what is its role, what are the achievements to date, what projects it is working on at present and how it operates. This will provide a greater understanding of the role of the student council and should allay any fears that these groups might have about it. This information should ideally be provided by the student council itself.

SAMPLE TRAINING PROGRAMME

A sample training programme is provided for student council members in this section. It is divided into three modules:

- **Training Module 1: Setting up a new student council**
  This training programme is aimed at setting up a new council in a school which has not had one previously. It includes general information on student councils, designing the structure of the council, looking at the election procedure and drawing up the Constitution of the student council. It can be given to any group of students who are interested in setting up the student council in the school.

- **Training Module 2: Basic student council training**
  This training programme provides basic training on operating a student council. Ideally, it should be given once the members of the student council have been elected and before they have their first meeting.

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■ **Training Module 3: Advanced student council training**
  This training programme provides more advanced training to a student council.

Each module will take a full day to complete. This training can also be given in smaller blocks, after or during school. It is not necessary to complete the three modules. Module 1 will probably not be relevant if you already have a student council in operation in the school. This is only a sample training programme – you may want to design your own programme which is more suited to the student council in your school.

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8.1 TRAINING MODULE 1:
SETTING UP A NEW STUDENT COUNCIL

Information

This training programme is aimed at setting up a new council in a school which has not had one previously.

Icebreaker

Time: 15 minutes

- The participants divide into pairs. Ask them to pair up with someone they don't know at all or don't know very well.
- Ask them to tell their partner their names, their year and class, what they hope to learn today and one other piece of information, such as what they had for breakfast, what they did during the summer, what is their favourite TV programme, etc.
- Give them a few minutes to do this.
- Get everyone back together and ask them to report back their findings about their partner.

Citizens of the school

Time: 30 minutes

- Do Activity 2.4: Citizens of the school. This activity aims to set the scene for establishing a student council which respects the rights and responsibilities of everyone in the school.

Participation activity

Time: 30 minutes

- Do Activity 2.5: Participation activity – Post your ideas. This activity focuses on participation of all young people in a group. It provides a framework to get information from a large number of students.

Break: 15 minutes

Why this school should have a student council

Time: 30 minutes

- Do Activity 3.2: Why this school should have a student council.

What is the role of student councils?

Time: 45 minutes

- Do Activity 3.3: What is the role of the student council? It is vital that students know this information.

Student voice in school

Time: 30 minutes

- Do Activity 6.1: Student voice in school. This activity looks at how the voice of the student can be heard in your school and starts the process of looking at the best structure for the student council in your school.

Lunch: 1 hour

Design the student council structure for your school

Time: 45 minutes

■ Do Activity 6.2: Design the student council structure for your school. This activity will help to identify the most appropriate structure for the student council in your school. This will depend on the size of the school and what you think will work there.

Elections

Time: 45 minutes

■ Explain how an election works and the rules that will apply to it (*see Section 7*, Introduction page). Show sample nomination forms (Template 7.4), ballot papers (Templates 7.5 and 7.6) and explain how votes will be counted – 'first past the post' system or proportional representation (Handout 7.7).

■ Do Activity 7.3: Electing class representatives. This activity looks at the responsibilities of being a class representative and gives the students the opportunity to decide whether they really want to do the job.

Student Council Constitution

Time: 45 minutes

■ Give students Handout 9.3, Template 9.4 and Handout 9.5 on the Student Council Constitution. Go through these documents and discuss them.

■ Ask students to commence drafting the Constitution for their student council.

NOTE: This will take more than 45 minutes. The students could meet at a later date to complete the task or the student council could complete the task when it is elected. Students should consult with other students in the school on the Student Council Constitution. The student council is required under the Education Act, 1998 to consult with the board of management when drawing up its Constitution.

ACTIVITY

8.2 TRAINING MODULE 2:
BASIC TRAINING FOR A STUDENT COUNCIL

Icebreaker

Time: 15 minutes

- Write up a list of things to find out about other people on a flip chart, e.g.
  - Someone who is in 1st year in the school
  - Someone who has a brother and a sister
  - Someone who likes broccoli
  - Someone who watches *Fair City*, etc.

  Write up as many things to find out as you want. They can be serious or fun items.
- Make sure everyone has a piece of paper and pen. Ask them to go around the room asking people these questions.
- When they find someone who answers 'yes' to any of the questions, write their name down beside the question.
- The purpose of this exercise is to get people to speak to others in the room whom they may not know, to find out their names and to discover a little bit about them.

Information on the student council in this school

Time: 30 minutes

- Give out copies of the Student Council Constitution for your school and explain it.
- Explain the role of the student council in your school.
- Ask members of the student council from the previous year to talk about the achievements of the student council to date.
- Give out a copy of the agenda, minutes and a financial report from one of the meetings in the previous year. Ask a student council member from the previous year to explain these documents.

Role of student council members and officers

Time: 45 minutes

- Ask the students to break into small groups and discuss what their role is as members of the student council. Feedback ideas to the main group.
- Give out Handout 9.9: Student council members. Go through the handout and discuss.
- Add any new ideas on the role of student council members to this handout based on the discussion that took place.
- Explain the role of each of the officers in the council (see Handouts 9.6, 9.7, 9.8 and 9.10). Former members of the student council can also make a useful input to this discussion.

Break: 15 minutes

Practising discussions

Time: 45 minutes

- Do Activity 9.16: Practising discussions. This activity gives students the opportunity to practise holding meetings, chairing meetings and taking minutes of a meeting. Switch 'chairperson' and 'secretary' two or three times to give different students a chance at the roles.

Active listening skills
Time: 45 minutes
- Do Activity 9.19: Active listening skills. This activity provides some tips for getting students to listen to each other and record their views.

Lunch: 1 hour

Student council activities
Time: 45 minutes
- Give out Handout 10.2: Some activities for student councils, and Handout 10.3: Activities of the student council in three schools.
- Do Activity 10.1: What activities should our student council carry out? This activity will give the students the opportunity to think about what activities the student council can engage in.

Planning a fund-raising event
Time: 45 minutes
- Discuss Handout 10.7: Fund-raising.
- Do Activity 10.8: Planning a fund-raising event.

Communications
Time: 45 minutes
- Give out Handout 11.1: Good communication between student council and students; Handout 11.2: Good communication between student council and management, staff and parents; and Handout 11.3: Communications of the student council in three schools. Discuss these handouts.
- Do Activity 11.10: Feedback outcome of student council to students, teachers and management. This activity gets students to identify ways in which they will feedback the outcome of the student council activities to students, teachers, management and any other relevant people.

    NOTE: This activity asks students to examine the outcome of a student council meeting. Since this is a training course and a student council meeting may not have taken place yet, you can use some of the ideas raised during the training session, e.g. the outcome of student council activities. Alternatively, you can use the minutes of a student council meeting from the previous year.

ACTIVITY

8.3 TRAINING MODULE 3:
ADVANCED TRAINING FOR A STUDENT COUNCIL

Leadership

Time: 45 minutes

- Give out Handout 9.18: Leadership skills. Discuss leadership with the students and how they think a good leader should act.
- Do Activity 9.17: Leadership activity – Lost at sea. This is an exercise in group decision-making.

Sub-committees

Time: 30 minutes

- Do Activity 9.20: Sub-committees. This activity looks at what a sub-committee is and how it works.

Break: 15 minutes

Prioritising/selecting issues or activities

Time: 30 minutes

- Do Activity 9.21: Prioritising/selecting issues or activities. This activity is a way of deciding, in a democratic way, what are the most important issues for discussion or the most popular activities to carry out.

Student Council Plan

Time: 45 minutes

- Complete Template 10.4: Student Council Plan. The first activity that any student council should do is to draw up a plan for the year. The completion of this two-part template will help the student council to draw up its plan. It includes the issue/activity to be carried out, what is to be done, who is to do it, what resources will be required, when is it to be done, how is it to be done and what costs will be involved.

Planning/evaluating an activity

Time: 45 minutes

- Do Activity 10.6: Planning/evaluating an activity. This activity will help the students to look in detail at all the issues related to running a particular activity or to evaluate the activity once it has been completed.

Lunch: 1 hour

Producing a magazine, newsletter or website and doing a survey

Time: 15 minutes

- Give out Handout 10.10: Producing a magazine, newsletter or website, and Handout 10.11: Doing a survey. Go through these handouts. They will be useful if the students decide to produce any or all of these things at a later date.

Identifying issues to be brought to the student council

Time: 45 minutes

- Do Activity 11.4: Identifying issues to be brought to student council. This demonstrates an activity that student council representatives can carry out with the group they represent to raise potential issues, which can then be dealt with by the student council.

Negotiating skills

Time: 30 minutes

- Give out Handout 11.11: Negotiating skills. Discuss the handout with the students.
- Ask the students to divide into small groups.
- Ask them to select an issue that the student council might have to negotiate on, e.g. new facilities.
- Each group should answer the questions in the Negotiation Action Plan.
- Each group should carry out a mock negotiation – with two people acting as negotiators, two people acting as management and the remainder observing.
- The observers should give feedback on how they felt the negotiation went and what improvements, if any, could be made.

Consulting people

Time: 30 minutes

- Give out Handout 11.12: Consulting people. Discuss the handout with the students.
- Ask the students to divide into small groups.
- Ask them to select an issue that the student council might wish to consult on.
- Ask them to plan this consultation using the handout.

HANDOUT

8.4 TIPS FOR PLANNING A TRAINING SESSION

- ■ **Accommodation:** Ensure that you have a nice room, which is big enough and has enough chairs and tables. It will also be helpful if the room can have an informal layout, e.g. everyone sitting around in a group.

- ■ **Equipment and resources:** Ensure that all equipment and resources are available, e.g. flip chart, pens, paper, enough copies of handouts, etc.

- ■ **Notification:** Ensure that you tell everyone involved when and where the training session is on. You should give them sufficient notice and try and organise a date and time suitable for most people.

- ■ **Programme:** Look at what you are trying to achieve. What do you want the participants to know and be able to do after the training session? Ensure that you include information and activities to achieve your objectives.

- ■ **Interesting:** Try to ensure that the participants are not sitting listening to you all day. Try to include a good mix of listening and participating. Try to make the training session interesting and enjoyable for everyone.

- ■ **Timing:** Be realistic about what can be achieved in the time available. Do not try to pack too much into the training session. Ensure that there are enough breaks.

- ■ **Level:** Ensure that the training is at the correct level for your participants. Be aware of what the participants know already and do not assume that they have knowledge about issues that they do not have. Try to ensure that your talk is easy to understand – use simple, jargon-free language.

- ■ **Relevance:** Ensure that the training is relevant to the participants.

- ■ **Evaluation:** Ask the participants to evaluate the training session honestly at the end. This will help you to improve the training for the next time.

- ■ **Follow-up:** Decide if there needs to be any follow-up to the training session.

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9. OPERATING THE STUDENT COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

This section provides practical exercises, handouts and templates on operating the student council, including drawing up a Constitution, the roles of officers on the council and holding meetings.

THE STUDENT COUNCIL HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR:

- working with the staff, board of management and parents' association in the school;
- communicating and consulting with all of the students in the school;
- involving as many students as possible in the activities of the council;
- planning and managing the council's programme of activities for the year;
- managing and accounting to the student council and board of management for any funds raised by the council.

THE CONSTITUTION

Every student council should have a Constitution. The student council is required under the Education Act, 1998 to consult with the board of management when drawing up its Constitution. Handout 9.3, Template 9.4 and Handout 9.5 provide information on the Constitution and give a sample text.

OFFICERS

The student council should appoint officers to run an effective council. The suggested officers are Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Public Relations/ Communications Officer. Job descriptions, tips and skills for these roles are given in Handouts 9.6, 9.7, 9.8 and 9.10.

MEETINGS OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL

Members of the student council should be given good notice of any meetings. It is a good idea to agree a regular day, time and place for meetings. The board of management should provide a suitable place to hold them. If possible, the members should be given a copy of the agenda in advance of a meeting, so that they can prepare. It is important that members participate in meetings and give their opinions. However, members should also listen carefully to what others have to say and respect their opinions.

THE AGENDA

The agenda is a list of the items to be discussed at a meeting. It should be drawn up in advance of the meeting by the Secretary and the Chairperson, in consultation with the other officers of the student council. Students in the school should be given the opportunity to put items on the agenda through their representative on the council. Template 9.11 shows a sample agenda.

THE MINUTES

The minutes are a record of what was discussed at a meeting. They should clearly record the decisions made, the follow-up action and who will carry out the action. The Secretary records the minutes of the meeting. Minutes of the previous meeting should be circulated to all members as soon as possible after the meeting. Template 9.12 provides a template for taking the minutes.

AGREEMENT AT MEETINGS

The Constitution of the student council should state how decisions will be reached at meetings. Decisions at all meetings should be *by consensus.* All members of the student council, irrespective of their position, should have the same vote and status. In the event of a tie, the Chairperson has the casting vote. If this system is used, a minimum number of council

members should be present (a quorum). On important issues, it may be useful to delay the vote until the following meeting, giving representatives time to consult with their class/year and obtain their views. Activity 9.21 provides a method of prioritising and selecting issues for discussion.

SUB-COMMITTEES

Sub-committees may be formed to plan and oversee specific activities of the student council. They are usually made up of a small number of people from the main student council. They should be required to submit their plan to the council for approval and should report back to the council on their activities. An example of a sub-committee might be an anti-bullying sub-committee, which is working with management on developing and implementing an anti-bullying policy in the school.

9.1 OPERATION OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL IN THREE SCHOOLS

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. The operation of the student council in each of these schools is detailed below.

SCHOOL A
Procedures of the student council
The student council does not have a written Constitution, partly because it is felt that a Constitution would tie the council to a set remit and it is preferable to play it by ear from year to year. However, over the years, specific procedures have been decided on by the council, including the format of meetings, the election procedure and how a prefect would lose her badge. In the latter case, council members must have some safeguards and security of tenure, and a prefect would only lose her badge for one of three reasons – if she resigns; if she does not attend meetings; or if she is put 'on report', which means that she is not a good role model.

Meetings
The full student council meets once a month after school for approximately one hour and the Senior Executive Council has an extra meeting in between the full council meetings. The council is chaired by the Head Girl. The meetings are formal – there is an agreed agenda, the attendance and minutes are taken. Members who wish to raise an issue at the meeting ask for it to be put on the agenda. They can also raise it at the 'Any other business' (AOB) time of the meeting. The meeting runs quickly and smoothly, covering many issues within 45 minutes.

Funding
The student council receives the commission given on each item sold from the vending machine. This can amount to a few hundred euro each year. The council aims to use the money for the benefit of the pupils generally, e.g. prizes in competitions, new towels for the bathrooms, donations to charity.

SCHOOL B
Procedures of the student council
The student council has a written Constitution, which took almost one year to establish and agree. After it had been agreed by the council, it was brought before the board of management who ratified it officially. It has since been reviewed and two changes have been made by succeeding councils. The Constitution has seven sections, discussing structure; election procedures; the role of prefect/Meitheal representatives and the liaison teacher; meetings; exclusions; code of conduct; and removal of student council members.

Meetings
The student council meets weekly at lunchtime for half an hour. There must be 7 people present to have a meeting and 9 to have a vote. The meetings are formal – there is an agreed agenda and the attendance and minutes are taken. Decisions are taken on a majority vote. The liaison teacher feels it is important that the council meets weekly, even if it is simply to maintain contact with each other.

Funding

The prefects give the student council a proportion of the profits that are acquired from the vending machines. The parents' council also donates €500, which pays for the training of members of the council. Fund-raising for the council is difficult because there are already so many fund-raising events in aid of charity.

SCHOOL C

Procedures of the student council

The student council has compiled all its policies and procedures in a Student Council Handbook. This handbook contains all the information needed for the successful running of the council. It includes the Constitution, management layout, job specifications and procedures related to selection, removal, filling vacancies and grievances. Each September, the council goes away for a training weekend during which members develop an Action Plan for the year and elect the officers.

Meetings

The student council meets every Tuesday for 50 minutes. The school does not open until 10am on Tuesday mornings, so council members meet in their own time. The meeting is formal – attendance is taken, there is an agreed agenda and minutes are taken. The liaison teacher is not necessarily present for all of the meeting.

Funding

The student council gets funding from the parents' association, the Battle of the Bands and from the vending machines. It has its own bank account under the council's name. The main expenditures are the Battle of the Bands, contribution to the training weekend and office stationery. The council also gave a donation to the school in aid of a new canteen.

9.2 STUDENT COUNCIL CONTRACT

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. One of the schools requires members of the student council to sign the following contract.

I, —————————————————— am willing to undertake the following duties:

To attend a weekly Student Council Meeting.

To inform students in my Year group of the issues raised or dealt with by the student council.

To represent my Year group responsibly and to fulfil any position I may be elected to do on the council to the best of my capability.

I will be supportive to the other prefects throughout the year. I acknowledge that I am accountable to the other student council members and to the liaison teacher.

I will abide by the school rules.

Signed: ——————————————————   ——————————————————
          Student   Liaison Teacher

Date: ——————————————————

9.3 STUDENT COUNCIL CONSTITUTION

The Constitution sets out the role and responsibilities of the student council and the rules that it follows. This document can be as comprehensive or as compact as each school wants. The ethos of the school, school code of discipline and school policies will have a bearing on the remit of a student council and its Constitution should reflect this. The following is a list of the areas that could be included in your Student Council Constitution:

■ Outline the aims, objectives and overall role of the student council.

■ How many members will the council have from each class/year and the overall number on the council.

■ The election process.

■ The term of office of the members.

■ How many officers the council will appoint (e.g. Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer) and how these officers will be elected.

■ The structure of the council, including sub-committees, executive committee, year councils, etc. and how these structures will be established and run.

■ Appointment and role of liaison teacher.

■ How many times a year the council will meet and when.

■ Who can call a meeting of the council and how much notice council members should be given of meetings.

■ How decisions are to be made (e.g. how many members must be present for a vote to be valid and what happens if the council is divided evenly on a decision).

■ If the council will be involved in fund-raising for charity or for the school, and how any money raised by the council will be managed.

■ Provision for filling a vacancy on the council.

■ How the Constitution will be changed if it needs to be changed.

■ What is to happen if the council wishes to remove one of its members.

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9.4 SAMPLE CONSTITUTION

NOTE: The following Constitution is only a sample. It is important that you don't simply copy it, but rather draw up a Constitution that suits your own school.

Role of the student council
The role of the student council is to represent students' views to management, to be consulted prior to the implementation of new policies, to contribute to developing policy in the school, to be a resource working in partnership with the management of the school, to improve the school atmosphere, conditions and facilities, and to generate good relations between students, staff and management.

Work of the student council
The student council will undertake a programme of activities that will support students, parents and staff. In planning its activities, the student council will consult with the Principal, staff and parents' association.

Structure of the student council
One student will be elected from each class in the school. This means there will be 4 students from each year and 24 students in total on the student council. A student council liaison teacher will assist the student council in its work.

Elections
Elections will take place in September each year. Each class will elect its representative in a secret ballot. Students will nominate themselves if they are interested in becoming members of the council. The students will vote for one of the nominated students and the student with the most votes will represent their class on the student council.

Term of office
The term of office is for one academic year.

Student council officers
The student council will appoint a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Communications Officer. Each will normally hold office for the year.

Sub-committees
The student council reserves the right to form sub-committees. A sub-committee will consist of at least 3 members, with at least one member from Junior cycle (1st, 2nd and 3rd year) and one member from Senior cycle (Transition, 5th and 6th year). The planned activities of a sub-committee must be submitted to the council for approval. Sub-committees must report regularly to the council on their progress.

Finance and fund-raising
The student council Treasurer will keep an up-to-date and accurate account of all money raised by the council and will provide a report to the council at the last council meeting of the year. The student council will consult and cooperate with the management, staff and parents when planning fund-raising activities.

Meetings and decision-making

The student council will meet fortnightly. Meetings can be called by the Chairperson or by 3 or more members of the council. All council members must be given at least one week's notice of a meeting. At least one-third of council members have to attend for a decision to be taken. When making a decision, any member of the council may call for a vote to be held and, where the votes are divided evenly, the Chairperson will have the casting vote.

Communications

The Communications Officer will be responsible for communications to students, staff and management. A sub-committee can be formed to ensure that a good communications system is put in place. Regular feedback will be provided to students and regular meetings between the student council and staff and management will be arranged.

Removing members of the council and filling vacancies

The student council has the right to remove a member if that member fails to attend meetings or is not committed to the work or aims of the council. The member must be given at least one week's notice of the proposal and must be allowed to address the council in their defence. Where a member is to be removed, a vote must be held and at least two-thirds of the council must be present.

Changes to the Constitution

A vote must be held regarding any changes to the Constitution. Proposed changes must be circulated to all members of the council at least one week in advance of the vote. At least two-thirds of the council must be present for the vote. Any changes to the Constitution must be discussed in advance with the board of management.

9.5 STUDENT COUNCIL CONSTITUTION IN A SCHOOL

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. One of the schools (School B) has the following Student Council Constitution.

Structure
The student council consists of:
- 2 elected representatives of each year group from 2nd – 6th year.
- 1 representative of prefects.
- 2 Meitheal members to represent 1st year.
- A representative of staff (liaison teacher).

Election procedures
- The process begins with the nomination procedure. All interested pupils must fill in a nomination form, being proposed by 2 of their year group.
- Class teacher signs the form.
- An interview will be held with the liaison teacher and 2 outgoing student council members at the end of May.
- List of candidates is displayed.
- Election is by secret ballot; pupils put 1st and 2nd preference beside candidates' names.
- The votes are counted and kept by a staff member.
- If a council member leaves or is dismissed, the candidate with the next highest number of votes will replace him.

Prefect/Meitheal representative
- Prefect and Meitheal representatives are decided within their own age groups.
- As prefects begin their term of office in April, the incoming prefect representative may attend student council meetings for the remainder of the school year and have a voice, but not a vote.
- The outgoing prefect representative maintains his vote.

Liaison teacher
- Attends weekly meetings.
- Acts as link between staff and student council.
- Has a voice, but not a vote.
- Is a source of information.
- Liaison teacher can select substitute teacher for replacement.

Meetings
- All council members are expected to attend all meetings.
- Meetings take place at lunchtime one day a week.
- There must be 7 people present to have a meeting, 9 to have a vote.
- Student council members vote to choose a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary.
- An agenda is set in advance and adhered to.
- Attendance record is kept and minutes are taken.

- All council members get an equal say and are expected to contribute to each meeting.
- All contributions to the meeting must be through the Chairperson.
- Decisions are taken on a majority vote.
- All problems discussed at meetings must be treated with discretion, respect and confidentiality.
- A teacher must be present for a formal meeting to take place.

Exclusions
- Any uncomplimentary mention of staff, management or pupil by name or implication.
- Individual grievances between pupil and teacher.
- Discos, Battle of the Bands, etc.
- Ongoing disciplinary matters involving a student or group of students.

Code of conduct
- Attend weekly meetings.
- To be actively involved in student council activities.
- To set a good example to others.
- To represent the year group.
- To stand as a group and support decisions made by the student council.
- To maintain good relations with staff members.
- Upon election, council members sign a contract in which they agree to attend weekly meetings, represent their year group, support their fellow-council members and abide by the school rules.

Removal of student council members

Reasons for removal
- Non-attendance at 3 meetings without a valid reason (automatic removal, no appeal).
- Regular non-involvement in student council activities.
- Breach of council's code of conduct.
- If a pupil leaves the school.
- If a pupil is suspended from school, the liaison teacher issues a warning.
- A second suspension results in removal from student council.

Removal procedures
- In order for procedures to be started, the liaison teacher must receive 3 complaints from individual council members.
- The liaison teacher issues a warning.
- If there are further breaches, the council member is asked to resign.
- The council member has a right to appeal in front of the student council.
- The decision to remove the council member is voted on.
- The result is decided by a majority vote and is final.

9.6 CHAIRPERSON AND DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON

Role of Chairperson
- is the chief spokesperson and officer of the student council;
- calls meetings;
- chairs meetings in a fair manner, ensuring that all have an equal say;
- signs any letters, notices, etc. that are issued by the student council;
- liaises with school management;
- ensures that the student council is run effectively and efficiently;
- prepares the agenda for each meeting with the Secretary;
- signs the minutes from the previous meeting with the Secretary when they are accepted by the student council.

Tips for Chairperson
1. Be prepared for each meeting and try to ensure that the other members of the group have a written agenda beforehand, if possible, so that they can also be prepared. It may be useful to meet with the Secretary to agree an agenda in advance of a meeting. An agenda should always include 'Any other business' (AOB).

2. Start and finish each meeting on time.

3. At the beginning of any meeting, allow group members to put items on the agenda under 'Any other business'. Then keep to the agenda items for discussion.

4. At the beginning of the meeting, ask the student council to agree the minutes of the previous meeting. Any changes should be agreed by the council and noted on the minutes. The Chairperson should sign the approved minutes.

5. Present each item for discussion, ensuring that everyone who wishes to do so gets an opportunity to speak and that each person is listened to. This will include:
   - giving everyone a chance to speak if they want to;
   - asking people for ideas – remember, the Chairperson does not have to have all the answers;
   - if you know that someone has the answer to any question, ask them to speak;
   - encourage the quieter people to have their say;
   - ask members to propose practical solutions to problems.

6. Give direction to meetings, making sure that there is enough time to deal with each item on the agenda.

7. Try to keep the meeting focused on the agenda.

8. Call the meeting to order if necessary (e.g. if more than one person speaks at the same time or if an argument breaks out).

9. Help the process of decision-making by asking people to clarify what they are saying if it is not easily understood, by summing up what someone has said when they are finished and by stating clearly the decision that is being taken before it is noted in the minutes.

10. In some instances, it may be necessary to hold a vote (e.g. by a show of hands) on a particular issue.

11. At the end of each meeting, make sure to arrange a date/time/venue/possible agenda items for the next meeting.

Role of Deputy Chairperson
- takes over the responsibilities of the Chairperson when he/she is not available;
- assists the Chairperson in the organisation of the student council;
- accompanies the Chairperson to meetings when necessary.

9.7 SECRETARY

Role of Secretary

- prepares the agenda for each meeting with the Chairperson and in consultation with the other officers of the council;
- circulates the agenda to all members in advance of the meeting or at the start of the meeting;
- takes minutes at meetings and writes them up;
- distributes and reads out minutes from previous meeting and, on acceptance, signs them with the Chairperson;
- sends out letters and notice of meetings that will be held, stating time and place;
- ensures that everyone is aware that meetings are being held.

Tips for Secretary

1. Bring any correspondence received to the attention of the Chairperson before the agenda is drawn up, e.g. perhaps some element of correspondence needs inclusion on the agenda for discussion/response.

2. If necessary, read the minutes of the previous meeting at the beginning of each meeting and make any necessary corrections before the minutes are signed by the Chairperson.

3. Give a brief account of correspondence received/sent since the last meeting.

4. Record as accurately and as fairly as possible the minutes of each meeting.

5. Remember to record the following at each meeting:
   - time, date and venue of each meeting;
   - attendance;
   - excuses and apologies;
   - any corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting;
   - the item that is being discussed;
   - proposals that are made and seconded;
   - the names of the people who proposed and seconded them;
   - any proposals that are agreed;
   - the number of votes for and against;
   - other decisions that were made during the meeting without a vote being taken;
   - any action that is to be taken, together with the names of the people who are going to carry it out and when they will carry it out;
   - the date, time and venue of the next meeting.

6. Remember that you also have a right to participate in discussions – don't allow your role to stop you from contributing to the various matters on the agenda.

7. It's a good idea to use the same notebook at each meeting for the taking of the minutes.

8. After you've written them up, check the minutes with the Chairperson before the next meeting.

9. Write up the minutes as soon as possible after each meeting.

9.8 TREASURER AND PUBLIC RELATIONS/ COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Role of Treasurer
- manages any funds raised by the student council;
- keeps any money in a safe place, e.g. student council bank account, school safe, etc;

  NOTE: The agreement of school management should be sought before a student council bank account in opened.

- keeps financial records in order and reports to the student council on the current financial status of the group;
- makes a brief financial report at every student council meeting;
- provides the student council and board of management with a complete financial report at the end of the school year.

NOTE: As a general rule, any payments made by the Treasurer should be countersigned or endorsed by another member of the council or a teacher designated for this purpose.

Role of Public Relations/Communications Officer
- keeps students informed about the activities of the student council;
- keeps noticeboards updated;
- helps produce the student council newsletter if the school has one;
- promotes good communications between the student council and students, teachers, school management and parents.

9.9 STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBERS

Role of student council member

- represents the views and ideas of their class/year at the student council;
- puts issues that are raised by their class/year on the agenda for student council meetings;
- informs their class/year on the outcome of student council meetings;
- promotes the student council;
- works with other members and in partnership with school management, staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students.

Advice for student council member

- Have regular meetings with the group you represent (class or year), getting their views and ideas and letting them know what is happening at meetings.
- Read the agenda before the meeting.
- Get information on the issues on the agenda that are relevant to you and the group you represent and bring it with you to the meeting.
- Speak clearly at the meeting.
- Write out your points in advance so that you won't forget what you want to say.
- Don't speak or ask questions when there is nothing to be said.
- Stand up for your point of view, but be prepared to listen to other people's opinions too – and be prepared to compromise.
- Think before you speak and don't interrupt other people when they are speaking.
- Be polite at all times and show respect for other people's point of view.
- Give a signal to the Chairperson if you want to speak (e.g. raise your hand).
- Be willing to take someone else's view on board.
- Try not to be negative and complain all the time. Try to come up with solutions to problems.
- Do not commit or promise to do something that cannot be done.

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9.10 STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICERS IN ONE SCHOOL

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. The roles of the student council officers of one of the schools are given below.

Senior Chairperson

The Senior Chairperson is responsible for presiding over the meetings of the student council. Therefore, the Senior Chairperson must be on time. They are the designated representative of the student council at meetings with the school management and, as such, they must be aware of all that is going on in the student council.

During the meeting, the Senior Chairperson must:

1. Make sure the Senior Secretary is taking minutes.

2. Keep a watch on the time to make sure that all items on the agenda are discussed. Sometimes the Senior Chairperson will need to close the discussion in order to reach a decision (they can use the agenda to guide them through the meeting).

3. Make sure that everyone is involved in the discussion and that a few individuals are not dominating the scene (refer to meetings procedures).

4. As the meeting comes to an end, the Senior Chairperson should ask if any council member would like to raise any other business (AOB). These should be very small items and should be dealt with quickly. Any item that needs a lot of discussion should be included in the agenda for the next meeting.

5. After the meeting, the Senior Chairperson must make sure the Senior Secretary knows what to include in the minutes. Before the next meeting, the Senior Chairperson must meet with the Senior Secretary to arrange the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

Senior Secretary

The Senior Secretary prepares the agenda for each meeting with the Senior Chairperson. The Senior Secretary then circulates the agenda for the upcoming meeting to all the members of the student council, in advance where possible. Any other business (AOB) should always be included since this allows any council member to raise an issue that is not on the agenda.

During the meeting, the Senior Secretary must:

1. Write down the names of the student council members attending, noting absences.
2. Write down all suggestions made, who the suggestions are proposed by, action that is decided upon and who is responsible for the action to be taken. These are called the minutes.

After the meeting, the Senior Secretary must:

1. Check the minutes with the Senior Chairperson.
2. Discuss the agenda for the next meeting with the Senior Chairperson.
3. Circulate the minutes of the last meeting and the agenda for the upcoming meeting to all student council members as soon as possible.

Public Relations Officer

The Public Relations Officer (PRO) is responsible for promoting good communications between the student council and the student body, staff, parents, board of management and their wider community.

The PRO will have a committee for each member including the PRO.

The PRO and the PR committee are responsible for:

1. Keeping the student body informed of the student council's activities and plans.
2. Advertising, i.e. the local newspaper.
3. Any announcements concerning the student council.
4. The student council website.
5. Keeping the notices on the student council noticeboard up to date.
6. Providing updates to the board of management, parents/teachers association and the Principal on the student council's activities and plans.
7. Providing an end of year report to the board of management.

Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for managing the funds of the student council. Therefore, they should keep a complete account of all income and expenditure of the student council. Advice and recommendations can then be given regarding its funds.

The Treasurer should provide the student council with a complete financial report at the end of the school year.

Finances should *not* be kept in the student council office.

Office Director

The role of Office Director is a practical role and, as such, the person is entitled to form a committee. The Office Director is responsible for:

1. Keeping the computer in the student council office working.
2. Keeping the student council office stocked with stationery.
3. Keeping the student council office clean and tidy.
4. Keeping a checklist of all items in the student council office to make sure that all items are where they should be.
5. The combination to the lock on the door of the student council office.
6. The decoration and furnishings of the student council office.

TEMPLATE

9.11   SAMPLE AGENDA

Name of meeting _____

Date _____

1. Welcome and introduction from the Chair.

2. Sign the attendance sheet and apologies for non-attendance.

3. Minutes from the last meeting.

4. Matters arising from the last meeting.

5. Officers' reports.

6. Correspondence sent and received.

7. Specific agenda items.

8. Any other business.

9. Date, time and venue of next meeting.

9.12 SAMPLE MINUTES

Minutes of Student Council Meeting

Name of school _____

Date of meeting _____

Names of the people present _____

_____

_____

Apologies for absence _____

Other absences _____

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	ACTION	BY WHOM
Minutes of the last meeting: a) are they agreed? b) matters arising from last meeting's minutes		
Item 1		
Item 2		
Item 3		
Item 4		
Item 5		
Item 6		
Item 7		
Any other business		
Items for the next agenda		
Date of next meeting		

9.13 STUDENT COUNCIL MEETING REPORT IN ONE SCHOOL

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. The minutes of a student council meeting of one of the schools are given below.

- At this meeting, the student council welcomed two visitors from the Children's Research Centre. They were using our student council as part of their research.

- Each officer gave her report. The Treasurer informed us that there is now €137 in the student council account.

- Thank-you letters were received from the charities that we collected for at Christmas and read out at this meeting. The student council also discussed the success of the Tsunami appeal collection.

- The student council was informed that students would be able to use the computers on Tuesdays between 1:05 and 1:35 in the computer room.

- We decided that, after much research, it would not be possible to have soup during lunchtime. However, the facilities are there for those who do Supervised Study.

- The 1st year PE class was also discussed. The fact that the PE hall is being shared with another class is causing concern. The 1st year students themselves decided that they would follow up on this for the next meeting.

- Finally, the student council discussed the idea of a rota system in every classroom so that students will be responsible for cleaning up the classroom after lunch. This will be followed up at the next meeting.

- The next Senior Executive meeting will take place on 31st January and the next full student council meeting will be on 28th February.

Signed: _____

Head Girl

9.14 SAMPLE FINANCIAL REPORT AT STUDENT COUNCIL MEETING

Date of meeting ————————————

1. **Balance of funds at date of last meeting**
    (this should agree to the closing balance of the previous financial report)

    ————————————————————————

2. **Income since last meeting***

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

3. **Expenditure since last meeting***

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

    ————————————————————————

4. **Balance of funds at date of this meeting** (Total of 1 + 2 – 3)

* Each item of income and expenditure should be listed separately

Signed: ————————————————————
       Treasurer

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9.15 SAMPLE FINANCIAL REPORT AT END OF YEAR

Year _____

1. **Balance of funds at the beginning of the year:**
    (this should agree to the closing balance at the end of the previous year)

2. **Total income for the year:**

    Fund-raising events (list each event)

    Grants (list the grants)

    Other income (list each source of income)

3. **Total expenditure for the year:**

    Student council equipment

    Expenditure on fund-raising events

    Expenditure on other events

    Donations to charity

    Donations to school

    Other expenditure

4. **Surplus (Deficit) of income over expenditure (2 – 3)**

5. **Balance of funds at the end of the year (1 + 2 – 3)**

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Signed: _____
    Treasurer

Signed: _____
    Assistant Treasurer, other member of council, teacher, parent, other person

Date: _____

ACTIVITY

9.16   PRACTISING DISCUSSIONS

This activity gives students, who may or may not be on the student council, the opportunity to practise holding meetings, chairing meetings and taking minutes of a meeting.

Instructions

■ The group should appoint a 'chairperson' and a 'secretary' who will take on these roles during the meeting. Everyone else takes the role of members of the student council, attending the meeting.

■ The group should take a few minutes to examine the roles of the Chairperson (Handout 9.6), Secretary (Handout 9.7) and members of the council (Handout 9.9).

■ The acting 'chairperson' commences the meeting by asking the group to choose an issue on which to have a discussion. The chairperson should decide how the issue will be chosen (e.g. by vote, by consensus, etc).

■ The 'chairperson' should now ask for the opinions of those attending the meeting and should ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak if they want to. The 'chairperson' should encourage the group to find an agreed solution to the issue during the time allowed. He or she should try and get the meeting to reach a decision and agree what action will be taken and who will carry it out.

■ The acting 'secretary' records the main points in the discussion, as well as any decisions taken, any action to be taken and who will carry out the action.

■ After about 15 minutes, stop the discussion and the 'secretary' should read the notes of the discussion.

■ Evaluate the discussion, making constructive comments on:
   – how well the 'chairperson' carried out their role;
   – how well the 'secretary' has made notes and reported back;
   – how well the group members carried out their role;
   – was the discussion useful and was a solution found and decisions taken on the issue.

■ The chairperson, secretary and members of the group can also make comments on how well the process worked and what they would do differently the next time.

■ Repeat the process with different people in the role of chairperson and secretary. A different issue or the same issue can be discussed.

ACTIVITY

9.17 LEADERSHIP ACTIVITY – LOST AT SEA

Instructions

You are adrift in a small boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Please rank in order of importance for your survival the list of items in the 'Ranking Sheet' table below.

This is an exercise in group decision-making. Your group is to use the group consensus method in reaching its decision. This means that each group member must agree on the choice of the 15 survival items before it becomes a part of the group decision.

Consensus can be difficult to reach; therefore, not every ranking will meet with everyone's complete approval. As a group, try to make each ranking one that all group members can at least partially agree with. Here are some guidelines to use in reaching consensus:

- Avoid arguing for your own judgements. Approach the task on the basis of logic.
- Avoid changing your mind if it is only to reach agreement and avoid conflict. Only support solutions that you feel able to agree with (even if only partially).
- Avoid 'conflict-reducing' techniques, such as majority vote, averaging or trading-off in reaching your decision.
- View differences of opinion as a help rather than a hindrance in decision-making.

RANKING SHEET

ITEM	INDIVIDUAL RANKING	GROUP RANKING	ACTUAL RANKING	DIFFERENCE
Sextant				
Mirror				
25 litre can of water				
Mosquito netting				
1 case of 14 days' food rations				
Maps of the Pacific Ocean				
Seat cushion (flotation device)				
10 litre can of gas/oil mixture				
Small transistor radio				
Shark repellent				
2 square metres of opaque plastic				
1 litre of 160 proof Puerto Rican rum				
4.5 metres of nylon rope				
2 boxes of chocolate bars				
Fishing kit				

9.17   LEADERSHIP ACTIVITY – LOST AT SEA *(continued)*

Solution

ITEM	INDIVIDUAL RANKING	GROUP RANKING	ACTUAL RANKING	DIFFERENCE
Sextant			15	
Mirror			1	
25 litre can of water			3	
Mosquito netting			14	
1 case of 14 days' food rations			4	
Maps of the Pacific Ocean			13	
Seat cushion (flotation device)			9	
10 litre can of gas/oil mixture			2	
Small transistor radio			12	
Shark repellent			10	
2 square metres of opaque plastic			5	
1 litre of 160 proof Puerto Rican rum			11	
4.5 metres of nylon rope			8	
2 boxes of chocolate bars			6	
Fishing kit			7	

HANDOUT

9.18 LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Leadership is a very important skill in school, in business and in society in general.
Some useful strategies include:

- Self-esteem: Make others feel important.
- Listening: Be a good listener (words and body language).
- Fairness: Be fair with all students.
- Planning: Organise a plan of action.
- Motivating: Motivate your student colleagues.
- Enthusing: Show enthusiasm for the work being undertaken.
- Communicating: Communicate clearly so that everyone knows what is happening.
- Delegating: Let others do many of the jobs.
- Empowering: Pass on responsibility to others to accomplish a task.

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ACTIVITY

9.19 ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Information

It is important that at meetings all members listen and understand what is being said. It is particularly important that the Chairperson and Secretary listen actively and record accurately what is said and agreed at the meeting. This activity provides some tips for active listening and gets students to listen and record the views of other students.

Instructions

■ Explain to students the importance of listening and understanding what is said at a meeting. Everyone leaving the meeting should know and understand what decisions were made. The minutes of the meeting should clearly record what decisions were taken.

■ Explain that the Chairperson should help people to hear what is being said by clarifying issues during the meeting and by summing up at the end. Some phrases which the Chairperson and others can use during the meeting to clarify issues are:
  - Do you mean ...?
  - Are you suggesting that ...?
  - Tell me more ...

■ Other ways of encouraging discussion and active listening are to look at the person who is talking, nod agreement, look interested, etc.

■ Break into small groups. Ask each group to select a topic for discussion, e.g. what activities will the student council carry out this year. One person in each group should act as the 'chairperson' and another as 'secretary' and take notes. The rest of the group are acting as members of the council, attending the meeting.

■ Ask the group to discuss the issue, using the active listening skills listed above. Ask the group to reach a decision in 15 minutes.

■ The 'secretary' of each group should read back the notes of the meeting to their group.

■ Each group should discuss how the activity went. Did everyone feel listened to? Did the secretary's notes accurately reflect the discussion? Did everyone understand the discussion? Did everyone know what decisions were taken? What could they as a group have done better?

■ Give feedback to main group on how the activity went.

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ACTIVITY

9.20 SUB-COMMITTEES

Information
An activity to look at what a sub-committee is and how it works.

Instructions
- Leader explains what a sub-committee is – a small group taken from the main student council to look after certain specific activities.

- Ask the group to think of activities where a sub-committee should be set up.

- Break into smaller groups and each group take one activity.

- Discuss what the sub-committee would do. For example:
  - make a plan;
  - get assistance/advice from others in the school;
  - let people know what they are doing;
  - raise funds.

- Each group should take notes and give feedback to main group for discussion.

ACTIVITY

9.21 PRIORITISING/SELECTING ISSUES OR ACTIVITIES

Information

This activity is a way of deciding, in a democratic way, what are the most important issues for discussion or the most popular activities to carry out. It can be used by a class/year to decide what issues will be brought to the student council for discussion. It can be used by the student council to prioritise the issues for discussion. It can also be used by the student council to prioritise their activities for the year.

Instructions

- List all the possible answers to a question on a flip chart and leave some space next to each answer (e.g. What issues do we want the student council to look at? What activities do we want the student council to do?).

  NOTE: The answers to the questions can be generated using Activity 2.5: Participation activity – Post your ideas or Activity 10.1: What activities should our student council carry out?

- Give everyone three sticky dots and ask them to 'vote' on the items by placing their dots next to their favourite answers. They can place the three dots on one answer, two on one answer and one on another answer, or the three dots on three different answers.

- When everyone has finished voting, count the dots opposite each answer.

- Rank the answers in order of importance. The answer with the most dots is first, the next most dots is second, etc.

- The issues/activities have now been prioritised in a fair and democratic manner. This method gives everyone a chance to have their say, including the quieter students.

10. STUDENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

This section provides some practical exercises, handouts and examples of some of the activities that a student council can carry out.

ACTIVITIES OF STUDENT COUNCILS

Each student council will decide on its own role and what activities it will carry out. The activities engaged in will depend on the agreed role of the council *(see Section 3)*. It is important that the activities are in accordance with the role of the student council and that they are agreed by the council members. It is also important that the students in the school are in agreement with the activities and will participate.

PLANNING

At the first meeting of the student council, a basic plan should be drawn up on the activities to be carried out during the year. Activities can be added or removed from the plan during the year, but it is important that a basic plan is in place if the student council is to achieve anything. It would also be beneficial to consult with the students in the school when drawing up this plan.

Each activity should also be carefully planned before it is carried out to ensure that it is successful. When a particular activity has been completed, the student council should take time to discuss and analyse it — how did it work, was it successful, what problems there were and solutions for next time, improvements to be made.

The student council plan should be evaluated at the end of the year to see what was and was not achieved *(see Section 5).*

ACTIVITY

10.1 WHAT ACTIVITIES SHOULD OUR STUDENT COUNCIL CARRY OUT?

Information

This exercise looks at the activities that are appropriate for your student council. The activities should be in accordance with the agreed role of the student council *(see Section 3).*

Instructions

- Divide into smaller groups. Each group should know what the role of the student council is.

- Discuss what activities might be appropriate to fulfil this role.

- Discuss the activities mentioned in Handout 10.2: Some activities for student councils and Handout 10.3: Activities of the student council in three schools. Should your student council do any of these activities?

- Give feedback to the main group and then agree and prioritise the activities that could be carried out by your student council. (This can be done by using Activity 9.21: Prioritising/selecting issues or activities.)

- Plan how you can carry out the agreed activities, e.g.
  - Do you need permission/agreement from management/students?
  - How will the activity be carried out?
  - Who will do what?
  - How long will it take to do?

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10.2 SOME ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENT COUNCILS

The following is a list of some of the activities that a student council can engage in:

- liaising with Principal and board of management on issues of concern to students;

- communication and cooperation with school staff;

- working with the parents' council in school;

- cooperating with management and staff on the development of school rules and regulations;

- involvement in school planning;

- having a say in school policies, e.g. anti-bullying policy;

- making suggestions about improving school facilities;

- extra-curricular activities;

- school newsletter/magazine;

- links with other schools;

- getting involved with the community, e.g. helping the elderly, tidy towns, etc;

- mentoring programmes for younger students;

- student award ceremonies;

- carrying out surveys and organising petitions;

- organising social events;

- fund-raising;

- organising recycling in school.

10.3 ACTIVITIES OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL IN THREE SCHOOLS

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. The activities of the student council in each of these schools is detailed below.

SCHOOL A

The student council has achieved many things over the years. Some of these include:

- changes to the uniform – the introduction of trousers (a campaign which took five years to achieve) and permission to wear black tights instead of grey tights with the school skirt;
- setting up a system for students to photocopy documents;
- organising the use of computers at lunchtime and extended use of the library.

The student council has also been instrumental in:

- shortening of the school lunchtime and thus shortening of the school day;
- setting up supervised study after school.

In addition, every year the student council organises:

- fund-raising events – the council raised funds in aid of the Tsunami Crisis in excess of €9,000;
- Person of the Year award.

This year, 5th and 6th years requested and received the use of courtyards for lunchtime as they would normally have to stay in their classrooms. The student council provided bins and benches for the students to sit on. Transition year students are currently in the process of lobbying for a courtyard. The area the 4th years requested is normally used by the teachers as a smoking area. This issue is being discussed at the moment.

This year, the student council has also continued work on making the toilets more pleasant.

- students requested that the towels in the toilets would be changed everyday and wanted an electric hand-drier. However, when council researched this, they discovered that electric hand-driers are not only expensive but also unhygienic;
- students also requested that there was a constant supply of toilet paper. To this effect, the council have ordered larger toilet rolls (which cannot be stuffed down the toilet) and have asked the caretaker to check the toilets everyday;
- students requested and were granted mirrors in the toilets. They also requested that soap would be available. However, this issue has not yet been resolved (liquid soap runs out too quickly and a bar of soap runs out or goes missing).

SCHOOL B

Each year the student council works on one big project and a number of smaller issues. Last year, the big project was setting up an anti-bullying committee with teachers. The Principal found that having students around the table was 'an excellent experience'. This year, the big project is acquiring a discount card for students to get discounts in local shops. At the time of writing, the student council had already sent letters to all the local shops and businesses and had received a response from five or six.

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The council has approached the Principal with a request to change the policy on camera phones. Currently, if a student is caught with a camera phone, it is confiscated for 20 days. The council thinks that this is too harsh since most mobile phones now are camera phones, so it has approached the Principal with suggested changes and then the issue will be brought before the staff meeting.

The boys also wanted top-up machines (for mobiles) and change machines (for the vending machines), but it was decided that the machines would be vandalised. Instead, the student council has organised that students can get change through the school book shop, the school shop and the office.

Some of the other achievements of the student council include:
- introducing a school fleece with the school crest on it. Originally the council had wanted to get a school tracksuit, but this proved too expensive, so they opted for the fleece instead. There was a lot of demand for it. No profit was made on this project since only the cost price of the fleece was charged;
- buying a stereo system for break-times;
- organising water for the vending machines and there will be a water font in the new building;
- organising many successful fund-raising events.

SCHOOL C

Senior cycle students reported that the student council had improved significantly over the years. One council member who has sat on the council for a number of years recalled, for example, how disorganised the meetings used to be when the council began. She said that over the years, they have learned to make meetings short and efficient, and to make decisions. They are proud of having a properly worded Constitution and a Student Council Handbook.

The Principal, too, stated that the student council had grown from strength to strength:

'I think in the last couple of years in particular, their perception of themselves as a group with autonomy, with power, has changed and they have become more confident, so now they have no problems calling the main office to make an appointment with the principal to discuss such and such an issue ... in that sense, they've grown from strength to strength.'

The council has a number of ongoing projects:
- organising the Battle of the Bands every year, which, although it involves a lot of organisation, seems to be a popular event;
- mentoring of 1st year students. Two council members are designated to each of the 1st year classes. They meet with the class once a month and talk to them about various issues, such as drugs or bullying. The council has developed a syllabus which they complete with each class. Mentoring requires members of the council to give up quite a lot of time. This involves the council meeting a day before the term begins in September to organise and plan the mentoring. Members also have to decide for themselves which classes they will give up to go to speak to their mentoring group – in other words, they have to organise their own time, seek permission from their teachers and make sure they do not constantly miss the same class.

The student council has also been involved in:

- introducing vending machines;
- improving toilet facilities;
- tackling graffiti;
- developing school policies, e.g. discipline, bullying and substance abuse;
- accessing students' views via a survey about changing the school uniform;
- fund-raising for school facilities, e.g. the school canteen.

At the time of the research (2005), the student council was working on two issues. Firstly, it wanted to organise benches for students to sit on during break-time; it was decided to make an appointment to see the Principal about this after the meeting. Secondly, students had approached the council about the fact that the toilets were only open at break-times. This was to minimise the level of litter and vandalism in the toilets. The council made a decision to put up posters around the school, asking students to keep the toilets clean. This issue was also to be raised with senior management.

10.4 STUDENT COUNCIL PLAN

Instructions

The first activity that any student council should do is to draw up a plan for the year. Use this template to put down all the achievable ideas for inclusion in the plan (*see* Activity 10.1: What activities should our student council carry out?). Prioritise and make decisions on what activities/issues will be included in the final plan (*see* Activity 9.21: Prioritising/selecting issues or activities).

	LIST ACTIVITY/ISSUE	PRIORITY	INCLUDE IN PLAN (YES/NO)
Activities/issues carried over from previous years			
New activities/issues			

10.4 STUDENT COUNCIL PLAN *(continued)*

Instructions

List each of the activities/issues from the previous template that were agreed for inclusion in the plan. For each activity/issue, answer each of the questions in the table below. This template will give the student council an idea of the work involved and the resources needed to implement each of the activities/issues. The plan may need to be revised once this template is completed. Remember, the Student Council Plan should always *be realistic and achievable.*

ACTIVITY/ISSUE	WHAT IS TO BE DONE?	WHO IS TO DO IT?	WHAT RESOURCES WILL BE REQUIRED?	WHEN IS IT TO BE DONE?	HOW IS IT TO BE DONE?	WHAT COSTS WILL BE INVOLVED?

10.5 INVOLVING PEOPLE IN THE SCHOOL

Information
This is an activity that looks at the knowledge and skills of different groups in the school and how the student council can get advice and assistance from these people for their activities.

Instructions
- Break into small groups.

- Write down the different groups of people in the school (e.g. students, teachers, Principal, office staff, caretakers, catering staff, school guidance teacher, CSPE teacher, cleaners, etc).

- Think of all the knowledge and skills that the people in these groups have.

- Look at the planned activities of the student council and match the skills of these people to the activities (e.g. Accountancy teacher – Fund-raising activities and Treasurer's job; Caretaking and cleaning staff – Improving school facilities; Former student council members – Activities that have taken place in previous years).

- Give feedback to the main group.

- When the student council is planning any activity, students should use the knowledge and skills of all the relevant groups of people in the school. Students can also use the knowledge and skills of people outside the school, e.g. parents or friends attending other schools who might be of help.

ACTIVITY

10.6 PLANNING/EVALUATING AN ACTIVITY

Information
This activity will help the student council to look at all the issues related to running a particular activity or to evaluate an activity once it has been completed.

Instructions
- This activity is called a SWOTT analysis. This is an acronym of the following words:
  - **S**trengths
  - **W**eaknesses
  - **O**pportunities
  - **T**hreats
  - **T**raining

- Select an activity/issue that the student council plans to carry out or has already carried out, e.g. consulting with students on the facilities they would like in the school.

- Look at the ways in which this activity can be carried out or was carried out, e.g.
  - giving a survey form to every student in the school;
  - asking students to post ideas on the student council's noticeboard;
  - asking students to put ideas in the student council's suggestions box;
  - asking student council members to get ideas from the groups they represent.

- For each of the different ways that this activity can be carried out, do a SWOTT analysis:
  - Strengths   What is/was good about this method?
  - Weaknesses   What is/was bad about this method?
  - Opportunities   What could happen now?
  - Threats   What might stop things happening?
  - Training   What help do/did we need?

- Decide on the way that this activity will be carried out based on the SWOTT analysis in the last step. If the SWOTT analysis was done to evaluate an activity, see what lessons have been learned which will help in doing other activities.

HANDOUT

10.7 FUND-RAISING

The student council may decide to raise funds for its own activities or for charity. The agreement of school management should be sought before planning any fund-raising activities. The Treasurer has responsibility for ensuring that any money raised by the council is used for the purposes for which it was collected. A financial report should be provided to the student council at each meeting and also at the end of each school year to the student council and the board of management (*see* Handout 9.8 for Treasurer's role).

Some advice on fund-raising

- The Treasurer should keep good records of how much was raised at each fund-raising event and how it was spent.

- Don't hold too many fund-raising events. Prioritise a limited number of issues and events.

- Plan the fund-raising event, looking at any problems which may arise.

- Get ideas from other students in the school on fund-raising activities.

- Get agreement from school management for the fund-raising activity.

- Seek help from other students, staff, management, parents, etc. who may have experience in running the type of activity planned.

- Cheques or payments should be authorised by two signatories (two student council members or a student council member and a designated teacher).

- Make sure all students in the school are told about the fund-raising event well in advance and tell them how the student council plans to use the money raised.

Some examples of fund-raising activities include:

- Art exhibitions
- Cake sales
- Fashion shows
- Holding a collection
- Jumble sales
- Raffles
- Non-uniform day
- Table quizzes
- Sponsored activities
- Battle of the Bands

ACTIVITY

10.8 PLANNING A FUND-RAISING EVENT

Information

It is important that a fund-raising event is properly planned; otherwise it may be a failure and the student council may lose money. This activity will help a student council to plan a fund-raising event so as to ensure that the maximum funds are raised.

Instructions

- Agree what the money raised by the event will be used for.

- List all the possible fund-raising events that could be held and select a small number which should be the most successful.

- Carry out a SWOTT analysis (*see* Activity 10.6: Planning/evaluating an activity) on each possible event and consult students in the school on what they think would be the most popular event. On this basis, select the fund-raising event to be run.

- Get agreement from management to run the event.

- Answer the following questions:
    - What needs to be done to run this event? (e.g. book venue, get raffle tickets, publicise event, etc).
    - Who will do it?
    - Are there other people in the school who can help?
    - What resources do we need? (e.g. venue, equipment, etc).
    - When will we do the preparation work? (Set deadlines).
    - How will we do the preparation work?
    - What costs will be involved?
    - How much money is estimated to be raised by the event? (Be realistic about how many people will attend the event, buy raffle tickets, etc).
    - What problems, if any, could arise?

    The answers to these questions will be the plan of action for running the fund-raising event.

- Use Template 10.9: Event Plan if you find it useful.

10.9 EVENT PLAN

Title of event _____

Date _____

Venue _____

Time _____

NOTE: All actions that need to be carried out to run the event should be included in the Event Plan, including who will do them and the date they will be done by.

ACTIVITY	ACTION/PERSON TO DO	ACTION/DATE TO BE DONE BY
Get permission from management		
Book venue		
Purchase equipment (list all equipment)		
Rent equipment (list all equipment)		
Publicise event (list all publicity activities to be done)		
Prepare all materials needed for the event (list all materials)		
Jobs on the day (list names and what each person will do)		

10.10 PRODUCING A MAGAZINE, NEWSLETTER OR WEBSITE

Introduction

It is important that students, staff and management in the school know what the student council is doing. Publishing a magazine, newsletter or website are useful ways for the student council to keep people informed. In this way, the student council can raise awareness of upcoming events, let people know about their successes and generate an interest and enthusiasm in the school about the activities of the student council.

Tips for producing a magazine, newsletter or website

■ Appoint an editor/manager of the project. This person should be a good leader, organiser and motivator. Ideally, they should have some experience on how to produce a magazine, newsletter or website. They will organise the work and ensure that information is produced to include in the magazine, newsletter or website.

■ A small group of people should agree to work with the editor/manager of the project. Their job will be to write the articles or get others to write them.

■ A technical/design person should also be included in the group. Their job will be to put together the magazine, newsletter or website, with a suitable format and good design. Ask for help from a teacher or parent who has good computer skills, if necessary.

■ Ask the students in the school to contribute relevant articles.

■ The editor/manager of the project and the group working with them should go through all the articles and choose which ones to include in the magazine, newsletter or website. Remember to include articles about the successes of the student council and upcoming events and activities. Try and achieve a balance between articles submitted by and of interest to both Junior and Senior cycle students.

■ The magazine, newsletter or website can also be used to run a survey or to get ideas and information by adding a feedback page.

■ The editor/manager should check all articles for grammar and spelling.

■ The editor/manager should also ensure that there is nothing critical of individual people (students, staff or management) included in the articles. Individual people can, of course, be praised for their work or achievements.

■ Produce the newsletter or magazine and distribute it as widely as possible.

■ If you are producing a website, let everyone know the address and remind people to access it on a regular basis.

HANDOUT

10.11 CONDUCTING A SURVEY

Tips for planning your survey:

1. Determine exactly what it is that you want to find out about. In your survey, you can collect information on things such as people's attitudes, knowledge or needs by asking questions such as:
    - **Attitudes** − How well do you think the student council is working?
    - **Knowledge** − Do you know that there is a student council in this school?
    - **Needs or wants** − What can the student council do to improve your school experience?

2. Identify who has the information you need − your target group.

3. Select the best way to collect the information you need. Surveys can be carried out in a number of different ways, e.g. through the post, over the telephone, in face-to-face personal interviews or electronically using e-mail or web-based surveys. Your choice will depend on the time you have to carry out the survey, the resources available to you and the type of people you are surveying.

4. Design your questionnaire, making sure each question is clear and easy to understand, with no ambiguities. There are many ways to write questions. For example, your questions may be open-ended ('Why do you feel that way?') or closed ('Do you agree or disagree?').

5. Before sending out the questionnaire, do a pilot test on a small number of people who are as similar as possible to those you intend to survey. This will help you answer the following questions:
    - Do respondents understand the questions?
    - Do respondents understand the instructions?
    - Do the words you use mean the same thing to all respondents?
    - Do the questions get the type of information you are looking for?
    - How long does it take to complete the survey?

    Based on the results of this pilot test, you may need to revise some parts of your questionnaire.

6. Send out your survey. You might want to send a follow-up reminder to increase the number of completed questionnaires that you get back.

7. Analyse the data, draw conclusions and write up a summary of what you have found.

NOTE: Not all information is best collected through a survey. Sometimes it is more useful to use other methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and observation.

ACTIVITY

10.12 CONTRIBUTING TO THE SCHOOL
CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Information
This activity allows students to contribute to the development of the school code of behaviour.

Instructions
1. Break into small groups to discuss the following questions:
    - What would I like my class/school to be like?
      e.g. welcoming, friendly to everyone, good atmosphere, no disruptions in class.
    - What are the things that stop my class/school being like this?
    - What do other people sometimes do in the class/school that is not nice?
      e.g. disrupt class, bully others, litter.
    - What do I sometimes do in my class/school that is not nice and might upset others?
      e.g. exclude people in the class, graffiti.

    NOTE: People cannot be named during this discussion — just talk in general about things that sometimes happen.

2. Having discussed the questions, the groups come back together and each group reports back on what their group has said. Comments are listed on a flip chart.

3. The full group then looks at all the comments on the flip chart and agrees a set of rules (code of behaviour) that will make their school the kind of place they want it to be. If this exercise was done in a class, it can become the code of behaviour for that class.

4. This set of rules can then be brought to the student council for wider discussion and consultation on a formal School Code of Behaviour.

11. COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

This section provides some practical exercises, handouts and templates for communications between the student council and the school community.

COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN STUDENT COUNCIL AND STUDENTS

It is important that there is good two-way communication between the student council and students in the school. Students should be kept informed of the activities of the student council. They should also be able to give their views to the council on issues being discussed and should be able to put issues on the agenda for discussion. Handout 11.1 includes some good communication activities.

COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN COUNCIL AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT, STAFF AND PARENTS

There must be good two-way communication between the student council and school management, staff and parents. A liaison teacher appointed to the student council is a good way to assist in such communication. It is important that boards of management listen to the concerns of student councils and also respond in a meaningful way to these concerns. Handout 11.2 includes some good communication activities.

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11.1 GOOD COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENT COUNCIL AND STUDENTS

Good communication between the student council and students can be achieved by some of the following activities:

- Having a student council suggestions box.

- Announcing upcoming events at assembly/roll call.

- Keeping a noticeboard in the school where information on student council activities is posted.

- Producing a student newsletter.

- Holding regular class meetings/year meetings between members of the student council and the students they represent in order to give feedback on what is happening on the council, discuss issues on the agenda and allow students to submit items for discussion.

- Conducting surveys of students on issues being discussed by the council.

- Holding an open forum of students.

- Holding an Annual General Meeting (AGM) to allow the student council to report back to all the students together on its activities for the year. This should be a student-only event if possible.

- Setting up a student council website.

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11.2 GOOD COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENT COUNCIL AND MANAGEMENT, STAFF AND PARENTS

Good communications between the student council and school management, staff and parents can be achieved by some of the following activities:

■ Holding regular meetings with the school management, staff and parents to inform them of the decisions of the student council and seek a response.

■ Providing regular updates to the board of management, Principal, staff and parents' association on the student council's activities and plans. This can be written or oral.

■ Receiving regular updates from the board of management, Principal, staff and parents' association on their activities. This can be written or oral.

■ Providing an end of year report to the board of management.

■ Receiving the minutes of the board of management meetings.

■ Discussing the agenda for the board of management meetings.

■ Students being represented at the board of management meetings by the Principal or teacher.

■ A student representative on the board of management.

■ Consultation by school management and staff on issues affecting the operation of the school.

■ Placing student issues on the agenda for board of management meetings.

■ Attendance of representatives from the student council at board of management meetings.

■ Attendance of representatives from the board of management at student council meetings.

11.3 COMMUNICATIONS OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL IN THREE SCHOOLS

The 2005 report *Second-level Student Councils in Ireland* included three models of good practice. The communications process of the student council in each of these schools is detailed below.

SCHOOL A

Communication with students

‘Whatever we want we can bring to the Council, and if it can work then they'll do their best.’ (Student)

There is a systematic communication procedure in place for the student council to communicate with students and management. Each prefect is given a folder and notebook at the beginning of the year so that they can make notes in the meetings and jot down ideas. Before council meetings, prefects ask their classmates when the class is together, usually during religion class, if there are any issues they would like to raise through the council. In the same way, prefects report back to their class on the issues that were discussed at the meeting. The teachers are usually very accommodating and allow some time for this feedback.

‘And generally the teacher would leave the classroom if there were any problems, so that they [prefects] could talk to students, so they don't feel, oh we can't do that.’ (Student council member)

All prefects and vice-prefects wear a badge so students can approach their class prefect at anytime if they would like to raise an issue. The students feel comfortable talking to the prefects as they are ‘usually approachable’. The girls said that this trust is possible because they vote for their prefects. Members of the council felt that students recognise the council and do put forward their views:

‘Students, loads of times, will come up and say – will you bring that to the Council, will you bring that to the Council? It's good, they know it's there.’

The system of liaison officers from Senior cycle linking with the Junior classes is considered a particularly good way of ensuring that the Junior voice is heard.

‘Especially the liaison between the juniors and the seniors. If one of them had a problem in the class they could come and talk to us. We'll help them.’ (Student council member)

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Communication with management and staff

After each council meeting, the Head Girl writes a report about the main issues raised at the meeting. A copy is given to the Principal; another is put up in the staff room and another on the council noticeboard. The Head Girl usually gives the report to the Principal by hand and goes through it with her.

On some occasions, student council members will address the staff meeting. Teachers may not turn up at council meetings unless they are invited for a particular meeting. If they wish to address the council, they arrange a time to come during the meeting. Students on the council feel that management is very supportive of the council and will, when possible, try to facilitate them.

SCHOOL B

Communication with students

Students can make their views and opinions known to the student council in a number of ways. They can use the council's suggestions box below its noticeboard. They can also approach council members, each of whom wears a badge so that students know who they are. The council pointed out that it gets a lot of student views simply through word of mouth. Feedback about what decisions are made in council meetings is given to students through the council's newsletter, which is pinned on its noticeboard.

The procedure for suggestions is that the idea is brought to the council and they take a vote on whether it should be pursued or not. One suggestion that they did not proceed with was a request that those cycling to school would be able to cycle up the driveway instead of dismounting and walking. Some students drive mopeds and they are allowed to drive them up the driveway because they cannot push them, but cyclists must dismount and push their bicycles. The council decided not to pursue it because they understood that cyclists were obliged to dismount for safety reasons.

Council members were of the opinion that students do notice the council's activities whenever something 'big happens'; for example, when the council organised for the purchase of a new school fleece and bought a stereo.

'Most students do recognise that you are making a difference for them. With the bullying policy, people didn't come up and say thanks or anything. But the likes of the discount card, when they do find out about it, obviously they are going to thank us, like. For the fleece and stereo they thanked us, but they forgot a week later! It's just part of school life, like.' (Student council member)

Council members do want to raise the profile of the council with the student body and would like students to speak up more often.

'It's important to get students to speak up themselves, like. There's no point them going over to their friend and giving out. If they come to us, we can possibly sort something out.' (Student council member)

In order to raise its profile, the council plans to put photographs of members of the council on the council noticeboard. It also intends to put the meeting agenda on to the website for students to view. It would also like to speak more often at assemblies.

Communication with management

On some occasions, the Principal will attend a student council meeting, mainly so that he can fill them in on what's happening in the school, such as the building plans. If council members want to raise an issue with him after a meeting, they make an appointment to see him. Council members also introduce themselves once a year to the board of management, the parents' council and the staff.

SCHOOL C

Communication with students

Students communicate with the council informally, mainly through word of mouth. The council also has office hours when students can drop by. It has conducted surveys to access student views when necessary, for example, when the uniform was being changed. Students can also communicate with the council through their class reps and the council mentoring system ensures 1st year students get to know some council members and are given the opportunity to meet with them. The council also circulates its own monthly newsletter, which provides an update of activities.

Students who were not on the council stated that, although it is easy to approach a council member with a suggestion, they would like to hear more about what the council were planning and would like to get more feedback about the council's activities.

The council members themselves were very aware of this issue and were planning to raise their profile. They were planning to get a new 'suggestions box' since the previous one had been damaged. They were also planning to visit each class to tell them about the council, make more announcements about council activities on the intercom, get a section in the school newsletter and make better use of the school website.

Communication with management and staff

Sometimes the Principal will attend a council meeting. If the council would like to raise an issue with her, they make an appointment to see her. The agenda and minutes of the meeting are also given to the Principal. Student council members felt that school management is very supportive of their activities.

Staff members stated that although they do not necessarily have any contact with the council on a daily basis, the council was a visible group within the school. One teacher described the council as being an integral part of the school and played an important role in terms of welcoming dignitaries and visitors. Another discussed how he was planning to involve the council in developing the new Health and Safety policy.

Once a year, the council makes a presentation to the parents' association, the staff meeting and the board of management to inform them about the council and what it is planning to do. The parents' association reported to the school that it had been very impressed with the presentation given by the council. The Principal also includes a section on the student council in her report to the board of management.

ACTIVITY

11.4   IDENTIFYING ISSUES TO BE BROUGHT TO STUDENT COUNCIL

Information

This is an activity that a representative on the student council can carry out with the group he or she represents to raise potential issues or to give ideas to the student council.

Instructions

- Divide into small groups and list five of the main concerns or issues about school life that the students would like to discuss, e.g. the uniform, bullying, litter, etc.

- Give feedback to the main group and list all the issues.

- Decide which issues the class can deal with itself. These should be removed from the main list and put on a separate list. (The class should work on how to deal with these issues at a later date.)

- The remaining issues on the list should be prioritised by the group. This can be done using Activity 9.21: Prioritising/selecting issues or activities.

- The representative should bring the issues on the list to the student council in order of priority. Five issues is probably enough to bring to the student council, but the representative should keep a record of the other issues in case other representatives raise them.

ACTIVITY

11.5 FEEDBACK SHEET TO/FROM CLASS/YEAR AND STUDENT COUNCIL

NOTE: This is a useful sheet for student council representatives to use to communicate issues, discussions, decisions and outcomes between the student council and the group they represent.

CLASS/YEAR	
Student council getting opinions of students Student council lists issues on which it wants the opinions of students in the school	**Students giving their opinions to student council** Students give their opinions on issues raised by student council
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
Students raise issues Students list the issues that they want the student council to discuss/take action	**Student council feedback to students** Student council tells students the outcome of the discussion on the issues they raised
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6

TEMPLATE

11.6   STUDENT COUNCIL NOTICEBOARD

Members' names and contact details

_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Date and venue of next meeting

_____
_____
_____
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Agenda for next meeting

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_____
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_____

Minutes of last meeting

_____
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TEMPLATE

11.7   WHAT DO YOU WANT THE STUDENT COUNCIL TO DO?

Please give us your ideas!

School facilities

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

School food

_____

_____

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_____

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_____

Helping people

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Events

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Other

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11.8   LOOK WHAT THE STUDENT COUNCIL IS DOING

Issue: _____

Update: _____

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_____

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Issue: _____

Update: _____

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Issue: _____

Update: _____

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Issue: _____

Update: _____

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Issue: _____

Update: _____

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TEMPLATE

11.9 STUDENT COUNCIL ACHIEVEMENTS

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ACTIVITY

11.10 FEEDBACK OUTCOME OF STUDENT COUNCIL TO STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND MANAGEMENT

Information

It is important that the decisions and activities of the student council are communicated to the relevant people. This will help to ensure that the student council has a high profile and that it gets credit for its achievements. It is also necessary to communicate with students, teachers and management to get things done. This activity gets students to identify ways in which they will feedback the outcome of the student council's activities to students, teachers, management and any other relevant people.

Instructions

- Examine the outcome of a student council meeting and identify each separate issue.

- For each issue, decide the following:
    - Who needs to know about the discussion and decisions taken?
    - What do they need to know?
    - Who will inform them?
    - How will they be informed?
    - Do we need/want feedback from these groups on the issues raised?
    - How will we get this feedback?

- For ideas on the best ways to inform these groups about student council discussions, ideas and activities, use Handout 11.1: Good communication between the student council and students, and Handout 11.2: Good communication between the student council and management, staff and parents.

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11.11   NEGOTIATING SKILLS

It is likely that most student council members, and in particular the Chairperson, will have to use negotiating skills at some stage during their term of office. The Chairperson may need to negotiate a decision made by the student council with management. Student council members may have to negotiate on issues with the group they represent. Student council meetings may involve negotiation between different viewpoints to reach a compromise. The key to any negotiation is to *be prepared.*

Negotiation action plan

Before entering a negotiation, be very familiar with the issue and answer the following questions:

- Do I have all the information I need on this issue, including information to back up my argument?

- Do I know what I really want to achieve in this negotiation?

- What is the ideal outcome?

- What am I willing to compromise on?

- What is the least I am prepared to accept?

- What are my options?

- What are my strengths?

- What is the pressure on the other side?

- What are their options?

- What are the deadlines in the negotiation?

- Where do I start with my presentation of the issue?

- Where should we hold the negotiation?

- How many negotiators should we have?

- How can I help the other side to feel satisfied?

- How can I create a good and trusting environment?

- What do we agree on?

- What interests do we have in common?

- What way can I try to ensure that we are both satisfied with the outcome?

11.12 CONSULTING PEOPLE

Introduction
Before carrying out any consultation process, the student council should answer the following questions to ensure that the consultation is a successful one.

Tips for consulting students, staff, management and others on issues of importance

1. Do you know why you want to carry out this consultation and are you sure that it is necessary?

2. Do you know what you hope to achieve from the consultation?

3. Are you clear on the questions you want to ask in your consultation? Will the answers give you the information you need?

4. Who will you consult?

5. What method of consultation will you use? Is this the most appropriate method of consultation that is inclusive of everyone?

6. Have you publicised the consultation?

7. Have you given people enough time to reply to the consultation?

8. Will you be able to analyse the results?

9. How will you let people know the outcome of the consultation?

10. Will you evaluate the consultation process to ensure that any lessons learned can be taken into account in the future?

Consultation methods
There are many different methods of consultation. Some of the methods that might be appropriate in a school are:

■ **Written consultation:** Publicise the idea/issue and ask for written views.

■ **Meetings:** Hold a meeting on the issue where everyone is welcome to attend and give their opinion.

■ **Focus groups:** A number of small groups meet and a facilitator gets their views on the issue. This method could be used by each student council representative to get the views of the group he or she represents.

■ **Surveys:** Set a number of questions and ask for responses.

■ **Information technology:** Use of Internet and/or text to get views.

12. DISSOLUTION OF STUDENT COUNCIL AND REMOVAL OF MEMBER

INTRODUCTION

This section contains information on the dissolution of a student council, removal of members and filling vacancies.

Dissolution

Normally, a student council is dissolved when the term of office of its members expires. The board of management of the school may dissolve the student council before the expiry of the term in accordance with the rules and procedures governing dissolution. This will only happen in exceptional circumstances after consultation with all concerned.

Circumstances that may require the early dissolution of a student council include:

- where a significant number of members of the council have been involved in a serious breach of the school's code of behaviour;
- where serious irregularities have occurred in the election of the council;
- where the activities of the council have endangered the welfare of staff or students of the school;
- where serious financial irregularities have occurred.

Removing a member from the student council

Sometimes it may be more appropriate to remove an individual member (or members) of the council rather than dissolve the council as a whole. A member of the council can be removed by:

1. The student council for a continuing failure to attend meetings of the council, or for a lack of commitment to the purposes of the council, or for stated misconduct. This decision should be taken on a majority vote of the council and the member should be given adequate notice of the proposal, the reasons for it and the opportunity to present his or her case and to be accompanied by a colleague. They should subsequently be entitled to appeal to the board of management.
2. The board of management in accordance with the board's rules and procedures. The member concerned and the council should be given adequate notice of the proposal, the reasons for it and the opportunity to appeal the removal to the board of management or patron of the school in accordance with established local appeals procedures within the school.

Filling a vacancy

Vacancies should be filled in accordance with the procedures governing elections. This should be set out in the Student Council Constitution (*see* Handout 9.3).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SECTION 27 OF THE EDUCATION ACT, 1998

(1)   A board shall establish and maintain procedures for the purposes of informing students in a school of the activities of the school.

(2)   The procedures established and maintained under subsection (1) shall facilitate the involvement of the students in the operation of the school, having regard to the age and experience of the students, in association with their parents and teachers.

(3)   Students of a post-primary school may establish a student council and, without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), a board of a post-primary school shall encourage the establishment by students of a student council and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to –
(a)   students who wish to establish a student council; and
(b)   student councils when they have been established.

(4)   A student council shall promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the board, parents and teachers.

(5)   The rules for the establishment of a student council shall be drawn up by the board, in accordance with such guidelines as may be issued by the Minister from time to time, and such rules may provide for the election of members and the dissolution of a student council.

(6)   A student council, following consultation with the board, may make rules governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs.

APPENDIX 2: RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

All of the publications listed below are available on www.studentcouncil.ie

Second-level Student Councils in Ireland: A Study of Enablers, Barriers and Supports
by Anna Fiona Keogh and Jean Whyte

A research report by the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin
on behalf of the National Children's Office, 2005
This report presents the findings of a study carried out by the Children's Research Centre on behalf of the Working Group on Student Councils in Second-level Schools, established by the National Children's Office.

It's Your Choice, Use Your Voice – Set up a student council in your school
Working group on Student Councils in Second-level Schools, 2004

This leaflet provides information on setting up and running student councils.

Student Councils: A Voice for Students
Department of Education and Science, 2002

These guidelines provide practical guidance to students, teachers and school management on the establishment and operation of student councils.

Youth Participation, Citizenship, Democracy
National Youth Council of Ireland, 2001

This pack provides helpful advice to support the development of student councils.

Share it with the Rest of the Class
National Youth Council of Ireland, 2000

A nationwide survey of second-level students and principals, examining their views on student participation in school decision-making and student councils.

Education Act, 1998
Section 27 of the Act refers to student councils *(see Appendix 1).*

APPENDIX 3: CONTACT DETAILS

IRELAND

Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
10H Centrepoint Business Park
Oak Drive, Dublin 12
Tel: (01) 460 1150
E-mail: office@accs.ie
www.accs.ie

Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)
ASTI House
Winetavern Street, Dublin 8
Tel: (01) 671 9144
E-mail: info@asti.ie
www.asti.ie

Dáil na nÓg (The National Youth Parliament)
c/o The National Children's Office
St. Martin's House
Waterloo Road, Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 242 0000
E-mail: nco@health.gov.ie
www.dailnanog.ie

Department of Education and Science
E-mail: info@education.gov.ie
www.education.ie

Marlborough Street, Dublin 1
Tel: (01) 889 6400

Cornamaddy
Athlone, Co. Westmeath
Tel: (090) 648 3600

Portlaoise Road
Tullamore, Co. Offaly
Tel: (057) 932 4300

Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
McCann House
99 Marlborough Road
Donnybrook, Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 496 6033
E-mail: info@ivea.ie
www.ivea.ie

Joint Managerial Body (JMB)
Emmet House
Dundrum Road, Dublin 14
Tel: (01) 283 8255
E-mail: info@secretariat.ie
www.jmb.ie

National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
46 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 662 7025
E-mail: napd@eircom.net
www.napd.ie

National Children's Office (NCO)
St. Martin's House
Waterloo Road, Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 242 0000
E-mail: nco@health.gov.ie
www.nco.ie

National Parents' Council (Post-Primary)
Unit 5, Glasnevin Business Centre
Ballyboggin Road, Dublin 11
Tel: (01) 830 2740
E-mail: npcpp@eircom.net
www.npcpp.ie

National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
3 Montague Street, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 478 4122
E-mail: info@nyci.ie
www.youth.ie

Ombudsman for Children
Millennium House
52-56 Great Strand Street, Dublin 1
Tel: (01) 865 6800
LoCall: 1890 654 654
E-mail: oco@oco.ie
www.oco.ie

Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)
73 Orwell Road
Rathgar, Dublin 6
Tel: (01) 492 2588
E-mail: tui@tui.ie
www.tui.ie

The Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) Support Team
Second Level Support Service
Curriculum Development Unit
Sundrive Road
Crumlin, Dublin 12
Tel: (01) 402 0422
Fax: (01) 453 7659
E-mail: cspe@cdu.cdvec.ie
www.cspe.slss.ie

Union of Secondary Students (USS)
Ceann Áras na Mac Léinn
Grattan Street
Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 435 3400
E-mail: info@ussonline.net
www.ussonline.net

INTERNATIONAL

Education International
A worldwide trade union organisation of education personnel
www.ei-ie.org

Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)
www.obessu.org

School Councils UK
www.schoolcouncils.org

National Children's Office
1st Floor, St. Martin's House, Waterloo Road, Dublin 4

Tel: +353 1 242 0000   **Fax:** +353 1 664 1929
E-mail: nco@health.gov.ie   **Web:** www.nco.ie

Student Council Working Group
Web: www.studentcouncil.ie

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