



Student Councils
a voice for students

student councils:

a voice for students



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Minister's Foreword



The Education Act, 1998 provides for the establishment of student councils, intending them to play an integral and important role in the school community. Student councils provide a representative structure through which students can debate issues of concern and undertake initiatives of benefit to the school and the wider community.

Students have a voice and a contribution to make to their school. It is important that they be given the opportunity to express their views on issues of concern to them in the school. It is equally important that they are listened to and encouraged to take an active part in promoting the aims and objectives of the school. The recent establishment of student councils in many schools is a most welcome development. It is my wish to see this happening in all of our post-primary schools.

I am pleased, therefore, to publish these guidelines which are intended to provide practical guidance to school management, teachers and students alike in the establishment and operation of student councils. The guidelines are divided into three parts. Part I describes the role and functions of a student council. Part II provides guidelines to school boards of management in accordance with section 27 of the Education Act. Part III provides a practical guide to students with accompanying support materials.

I recognise that the student council is a relatively new concept for many schools and that there will inevitably be a learning process for all involved. Nevertheless, I am confident that through active partnership between management, teachers, parents and students the concept will work effectively for the benefit of the entire school community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Woods". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'W'.

Dr. Michael Woods, T.D.

Minister for Education and Science

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PART I

Introducing the Student Council and its Role



What is a Student Council?

A Student Council is a representative structure through which students in a post-primary school can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management and staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students.

Why have a Student Council?

The Education Act, 1998 recognises that Student Councils are an increasingly common feature in post-primary schools and have worked to the benefit of many schools. The Act seeks to extend the success of this model to other post-primary schools throughout the country.

Students have a valuable contribution to make to the effectiveness of their school and their involvement in the operation of the school is itself a valuable part of the education process for the students.

A Student Council provides an opportunity for students to engage in a structured partnership with teachers, parents and school managers in the operation of their school. Research indicates that Student Councils can improve academic standards and reduce dropout rates in schools.* Student Councils can create a sense of ownership of the school and its activities among the student population.

The establishment of a Student Council gives students an opportunity to acquire the sort of communication, planning and organisational skills which will be of benefit to them in their future lives. It enables students to take responsibility for projects, and to demonstrate that they can manage and bring such projects to successful conclusion. Moreover, the contribution made by a Student Council to the development of school policy in a number of areas can have significant benefits for students and the school. School policies are far more likely to be successful where they are clearly understood and accepted by all partners within the school community.

The Education Act recognises that students of a school will take the lead role in the establishment and operation of a Student Council, although the Act also provides an important role for the Board of Management in supporting the establishment and ongoing development of the Student Council.

At the end of the day, a Student Council will thrive only if students themselves are committed to the concept and to making it work.

The role of the Student Council

The main role of a Student Council as set out in the Education Act is *"to 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"*.

A Student Council will set its own objectives, which will vary from school to school. Some general objectives could include:

- ★ To enhance communication between students, management, staff and parents
- ★ To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development
- ★ To promote friendship and respect among pupils
- ★ To support the management and staff in the development of the school
- ★ To represent the views of the students on matters of general concern to them

*see *'Moving Forward with Students'* Luke Monahan, IAPCE, 1999

A Student Council will identify activities that it would like to be involved in organising, although the final decision on the activities of a Student Council should be agreed with school management. *Some suggested activities for student councils are included in the 'Support Materials' section at Appendix A.*

Many schools that do not yet have a Student Council may already have a well-established class captain, prefect or mentoring system. These guidelines do not require that schools replace established practices that already work well with an entirely new structure or set of procedures. Instead these guidelines allow schools to adapt current practice to meet the requirements of the Act.

In some schools students play a valuable support role for school management for example by assisting in the running of the school shop and/or library or helping to maintain order in corridors between classes and during breaks. These arrangements generally have not been developed as representative structures, and the activities involved may not be appropriate to the work of a Student Council. School management should consider carefully which elements of their existing structures they will incorporate with a Student Council, and which may reasonably continue to run in parallel.

The Education Act provides that a Student Council shall act in co-operation with the Board of Management, parents and teachers. A Student Council should not through its activities interfere with, or detract from, the authority of school management or the teaching staff of the school. It is therefore not a function of a Student Council to discuss or comment on matters relating to the employment or professional affairs of the Principal, teachers and other staff of the school, or to become involved in any issues that fall within their professional competence.

The Student Council and the Board of Management

Section 27 of the Education Act, 1998 sets out four specific duties for Boards of Management:

- ① A Board of Management shall establish and maintain procedures for the purpose of informing students in a school of the activities of the school.
- ② A Board of Management in second-level schools shall encourage and help students to set up a Student Council and shall assist a Student Council when established.
- ③ A Board of Management shall draw up rules for the establishment of a Student Council which shall provide for the election of members and the dissolution of a Council. The rules should be in line with the guidelines issued by the Minister (see PART II).
- ④ Finally, a Board will have a role in considering the rules governing meetings of the Student Council, and the conduct of its affairs.

Encouragement and assistance in the establishment of a Student Council can be provided in various ways, for example, by providing information and/or guidance on the role and potential benefits of Student Councils, providing a room for students to meet to organise the establishment of the Council, allowing elections to take place during break time or class time, where this does not seriously disrupt normal classroom work. It is generally desirable for a teacher or parent to oversee this process.

Once a Student Council has been set up the Board of Management should give active support to it. This could involve designating a teacher in the school and/or a parent to liaise with the Council on an ongoing basis, as well as assisting the Council in drawing up a constitution and in planning and organising its activities.

If the value of a Student Council is to be fully realised, it will be important that the Board of Management involves the Council in the development of school policies in areas such as bullying, discipline and uniform requirements, and in the planning and organisation of school activities and

events. The establishment of a Council is not an end in itself, but rather offers all concerned an enhanced means of building partnership and effective communications within the school. It is important to stress the need for a Board of Management not only to listen to the Student Council but also to respond in a meaningful way to its concerns.

The Education Act provides that the primary responsibility for the management and operation of a school lies with the Board of Management acting through the Principal of the school. Student Councils will be required to operate within this context in promoting the interests of the school, in representing students, and in improving life within the school community.

The Student Council and the Principal

The role of the school Principal is of central importance in the establishment and operation of a Student Council. In assisting the Board of Management in the development of school policy, and in working with teachers and parents to implement it at day-to-day level, the Principal is centrally placed in all aspects of the school's operations.

In the initial stages, the Principal, together with the other teachers, can assist in the development of a Student Council in several ways, for example, by discussing with students the role of a Student Council and the role of individual representatives on the Council, by facilitating the holding of elections and by advising on an appropriate constitution or statement of objectives. As the Council develops, and begins to expand its role, the Principal will assist in guiding the Council's development, so as to allow for a constructive and purposeful Council.

More generally, the Principal can promote a school culture which recognises the potentially valuable input that students can make, through a Student Council, into the development of the school.

The Student Council and Teachers

Developing a spirit of partnership and co-operation between a Student Council and teachers has benefits for both. The Student Council can play an important role in recognising and supporting the work of teachers. Similarly the interest and support of teachers will be of great value to a Student Council, particularly during the early stages of its development.

It is generally desirable for a member of the teaching staff to attend meetings of the Council. The support and guidance offered by a teacher will be very useful to a Council when planning its activities, and providing for a teacher to attend Council meetings will help to build a co-operative and good working relationship between students and staff of the school.

The Student Council and the Parents' Association

The Parents' Association can make a significant contribution to the development of a Student Council, by encouraging and supporting students in the establishment of a Council and by supporting the Council in its activities.

A Student Council may find it useful to meet with members of the Parents' Association from time to time or to invite a parents' representative to attend Council meetings or to assist it in particular activities. This will help to ensure good communication between the Student Council and the Parents' Association.

Key functions of Student Councils

The functions and activities of a Student Council should support the aims and objectives of the Council and promote the development of the school and the welfare of its students. In planning and undertaking activities during the course of the school year, the Council should:

- ◆ work closely with school management, teachers and parents,
- ◆ consult regularly with students in the school, and
- ◆ involve as many students as possible in the activities of the Council.

There is a wide range of activities of benefit to the school community which a Student Council may wish to undertake, some of which are outlined below:

Representing the views of the student body to the school management

This should be one of the fundamental aims of every Council. It involves talking and listening to the student body, considering their views and concerns, and discussing these with the school management on behalf of the students.

Promoting good communications within the school

Improving communication within the school community is a shared responsibility and a Student Council can contribute to this process. Making presentations at staff meetings to keep staff informed of activities, keeping a Student Council notice-board or organising a regular newsletter are just some ways the Council can communicate with the students, school management and staff, and parents.

Supporting the educational development and progress of students

A Student Council can contribute to the learning environment for students in the school by, for example, setting up study groups for students in exam classes or homework clubs, or organising lunchtime activities such as language clubs.

Assisting with induction and/or mentoring for new first year students

Starting secondary school is a challenging new experience for 1st Year students. A mentoring programme where senior students help new students to find their feet can help their integration into the school community.

Contributing to the development of school policy

The Student Council can actively contribute to the development of school policy in a wide range of areas such as bullying, uniform requirements, behaviour code and extra-curricular activities. The Council could form sub-committees to consider individual policy issues, to consult with students, staff and parents on those issues and to represent the Council's views on those issues to school management.

Assisting in school sporting and cultural activities

Student Councils can assist in organising and developing sports and cultural activities within the school, including, for example, sports days and drama or musical events.

Assisting with or organising fund-raising events for charity

Student Councils can organise events both within the school and involving the wider community, for the purposes of raising money for designated charities.

Liaising with Student Councils in other schools

It may be useful for a Student Council to liaise with Student Councils in other schools, particularly in the organisation of sporting and cultural activities and when fund-raising for charity. An existing Student Council could have a useful role in helping and advising a newly formed Student Council in another school.

PART II

Establishment and Operation of a Student Council

Guidelines for Boards of Management



**BALLOT
BOX**

Guidelines for Boards of Management on the establishment and dissolution of Student Councils

Section 27 (5) of the Education Act, 1998 provides that a Board of Management of a post-primary school shall draw up rules for the establishment of a Student Council, including the election of members and the dissolution of a Council, and that these rules shall be in accordance with such guidelines as may be issued from time to time by the Minister for Education and Science.

THE MINISTER IS HEREBY ISSUING THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES FOR THIS PURPOSE:

A Board of Management shall, following consultation with teachers and parents, draw up rules for the establishment of a Student Council, having regard to the following basic principles:

- ◆ the 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
- ◆ the Council should, as far as is practicable, be representative of each class or year group in the school
- ◆ the Board of Management shall at all times retain the right to dissolve a Council or remove a Council member, in accordance with these guidelines.

① *Establishing a Student Council*

Where students in a school notify the Board of Management that they wish to establish a Student Council, the Board of Management should provide them, in a timely manner, with a copy of the rules it has drawn up in accordance with these guidelines.

Where students have not yet taken the initiative to establish a Student Council, the Board of Management acting through the school Principal and teaching staff shall encourage, facilitate and assist students in doing so.

② *Size and Composition of a Student Council*

The size and composition of a Student Council shall be determined by the Board of Management having regard both to the need for the Council to be representative of all students in the school and the need for it to function effectively.

It may not always be appropriate for each class to have a representative on the Council, for example in a large school. Where a Board of Management decides to allow representation for each year group rather than each class, each class should be allowed to nominate a candidate for election. In large schools consideration may also be given to having two councils, one for Junior Cycle students and one for Senior Cycle students, with Council officers who attend meetings of both Councils.

A Board of Management may, at its discretion or on the advice of the Principal, decide that 1st year students should not be appointed to the Student Council having regard to their relatively recent introduction to second level education. Where a Board of Management takes such a decision, it should provide adequate structures to ensure that the views and concerns of 1st year students are addressed, for example through a mentoring programme.

In a co-educational school, provision should be made to allow for an appropriate gender balance on

the Council, either through the selection by each class of two representatives, one of each gender, or through some other method.

A Board may also, at its discretion, provide for a teacher to be included as a non-voting member of the Council.

3 *Nominations and Elections*

The Board of Management, or the Principal acting on its behalf, should set a date for the election of representative(s) to the Student Council.

All students in each class or year group having a representative on the Student Council should be entitled to stand for election to the Council.

A Board of Management may, at its discretion, make provision for the Principal or relevant teacher to veto a nomination. As such a right should be exercised with caution and only in exceptional cases, the Board of Management in its rules should clearly state the circumstances in which any veto may be used. Provision should be made that where a veto is exercised, those exercising the veto must explain clearly to students the basis for their decision, and students should be given an opportunity to respond.

Nominations for election should be made within a reasonable period before the election as specified by the Board.

Voting may take place during class time, break or after school. The holding of elections during class time is at the discretion of the Board of Management or Principal as the case may be, having regard to the views of the staff of the school.

All voting should take place by secret ballot.

The counting of votes should take place under the supervision of a member of the staff of the school or a representative of the Board of Management or a parent designated for this purpose. In the case of junior cycle classes, provision may be made for senior cycle students to supervise the counting of votes.

The Board of Management rules should specify the manner in which candidates are to be elected. It should also specify the term of office of elected members. The rules may also provide for the election of a President of the Council.

The Board of Management may wish to discuss the merits of different voting systems with students before adopting a particular system.

4 *First meeting*

The Board of Management should provide in its rules for the convening, by the Principal or a designated member of staff, of the first meeting of each newly formed Council. The first meeting of a newly formed Council should take place early in the school year or as soon as possible after the conclusion of the elections throughout the school. In general, where elections take place at the start of the school year, the first meeting of the Council should be held within 3-4 school weeks of the election.

5 Constitution

The Student Council may make rules governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs, but it shall consult with the Board of Management before doing so. Such rules may include the drawing up of a Constitution. Where a Student Council does not already have a constitution in place, it should be encouraged to draw one up.

6 Procedures for filling a vacancy in the Council

Where a vacancy arises for any reason on the Council, the class or year group concerned should hold a further election, in the manner set out above, for the election of a candidate who will serve as the class or year representative for the remainder of the term of office of the Council.

7 Removal of a Member

The Student Council may remove any member or officer of the Council for a continuing failure to attend meetings of the Student Council, or for demonstrated lack of commitment to the purposes of the Student Council, or for stated misconduct. Such a decision will be taken on the basis of a majority vote of the Council. The member or members shall be given adequate notice of the proposal, the reasons therefor and an opportunity to present their case in advance.

The Board of Management, acting on the advice of the Principal, or on its own initiative, may remove a member from the Student Council. The rules drawn up by the Board of Management should state clearly the grounds on which the Board may remove a member or members of the Council. The Student Council should be given adequate notice of the proposal, and the reasons therefor, and both the Council and the member(s) concerned should be given an opportunity to appeal the decision to the Board of Management or patron, in accordance with any local appeals procedures which may be in place.

8 Dissolution of a Student Council

The Board of Management rules will provide for the dissolution of a Student Council where the Council's term has expired or, in exceptional circumstances, before the expiry of its term. The rules drawn up by the Board should state clearly the grounds on which the Board may consider dissolving the Student Council before the expiry of its term of office. Dissolution should happen only in specified circumstances and on grounds of a significantly serious nature, such as:

- ◆ where a significant number of the Council members 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

Where a Board is considering the dissolution of the Council before the due date, the Board should seek the views of the staff of the school and the Parents' Association prior to making a decision. Adequate notice should be given to the Council, and the reasons for the dissolution clearly explained. The Student Council should be given the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Board of Management or patron, in accordance with established local appeals procedures.

Early dissolution of the Council may not be appropriate where a minority of members of the Council have been involved in a breach of the school code; in those circumstances it may be more appropriate to remove only those students concerned from the Council.

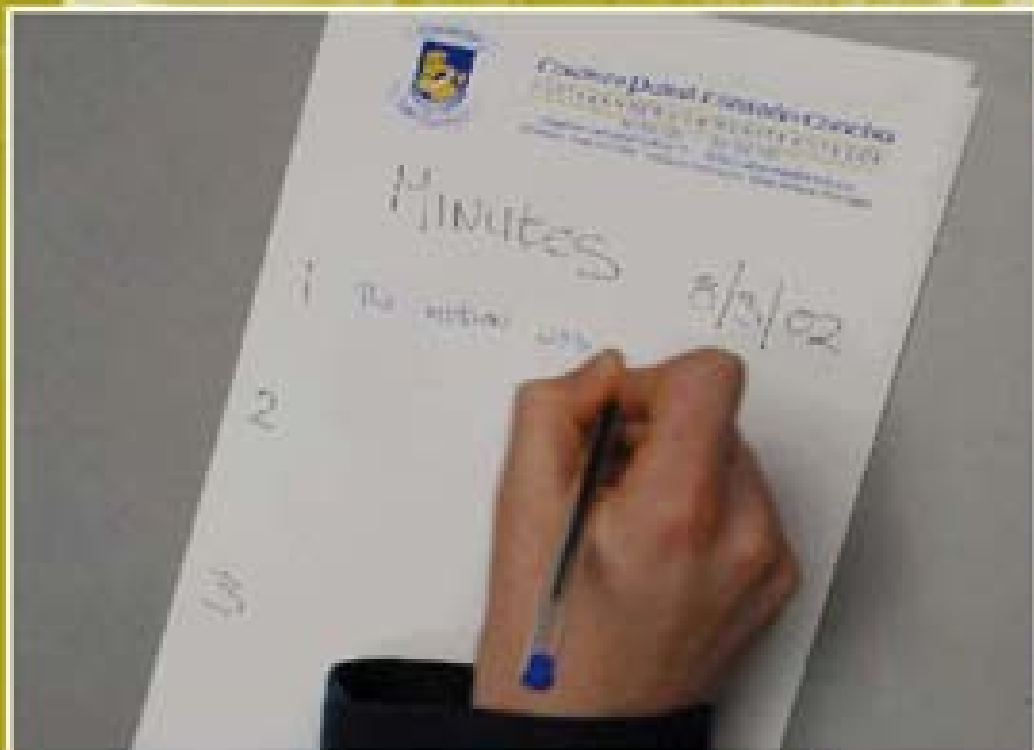
Provision should be made in the Board's rules for the election of a new Student Council where the Council has been dissolved. Where the Student Council is dissolved less than 6 school weeks prior to the end of the school year, the election of a new Council may reasonably be left until the following school year.



PART III

Establishing and Running a Student Council

Practical Guide for Students



GETTING STARTED!

Deciding to start a Student Council

Where a number of students wish to start a Council in their school they should approach the Principal or Board of Management and ask for a copy of the rules for the establishment of a Student Council.

The rules will vary from school to school, but will be in accordance with the guidelines set out in PART II.

Students should pay careful attention to the rules they are given and should not hesitate to ask the Principal or the Board of Management questions if they don't understand some part of the rules or need advice in general. Similarly students may wish to ask the Parents' Association for help or advice. At this stage regular communication with the Principal and teaching staff is necessary as it is important that everyone works together and that trust is built up between the students involved and school management.

Advice and Assistance from School Management

The management of the school will offer encouragement and support to students in the formation of a Student Council.

Both the Transition Year Programme and the new subject of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) give schools the opportunity to explore with students the value and need for a Student Council, and facilitate the involvement of teachers in the establishment of a Council.

Where students have not yet taken the initiative, or where students who want to start a Council are finding it difficult to get other students involved, the Board of Management, Principal or teachers could assist the process by providing information and/or guidance on the role and potential benefits of a Student Council. Management may also provide a room for students to meet to organise the establishment of the Council, or allow elections to take place in class time, where this does not seriously disrupt normal classroom work.

Parents' Association

The role of the Parents' Association is also one of support and encouragement. The Parents' Association can help by encouraging the students to consider starting a Council and by assisting with the running of elections.

Elections

The rules drawn up by the Board of Management will explain how students may elect a Council, and students should follow these rules.

Composition of a Student Council

The Board's rules will set out how many students may sit on the Council, who will elect them and the timing of the elections. They should also specify the term of office of elected members which may vary from a school year to a number of years. They will also set out whether a teacher is to be included as a non-voting member of the Council.

The composition of a Student Council and the procedures for electing members will generally depend on the size of the school. The aim should be to provide a Council which is representative of students in the school and which at the same time is able to function effectively. For example, in a smaller school every class in the school might have a representative on the Council, whereas in large schools each year group might vote for a specific number of representatives (see the example below). Whichever model is adopted in the school, it should ensure that each class is given the opportunity to nominate a candidate for election.

SCHOOL A

School A has six year groups, 1st to 6th year, with only 1 class in each year group. Each class is allowed 2 representatives on the Council, which results in a Student Council of 12 members.

SCHOOL B

School B also has six year groups, 1st to 6th year, but has 5 classes in each year group. If School B had 2 representatives for every class the Student Council would have 60 members. Instead each year group might have 3 representatives on the Council. Each class in the year group nominates one candidate, resulting in 5 candidates, and the year group votes as a whole to elect the three who will be on the Student Council. This results in a Council of 18 members.

Some schools may favour the involvement of all year groups in the Council, others may prefer that first year students are not involved, as it may be difficult for them to choose representatives where many of them have only just met. Boards of Management may therefore exclude first years from the Student Council at their discretion, although care should then be taken to ensure that the views and concerns of first year students are addressed through other mechanisms, such as a mentoring programme.

In large schools, another possibility that may be considered is to have two Councils, one for Junior Cycle students and one for Senior Cycle students, with Council officers attending meetings of both Councils.

In a co-educational school provision should be made for an appropriate gender balance on the Council. This may be done in a variety of ways, and possible options include requiring the nomination of an equal number of male and female candidates, or the co-option of additional students onto the Council once it has been established. To use the example of Schools A and B given above, if these schools are co-educational, with equal numbers of male and female students, the following might apply:

SCHOOL A

Each class is allowed 2 representatives – classes must vote for one male representative and one female representative.

SCHOOL B

Five classes in each year group collectively electing their representatives. To allow for gender balance, provision could be made that each year group elects 4 representatives, 2 male and 2 female. Each class will nominate 2 candidates, 1 male and 1 female, giving 10 candidates for election. Each year group will elect their 2 female representatives from the 5 female candidates and similarly elect their 2 male representatives.

The rules in relation to the composition of the Council will be a matter for individual Boards of Management to decide, having regard to the need for meaningful representation of all students on the Council, while ensuring that the Council is a reasonable size.

Nomination of candidates

The Board of Management rules will also set out the procedures governing the nomination of candidates.

Provision will be made for each class to nominate candidates, whether those candidates are going forward for election as a class or year representative. Schools with an established pastoral care system which provides for class tutors for each class have a ready made structure through which the nomination and election of class representatives can occur.

Voting

Voting may, at the discretion of school management, take place during class time, or elections may be held during the lunch period or after classes are finished. Holding elections will require organisation on the part of students, and it may be useful to ask the Principal, teachers and/or parents for some help.

The timing of elections will be determined by school management and students will be given reasonable advance notice so as to enable nominations to be made by individual classes. Voting should be carried out by means of a secret ballot, and the counting of votes should be carried out under the supervision of a teacher or parent as arranged by school management.

The voting system which determines the manner in which candidates are to be elected will be a matter for the Board of Management or Principal to decide, although school management may wish to discuss the merits of different voting systems with students before adopting a particular system. It is important that students understand the system to be used and it is advisable to raise any specific questions with management before the elections are held.

There are many methods available for the election of Student Councils. Schools will choose the method that suits their individual circumstances. A 'first past the post' system is a straightforward system which may be used in some schools, although the use of proportional representation may provide for a more appropriate representation of students, particularly in larger schools.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The First Meeting of the Student Council

The first meeting of the Student Council will generally be convened by school management shortly after the elections. School management will assist the Council in finding a suitable venue for the meeting. The Principal or one of the teachers acting on behalf of the Principal may address the first meeting of the Council and this will be an opportunity for the student members of the Council to raise any particular issues or concerns in relation to their role and the role of the Council.

The Constitution

One of the most important tasks for any Student Council that has not previously done so is to draw up a constitution. A constitution should set out the general objectives and functions of the Council and the rules that govern it, for example:

- ★ How many officers the Council will appoint (for example - chairperson, secretary, treasurer) and how these officers will be elected
- ★ Whether the Council will have subcommittees, and if so, how and when these will be established
- ★ Provision for a teacher and/or member of the Parents' Association to attend Council meetings
- ★ How many times a year the Council will meet, and when (for example, the last Friday of every month)
- ★ 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, (for example, how many members must be present for a vote to be valid (quorum), and what happens if the Council is divided evenly on a decision)
- ★ If the Council will be involved in fundraising 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

Generally a simple majority at a meeting of all Council members should be sufficient to adopt the constitution.

There are significant benefits in having teachers and parents involved in the activities of the Student Council. Involving a teacher and/or member of the Parents' Association in the early stages of a new Council can be particularly helpful. Making provision for teachers and parents to attend Council meetings over the course of the year also has significant benefits for the Council, as it means that there is a source of ongoing advice and support available. Where a teacher or a parent is involved from year to year it also ensures some continuity in the activities of the Council.

A Student Council may also wish to provide for different roles for junior and senior cycle students on the Council. For example a Council may specify that only Transition Year and 5th year students may be officers, so as to ensure that officers have the requisite experience to carry out the role effectively and to ensure that 6th year students are free from any distraction from their studies that appointment as an officer might cause. The Council should consult with the school management, staff and parents when considering this issue.

When developing a constitution the Student Council shall, as required under the Education Act, consult with the Board of Management which will be able to provide useful advice and guidance in drawing up a suitable constitution. Before a constitution is adopted the Board of Management should be given a copy and the Student Council should listen carefully to any suggestions the Board of Management may make. Consultation with teachers and parents will also be beneficial. It should be noted that any provisions in the constitution relating to the removal of a member of the Council, or the filling of vacancies on the Council, will need to be in accordance with the Board of Management rules on the matter.

Remember – the constitution is not written in stone! When drawing up a constitution, it might be difficult for a new Student Council to know what will work best in its situation. If it turns out that the constitution needs to be changed, the Council may do so at a later date, but any changes will have to be made in consultation with the Board of Management. **In general the constitution will remain in place for some time to come, so time spent on preparing it is time well spent!**

Where the constitution of a Student Council is already in place, any newly elected Council should take time to go through it carefully, as it provides the framework in which the Council shall operate and it is therefore important that all Council members are familiar with its provisions.

A sample agenda, constitution and calendar of activities may be found in the 'Support Materials' section in Appendix A. A guide to better meetings and fundraising may also be found in the 'Support Materials' section.

THE WORK OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL

The work of the Student Council

The Student Council as a whole 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 for any funds raised by the Council

Planning and Managing the Work

While the Student Council members all have a part to play in the activities of the Council, not all can or need to be involved in organising the work. It is for this reason that the Council should appoint officers. It may also decide to establish subcommittees.

Officers

Every Student Council should appoint a Chairperson or President, a Treasurer and a Secretary. In some schools a President may be appointed by election. The Student Council may also choose to appoint a Deputy Chairperson and a Public Relations Officer. The role of each of these officers is outlined below, and each will normally hold office for the school year.

Subcommittees

Rather than trying to plan and organise every activity during the year, a Student Council may find that it is more effective to use subcommittees to plan and oversee specific Council activities. Subcommittees should be required to submit their plan to the Council for approval and should report back to the Council on their activities. One area where a subcommittee might be useful is a fundraising subcommittee. It is a matter for the Council to decide how many members of the Council will sit on a subcommittee and the Council may choose to dissolve a subcommittee at any time. The Student Council's constitution should provide a clear framework for the operation of subcommittees.

The role of the Officers

Chairperson

The Chairperson is responsible for presiding over meetings of the Council. The Chairperson, with the Secretary, prepares the agenda for each meeting and, where necessary, signs the minutes (see below) once they have been agreed by the Council. Where a vote is held at a Council meeting, and the votes are divided equally, the Chairperson generally has the casting vote. The Chairperson may also be designated to represent the Council at meetings with school management.

Deputy Chairperson

The Deputy Chairperson is responsible for assisting the Chairperson, and when the Chairperson is absent from a meeting s/he assumes the role of the Chairperson for that meeting.

Secretary

The Secretary, with the Chairperson, prepares the agenda for each meeting and the Secretary then circulates it to all the members of the Council either in advance of the meeting or at the start of the meeting. This will involve consulting with the other Council officers in order to decide what will be included on the agenda. All agendas should include a provision for 'Any other business'; this allows Council members to raise a matter for discussion in the event that it has not been included on the agenda.

The Secretary also keeps a record of Council meetings and any decisions taken by the Council (the minutes). If necessary these minutes can be circulated to all members of the Council either with the agenda for the next meeting or at the start of the next meeting. The Council can be given the opportunity to make any changes to the minutes before they are signed by the Chairperson.

Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for managing any funds raised by the Student Council and should keep a complete account of all income and expenditure of the Council. Advice and assistance in this regard may be provided by school management or a teacher acting on its behalf. The Treasurer should provide the Council with a complete financial report at the end of the school year. Given the responsibility of the post, a Student Council may reasonably require the Treasurer to be a Senior Cycle student.

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.

Public Relations Officer

A Student Council may wish to appoint a Public Relations or Communications Officer with responsibility for promoting good communications between the Council and the student body as well as consulting with teachers, parents and school management on issues affecting the student body.

Some useful tips for officers are included in the 'Support Materials' section in Appendix A.

Communication

Regular, effective communication is the key to success for any Student Council. This doesn't happen by itself and it is a good idea to develop ways of keeping the school community informed of and involved in the various activities planned by the Student Council. Some examples include:

- ◆ producing a student newsletter
- ◆ providing updates to the Board of Management, Principal, staff and Parents' Association on the Student Council's activities and plans
- ◆ keeping a student notice-board in the school where information on the Council's activities is posted
- ◆ announcing upcoming events at assembly/roll call
- ◆ providing an end of year report to the Board of Management

The Council may wish to appoint a Public Relations or Communications Officer to take on these responsibilities.

Communication between the Council and students

The Student Council represents all students in the school. It is very important that students receive regular information on the plans and activities of the Student Council and that as many students as possible participate in events organised by the Council. Each member of the Council has a special

responsibility to the class or year group which elected him/her, and should ensure that their views are brought to the attention of the Council and that they remain fully informed of the Council's activities.

Procedures should be put in place to ensure that all students are fully informed about Council activities. One way of ensuring this would be to provide for regular meetings between individual members of the Student Council and the classes they represent. The Council could also carry out a survey of student views on particular issues, or on the role of the Council itself.

Communication between the Council and the School Community

Regular communication between the Student Council and school management, staff and parents provides the basis for building a good and lasting relationship, based on trust and respect, between students and the rest of the school community. Much can be achieved where all members of the school community work together towards common goals, and good communication is vital if a common understanding is to be reached on what those goals are, and how best to achieve them.

Good communication doesn't simply mean keeping the school management, teaching staff or Parents' Association informed of planned activities; it also involves seeking their views and suggestions. It means consulting with, and sharing ideas with the school management, staff and Parents' Association, listening to their suggestions and making sure that all sections of the school community understand the purpose and goals of the Student Council.

Having a teacher or a parent attend meetings of the Council on a regular basis also helps to improve communications and this may be provided for in the Board of Management rules. Also, the Principal may wish to address the Council from time to time on key issues affecting the school community.

Promotion of Gaeilge

The Student Council can help to promote the use of Irish in the school by conducting parts of its meetings through Irish, by using its Irish title or by including Irish language articles in its newsletter. It may wish to appoint an Irish officer to promote the development of Irish within the school.

DISSOLUTION/REMOVAL OF A MEMBER

Dissolution of a Student Council

Normally a Student Council shall stand dissolved when the term of office of the members expires. A Board of Management may dissolve the Student Council before the expiry of its term in accordance with the rules and procedures governing dissolution. This will only happen in exceptional circumstances after consultation with all concerned. Where a Board of Management intends dissolving the Council, it will give the Council adequate notice of the proposal, and the reasons therefor. The Council will be allowed to appeal the dissolution to the Board of Management or Patron of the school, in accordance with established local appeals procedures within the school.

Where the Student Council is dissolved another Council may be formed following the procedures outlined earlier. Where a Council is dissolved less than 6 weeks before the end of the school year, the appointment of a new Council may reasonably be left until the following school year.

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

It will not be appropriate to dissolve a Council where only a few of its members have been involved in a breach of the school code. In those circumstances, the Board of Management should only consider removal of those students concerned.

Removing a member or members of the 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. This may happen in two ways:

- ① The Student Council may remove any member or officer of the 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 (including significant breaches of the school's code of behaviour). Such a decision should be taken on a majority vote of the Council, and the member should be given adequate notice of the proposal, the reasons therefor, and the opportunity to present his/her case.
- ② The Board of Management, on the advice of the Principal or on its own initiative, may remove a member of the Council in accordance with the Board's rules and procedures in this regard. Both the member concerned and the Council should be given adequate notice of the proposal, the reasons therefor 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 on the Council

Where a member is removed or resigns from office, the resulting vacancy should be filled in accordance with the procedures governing elections. For example if the representative of class 5B is removed, then class 5B should elect a new representative in the same way as they elected their first representative.

APPENDIX A

Support Materials

Student Council
Meeting

Junior Council

Tuesday
March 12th

12.30 Room 30



SUPPORT MATERIALS

Sample agenda

STUDENT COUNCIL AGENDA

Meeting 19th November 2001, 4.10pm, Room 12

- ◆ Minutes
- ◆ Update from the fundraising subcommittee
- ◆ Report on the meeting with the Parents' Association about Homework clubs
- ◆ Items for inclusion in the December newsletter
- ◆ Proposals for new activities
- ◆ Issues of concern to students
- ◆ Any other business

Sample calendar of activities

Here are some examples of the activities a Student Council might be involved in planning and organising in conjunction with the school staff and/or management and/or Parents' Association:

- ◆ Mentoring programme for 1st years
- ◆ Second hand school books and uniform sale
- ◆ School newsletter
- ◆ Fundraising activities
- ◆ The School Play
- ◆ School sports day
- ◆ Homework clubs
- ◆ A 'Club Gaelach' or a foreign language club
- ◆ School Open Day
- ◆ Competitions within the school (for example, in sports, debating, chess, singing)
- ◆ Graduation ceremony for 6th years, or other ceremonies within the school
- ◆ Presentations to school staff on their retirement
- ◆ A 'thank the teachers' event at the end of the school year

Sample constitution

STUDENT COUNCIL

Constitution

1 The aim of the Student Council

The aim of the Student Council is to work in partnership with the Board of Management, staff and parents for the benefit of the whole school community. The Student Council seeks to build a relationship based on mutual respect and trust with all in the school, and supports the staff, management and parents in their efforts to create and maintain an environment conducive to educational and personal development. As part of that process, the Student Council seeks to provide a line of communication between students, management, staff and parents, representing the views of the student body on matters of concern to them.

2 The work of the Student Council

The Student Council will undertake a programme of activities which will support students, parents and staff. In planning its activities the Student Council will consult with the Principal, staff and Parents' Association.

3 Student Council Officers

The Student Council will appoint a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Each will normally hold office for the year.

4 Subcommittees

The Student Council reserves the right to form subcommittees. A subcommittee will consist of at least 3 members, with at least one member from Junior Cycle (1st, 2nd & 3rd year) and one member from Senior Cycle (Transition, 5th & 6th year). The planned activities of a subcommittee must be submitted to the council for approval. Subcommittees must report regularly to the council on their progress.

5 Finance and fundraising

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 co-operate with the management, staff and parents when planning fund raising activities.

6 Meetings and decision-making

The Student Council will meet at least 5 times per year. Meetings can be called by the Chairperson, or by 3 or more members of the council. All council members must be given at least 1 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.

7 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 1 weeks 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.

8 Changes to the constitution

A vote must be held regarding any changes to this constitution. Proposed changes must be circulated to all members of the council at least 1 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.

NOTE: *The constitution above is only a sample, it is important that you don't simply copy it, but draw up a constitution that suits your school.*

A guide to better meetings

Be prepared!

Read any information sent out before the meeting, such as the Agenda or the Minutes of the last meeting. Prepare any points you want to raise.

Listen!

Listen carefully to what others have to say, and be open to other people's opinions. One of the purposes of meetings is to exchange ideas and information and to learn from each other.

Participate!

It is much more constructive to raise matters of concern to you at the meeting, rather than afterwards.

Act!

If you undertake to follow up on a task, then do so, and be ready to report back at the next meeting.

Tips for the 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 for the meeting. It may be useful to meet with the Secretary to agree an agenda in advance of a meeting, and an agenda should always include a provision for 'Any other business'.
2. Start and close each meeting punctually.
3. At the beginning of any meeting allow some opportunity for group members to put matters on the agenda under 'Any Other Business'. Then, keep to the agenda/items for discussion.
4. It may be necessary to review and approve the minutes of the previous meeting at the beginning of a meeting and to 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.
6. Give direction to meetings making sure that there is adequate 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 (for example, 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 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 (for example, 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.

Tips for the Secretary

1. Bring any correspondence received to the attention of the chairperson before the agenda is drawn up. 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. Record as accurately and as fairly as possible the minutes of each meeting.
4. Remember to record attendance, excuses, apologies and the time, date and venue of each meeting. Remember also to give a brief account of correspondence received/sent since the last meeting.

5. Remember that you also have a right to participate in discussions....don't allow your role to stop you from contributing to the discussion of the various matters on the agenda.
6. Remember to record decisions made, who is to implement them and when.
7. It's a good idea to use the same book 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.

Fundraising and the Student Council

A Student Council may wish to hold fundraising events. The agreement of school management should be sought before planning any fundraising activities for the school or school projects.

The Treasurer has responsibility for ensuring that any money raised by the Council is used for the purposes for which it was collected. The constitution of the Student Council should specify that a financial report be provided to the Council at the end of each school year.

When planning fundraising activities:

- ◆ Be clear about why the money is needed and what will be done with it
- ◆ Get as many ideas as possible for activities
- ◆ Make sure your planned activity will suit your school and is practical
- ◆ Try to make sure that your event doesn't clash with another, or take advantage of other school events by planning yours around them (for example, a sale of work on the School Open Day)
- ◆ Make sure all students in the school are told about the event well in advance, and know what the Student Council plans to use the money for

Some examples of fundraising activities include:

- ◆ Art exhibition
- ◆ Cake sale
- ◆ Fashion show
- ◆ Holding a collection
- ◆ Jumble sale
- ◆ Raffle
- ◆ Non-uniform day
- ◆ Table Quiz
- ◆ Sponsored activities (for example, a sponsored walk)

NB: School management should be consulted about activities planned by a Student Council, as some activities may require adult supervision.



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MINUTE

APPENDIX B

Extract from the Education Act, 1998

8/2/02



EXTRACT FROM THE EDUCATION ACT, 1998

Information to Students and Student Council

- 27.** (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.

student councils:
a voice for students



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