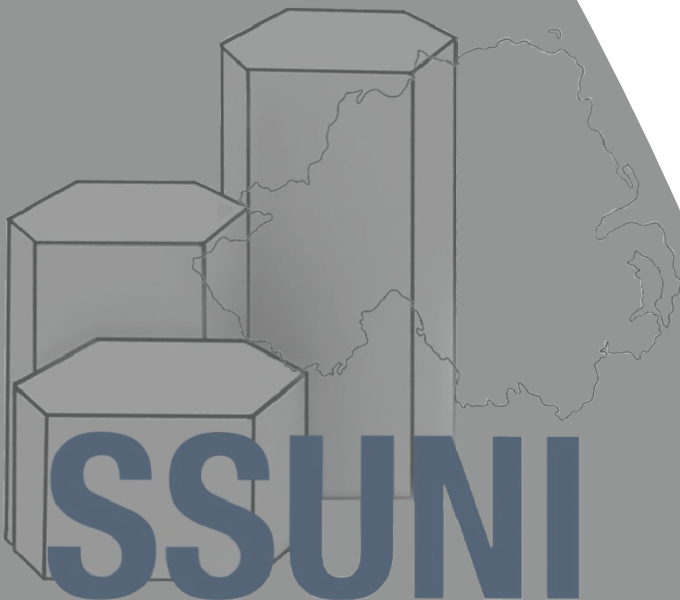


Student Councils That Work:

**Reviewing and Improving Student
Voice in NI Schools**



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I. Executive Summary

The Report on the School Councils Inquiry by the NI Committee for Education ([Committee for Education Report - Report on the School Councils Inquiry \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](https://www.niassembly.gov.uk)) defines a student/school council as a 'formal group of pupils within a school who are elected by their peers to represent them and their views.' The report notes that 'the aim of the Committee's inquiry is to champion and celebrate School Councils in Northern Ireland... with a view to identifying ways to support and enhance their work.' It was published on 20 June 2012. SSUNI recognises and celebrates all those throughout the education sector in Northern Ireland who have dedicated themselves to promoting the rights of children and young people, particularly in ensuring the views of students are heard and taken into account in decision-making. However, the students of Northern Ireland feel that Student Councils are still not effective in their role, and that little has been done to solve this major issue. For this reason, SSUNI has written this response to bring to attention the untapped potential of student councils in Northern Ireland and propose a solution.

The report will first discuss the importance of Student Councils, with reference to both their legal utility and benefits in education. This is done to solidify the argument for using Student Councils before any attempt is made to suggest current issues and possible improvements. Without this foundational belief in their importance, all parties involved with the Student Council, such as the students, teachers, Board of Governors, and parents, are likely to only pay lip-service and have merely a tokenistic appreciation of both the Student Council, and the importance of Student Voice in general.

Next, the report will address the problems facing Student Councils in Northern Ireland today. The SSUNI Student Council Working Group's experience, as current NI students, was vital to the understanding of the prevalent issues discussed. In structuring the report's discussion on these barriers to effective Student Councils, we are indebted to SSUNI's esteemed board member, Professor Laura Lundy, for all her support, and for her world-renowned Lundy Model, which was used to structure discussion throughout the report process. Solutions to these issues will also be proposed throughout the report.

These solutions, along with the Lundy Model, will be applied to create a model Student Council in the second half of the report. It must be stressed that whilst every school is different, and so the Student Council should reflect this, SSUNI believes that a Student Council which is firmly grounded in this model will be best placed to ensure Student Voice is effectively heard and taken into consideration in decision-making at a school level.

The SSUNI Student Council Working Group, acted as a focus group for this report, researching and discussing students' experience of Student Councils in Northern Ireland. It consisted of 16 students, from across Northern Ireland. One student was in Year 12, ten were in Year 13, and five were in Year 14. 63% of participants were female, 31% male, and 6% non-binary. Their schools came from a variety of sectoral backgrounds, such as Catholic, State, Integrated, Co-educational, and Quaker. 20% of participants were currently on their Student Council, 20% had previously been on their Student Council, and 60% had not had to opportunity to participate on a Student Council.

2. Importance of Student Councils

Northern Ireland, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, has an Article 12 duty to 'assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.' Undeniably, most decisions taken regarding education and the school environment affect the child. The lives of secondary school students in particular centre around school and education, which consumes most of the time for many. In this sense, it is imperative that this Article 12 duty is upheld to the highest degree.

Student Councils are a vitally important tool to ensure the effective implementation of Article 12 in education. They provide an opportunity to freely express views and opinions on issues relating to the school environment and education in a wider sense, as well as allowing for these views to be systematically heard and acted upon by those with authority. In interpreting Article 12, it is the case that all students at secondary-school age are of the required age and maturity to not only form their own views but also for those views to carry considerable weight in proper decision-making. Schools also have a domestic legal obligation to consult students on discipline and bullying policies. The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 clearly states the importance of consultation with pupils, stating that the Board of Governors must listen to the views of students when making policies or general principles concerning discipline. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, Articles 13(2) also states that it is the duty of the Board of Governors of a school to prepare, and from time-to-time revise, a School Development Plan. The views of students should be considered when developing this School Development Plan. In this sense, Student Councils are also an effective way of delivering domestic legal obligations. This context to Student Councils is informed by the [NICCY Pupil Participation Pack](#). Therefore, it is essential that Student Councils in Northern Ireland are effective and efficient in harnessing the potential of their students.

There are further benefits for the use of Student Councils. Article 29 of the UNCRC states that the 'education of the child shall be directed to' meet objectives such as 'the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential'; 'The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'; 'The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples.' These objectives are best met in the school environment through effective Student Councils. Indeed, the NI Education Committee's Inquiry found that Student Councils played a 'key role in many young people's early experience of democratic participation'; allowed students to 'develop life skills'; and resulted in 'increased self-confidence and learning outcomes for pupils'; 'increased participation in school life'; 'improvements in discipline and behaviour'; 'improved school ethos.' In addition to this, Student Councils are essential for creating an atmosphere of partnership and cooperation between student and teacher within a school. Student Councils create an environment of collaborative engagement in the education process. They are also vital for ensuring the rights of children and young people afforded to them by the UNCRC are not neglected within school and education, that there is respect for students as rights holders, independent individuals, and active participants in both education and wider society.

3. Current Issues

Every school is unique in its composition, structure, ethos, and objectives, and so a Student Council will reflect this, leading to huge diversity amongst Student Councils in Northern Ireland. However, SSUNI has identified common, persisting issues within the vast majority of Student Councils in Northern Ireland. These issues are interlocking, if one is not solved then the Student Council as a whole will suffer, creating a vicious cycle of ineffective Article 12 participation. In this sense, these intertwined issues must be addressed simultaneously and the Student Council must be improved holistically.

The issues most detrimental are as follows:

3.1 Structure

The composition of the Student Council is a key factor affecting its overall effectiveness. It is important that the Student Council is diverse and reflects the unique nature of the student body. As well as this, many Student Councils operate with separate 'Sixth Form Committees', 'Charity Committees', or 'Junior and Senior Councils'. Indeed, 32% of participants identified this as a problem with their Student Council. Although splitting a Student Council up may be necessary to accommodate for the unique school environment, a school separated over two buildings for example, it is generally optimal for the Student Council to meet and operate as one. This is to avoid the splitting of the student voice, weakening the power with which the Student Council can speak with, and allow for increased unity amongst the student body.

DO NOT SPLIT, AND HENCE WEAKEN, THE STUDENT VOICE OR STUDENT COUNCIL.

3.2 Election of Students

3.2.1 Ensure elections are uniform across the school.

Fair elections are a crucial component to ensure an effective Student Council. Elections ensure proper democratic representation of the student body; an increased awareness of the Student Council and its work; and increased interest and commitment by students putting themselves forward. Whilst the focus group themselves had participated in elections for Student Council, they demonstrated knowledge that in other classes, Year Groups, or schools, there was an absence of elections. They noted that elections were often not mandatory for the Student Council and that it was often dependent on the teacher in charge of the class or Year Group that was choosing a Student Council representative. Instead of elections, teachers select or appoint students, often based on arbitrary factors such as sporting ability or academic performance, resulting in an undemocratic and disinterested Student Council.

For those Student Councils that do hold elections, there are three common problems which must be addressed:

3.2.2 Encourage the Student Council, Improve its Reputation and Increase its Influence to ensure elections are taken seriously.

Firstly, many elections are not taken seriously by those involved. This manifests itself as popularity contests, disingenuous proposals such as 'no homework' or 'a swimming pool', and 'joke candidates.' A joke candidate refers to students who run for election as a joke and have no real intention of fulfilling their role on the Student Council. This was identified by over half of participants as a major issue affecting the effectiveness of Student Councils for accurately representing the views of the student body seriously. As noted, every issue relating to Student Councils are intertwined, and this issue arises from the negative reputation and lack of influence, discussed later. This negative reputation also results in a complete disinterest in elections, leading to a lack of candidates. This, again, can be solved through an improved reputation, increased influence, and encouragement from teachers.

3.2.3 Do not overcomplicate elections.

The second problem with elections is that they are often overcomplicated. For example, practices such as the use of complicated voting systems or the need to be nominated to run, make Student Councils seem undesirable. Elections should be simple, fair, and equitable, with every student having an equal opportunity for election. This should be by secret ballot. They should be held annually.

3.2.4 Encourage all students to get involved.

Lastly, frequent re-elections of students are another common issue. 87% of participants in the focus group identified this as an issue, explaining that certain students always get re-elected and so deprives them of an opportunity to get involved. Whilst these students may be best equipped to represent their peers' views, the Education Committee's Inquiry noted that 'membership should be rotated to allow opportunities for a wider range of pupils.' This will also allow for fresh ideas on the Student Council.



3.3 Meetings

3.3.1 Meetings should be regular and consistent.

Another common issue prevalent amongst Student Councils in Northern Ireland is their meeting structure. The opportunity for the Student Council to effectively express their views, and those of their peers, as well as have those views taken into account by decision-makers in the school, is severely reduced by infrequent and irregular meetings. Indeed, 60% of participants in the focus group criticised their Student Council's lack of regular meetings. This means that issues are left unaddressed for months causing problems to accumulate and situations within the school to deteriorate. Often, meetings are only held at the request of teaching staff to discuss their agenda.

3.3.2 Formal minutes should be taken and shared.

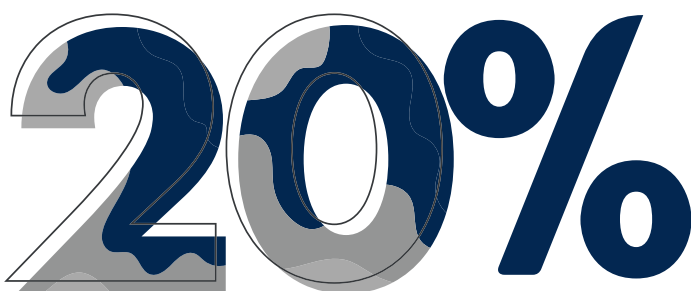
When meetings do occur, there is a lack of structure in how they are conducted. It is often the case that no formal minutes are taken, and so decisions made by the Student Council are forgotten and therefore no action is taken. 40% of Student Council meetings had minutes that were taken and shared after the meeting, according to participants in the focus group. Formal minutes may also be a tool for communicating the work of the Student Council to the student body, teaching staff, or Board of Governors, for example. Without them, there is no opportunity to raise awareness for the work of the Student Council and ensure the voice of students is heard throughout the school environment.

3.3.3 Meetings should be chaired by students.

In addition, another common issue pertaining to structure is that of how meetings are chaired and opportunities to speak in meetings. It is crucial that there is a defined chairperson to lead the meeting, who commands the respect of the Student Council, and who will facilitate an equal opportunity for each member to speak. Participants of the focus group expressed a desire for Student Council meetings to be chaired by the students themselves, but only 2 participants had Student Councils where this was common practice.

3.3.4 Anonymous Suggestion Box for Student Body

Regarding facilitating students to express their views, the inclusion of a method of anonymous participation, for example a suggestion box, not just for Student Council members but for the wider student body will also be beneficial for implementing Article 12 of the UNCRC. Only 20% of the focus group reported having an anonymous suggestion box for the student body to use.



Only 20% focus group reported that their school had an anonymous suggestion box

3.4 Suppression/Interference

3.4.1 Agenda-setting should be student led.

A major issue which undermines the purpose of Student Councils and prevents the proper implementation of Article 12 in schools, is the suppression of students' voice and interference by teachers, whether intentionally or by accident. It is often the case that teaching staff chair the meeting or, more importantly, set the agenda of discussion, and this was the case for over half of the participants in the focus group. This is to encourage discussion about issues which are important to staff, not to students. Indeed, 70% of the focus group agreed with the statement: 'I feel there is a predetermined outcome or decision which the teacher attempts to steer the students in.' This severely reduces the opportunity for students to express their views on issues which are important to them.

3.4.2 Teaching staff should not attend every meeting.

The presence of teaching staff in Student Council meetings is also responsible for the suppression of student voice. It may be the case that students feel pressured to support certain viewpoints, with fear of rebuke or reprisal as a result of criticising the school or its approach to certain issues. 62% of participants reported experiencing pressure by the presence of teaching staff. Indeed, the Student Council may function as a forum to discuss issues pertaining to teaching staff themselves, and so the presence of teaching staff may directly impact on such discussion.

3.4.3 Teaching staff should not attempt to interfere with discussion, or punish students for meaningful contribution.

Admittedly, however, it is important for teaching staff to be present on occasion so as for the Student Council to directly express their concerns. For this reason, the Vice Principal or Principal, for example, could attend certain Student Council meetings, ideally at the request of the Student Council. Equally, it may be felt that teachers should be present in order to maintain order at Student Council meetings. However, proper chairmanship by students is likely to be enough to maintain order and facilitate meaningful discussion between peers. When this was trialled by members of the Working Group in their own Student Councils, chairmanship by older students was shown to have a better outcome for all students involved. If teaching staff is to be present at Student Council meetings, however, it is vital that they do not intimidate students, attempt to interfere with discussion, or punish students for meaningful contribution.

3.4.4 Younger students should be supported and taken seriously.

It is also essential to ensure that all students, regardless of age, or other characteristics, are guaranteed an equal opportunity to express their views at a Student Council meeting. Younger students should be facilitated in expressing their views, whether verbally or through other means.

3.5 Reputation

The reputation of Student Councils within schools is another core, common issue. School Councils are often considered a very minor and disregarded aspect of the school community. Indeed, it may even be the case that the students themselves are unaware of the existence of a Student Council in their school. An atmosphere in a school where the right to participate and Student Councils are not encouraged is detrimental to the rights of students and the effectiveness of the Student Council. Engagement with the Student Council is not an issue solely amongst students. If teaching staff and all those adults involved with the school environment are disinterested with the Student Council, this furthers a negative atmosphere and reputation.

3.5.1 Circulation of minutes

Even if there is a general awareness of the existence of the Student Council, this is not enough. It is vital that students and staff alike remain informed of the ongoings of an active Student Council. For this reason, formal minutes and decisions should be made widely available following meetings, to the student body (via email or social media), staff, Vice Principal, Principal, Board of Governors, and all other relevant parties.

3.5.2 Student Council representatives should be clearly visible and approachable.

As well as this, Student Council representatives should be clearly visible and identified amongst the student body, using badges, for example. They should also be encouraged to report decisions and listen to the concerns of their peers.

The reputation of the Student Council within a school and the atmosphere surrounding participation in school is crucial. For half of participants in the focus group, the reputation of their Student Council was negative. Without a positive atmosphere it is unlikely the Student Council will be listened to by those with authority in the school environment. This will severely stifle the influence of the Student Council, leading to a loss of faith by the student body. This same loss of faith, prevalent in many schools today, results in decreased engagement in elections and the work of the Student Council. Hence, it is crucial to encourage Student Councils through status and possibly providing them with a set budget.



Half of the Focus Group reported that their student Councils had a negative reputation in their school

3.6 Influence

Student Councils give students the opportunity to create positive change in their school environment. However, if Student Councils are not given influence or power, if their decisions are not taken into serious consideration during decision-making, then the Student Council becomes useless. As mentioned, the decisions and views of the Student Council are often not communicated to the appropriate authority in the school environment or not communicated at all, as was the case for 27% of focus group participants. This severely prevents Student Councils from influencing decision-making.

3.6.1 There must be an open mind when approaching the inclusion of students in decision-making, a willingness to work with them.

Also, our focus group reported that there is often no desire to actively include the views of the Student Council in decision-making when they are communicated. Over half of participants noted that the views of the Student Council were not listened to. This may be for many reasons. For example, students consulted felt that teaching staff may neglect the importance of including young people in decision-making, underestimate the competence of the Student Council, or feel threatened by increasing the influence of students. One participant described the influence of their Student Council as: 'If teachers don't agree with our views, then our ideas aren't even considered.' Indeed, it is often the case that teachers feel that 'adults know best' and that it is not the place for young people to make decisions and take charge of certain aspects of the school environment. This is of course neglecting the importance of Article 12.

3.6.2 Feedback should be given for each decision made

Another issue relating to the influence of Student Councils is the absence of a feedback mechanism. Indeed, 73% of focus group participants felt that nothing happened after meetings to demonstrate how the views of the Student Council had been considered: there was no clearly defined feedback process. When a decision is made, very often the thought process behind the decision, reasons for a certain course of action, why the Student Council's preference was or was not followed through on, is not communicated back to the Student Council. This alienates students and increases a feeling of resentment and disempowerment. Students begin to feel like attending meetings, expressing their views, and participating in the Student Council is pointless. For the focus group, 80% of participants agreed with the statement: 'My Student Council gets nothing done. Nothing is achieved by its meetings.' Hence, it is essential that when the Student Council is involved that they receive feedback after the final decision is made.

3.6.3 Designate areas of responsibility and a budget for the Council

Lastly, there is often no clearly defined set of powers for Student Councils. It may be beneficial to allocate to the Student Council certain areas of the school environment for which they are responsible and to allocate a certain budget with which to work with. For example, our focus group reported beneficial experiences when allocated responsibility for common areas and anniversary events in the school. They also suggested that it would be beneficial to have control over areas such as school uniform policy or mobile phone policy. This will facilitate meaningful influence for the Student Council and so effective participation for the student body. However, over half reported that they were afforded no formal powers or budget in their Student Council.

3.7 Lack of Training

3.7.1 Training and teambuilding should be provided for the Student Council.

Another common issue surrounding Student Councils is the lack of training provided to both students and supporting staff. Students are expected to understand what to do and how to efficiently represent the views of their peers with little to no training. This lack of training is the most prevalent issue relating to Student Councils, with 93% of focus group participants reporting not receiving any training. Hence, it would be beneficial for all Student Councils if upon election the Student Council representatives could have a teambuilding and training day, in order to strengthen the bond between representatives, introduce them to the working of the Student Council, and to equip them with the skills necessary to be effective Student Council Members.

4. Improvement

In order to properly implement Article 12 of the UNCRC through the use of Student Councils, the problems discussed above as well as the overall Student Council framework within schools must be improved. SSUNI believe that the ideal structure of a Student Council, one that prevents the above issues whilst also championing the rights of students in Northern Ireland, is one based upon the Lundy Model of Participation. Using this model, we have designed the framework of our model Student Council. Below, both the Lundy Model and our Model School Council have been explained and discussed. We are in great debt to our esteemed board member, Professor Laura Lundy for all her support and her ground-breaking work on this area.

4.1 The Lundy Model

The Lundy Model is a framework for interpreting and implementing Article 12 of the UNCRC in an educational setting based on four separate factors: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. It recognises two key elements of Article 12: the right to express a view and then right to have that view given due weight. It recognises that Article 12 must be interpreted as part of a wider rights environment. It highlights the close relationship between Article 12 and Article 2 (Non-Discrimination), Article 3 (Best Interests), Article 5 (Right to Guidance from Adults), Article 13 (Right to Information), Article 19 (Right to be Safe).

The following diagrams demonstrate an outline of the mode. They are copied overleaf.

Sources:

1. Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs, National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020 (17 June 2015), p. 21. Accessible [here](#):
2. Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs, National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020 (17 June 2015), p. 21. Accessible [here](#):



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus educational decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.



Figure 2 Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation as included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020⁶

5. The Model Student Council

Every school environment is unique in many ways and each student body has different needs and requirements, and so each Student Council may vary slightly from this model. However, a solid grounding in this model and its core concepts, we feel, will ensure effective implementation of Article 12 and effective student voice in education at the school level.

5.1 Composition

The number of Student Council representatives there should be is dependent upon school size and structure. However, there should be as many representatives as needed to carry out the work of the Student Council, represent the student body, and effectively relay information back to it. For example, in a school with 4 form classes in each year the most appropriate might be one representative per form class, and so 28 representatives, assuming the presence of Years 13 and 14.

Our model Student Council is also not split into mini-Councils but instead functions as one. It meets together at a convenient time in the school schedule. This allows for the issues and views of the entirety of the student body to be heard, as well as allowing for a diverse range of opinions, with older students providing experience and younger students bringing fresh new ideas to the table. It is important to ensure, however, that there is a balance struck between younger and older students and that the older students do not dominate the conversation. Hence, extra support may need to be provided to younger students, for example, the chair of the meeting will ensure that younger students have a chance to speak or may be permitted to speak through other representatives or the chair. When the Student Council does make a decision, it is able to speak with a united voice.

In addition to the elected Student Council representatives there are also two Student Council Prefects. These are the leaders of the Student Council. They are two upper sixth students, or the most senior year group in the school, chosen by teaching staff through an application process and are part of the school's leadership or 'head' team. They oversee the Student Council. One of them will function as the chair of meetings, leading the meeting and ensuring each student has equal opportunity to speak, and the other as deputy chair/secretary, taking formal minutes. They also hold the power to call meetings, and are in charge of organising the logistics of meetings, any information needed prior, room, time, etc. Prior to meetings they will also set the agenda to be discussed, after consulting with Student Council representatives. Following a meeting, they will share the minutes with the Vice Principal, the Board of Governors, any relevant staff, and the Student Council representatives so that they may communicate Student Council decisions to their peers. They will also raise awareness about the Student Council and promote engagement amongst students, especially during elections, which they are responsible for organising. If, after a decision is made by the Student Council, work needs to be done between meetings, such as liaising with outside organisations or members of the school, then the Student Council Prefects will undertake such work.

5.2 Elections

In our model Student Council, elections promote a sense of fairness, democracy, representativeness, and seriousness. As each Student Council representative represents a form class in our example school, elections are held on a form class basis. Students should be elected by those whom they are representing. To ensure that the representatives elected are engaged with the work of Student Council, students nominate themselves for election. Candidates then submit a list of ideas or opinions to the Student Council Prefects, who then create an anonymous ballot.

An example is shown below:

Candidate	Policies/Ideas/Opinions	Place an X to vote
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Improved school lunches- Altered haircut policy	
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Better Bathrooms- Organising a football tournament	
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Revised Student Car Park Policy	

This use of an anonymous ballot is designed to prevent Student Council elections from becoming popularity contests, and instead ensures the Student Council is taken seriously, and that genuine ideas and views are heard in the Student Council process. This idea was inspired by Russell King, when he suggested this concept in the Guardian. ([School councils: Shut up, we're listening. | Schools | The Guardian](#))

The election is done by secret ballot, using First Past the Post, whoever gets the most votes wins. This is to ensure that the election is simple and understandable by all students. However, this is only one option for electoral systems used. Schools may wish to use Proportional Representation for their Student Council election. This system has the added benefit in that Proportional Representation, in the form of Single Transferable Vote (STV), as used in NI Assembly elections. Student Councils are an engaging opportunity to learn about democracy, and so the use of this system may be used to teach students about voting in their local elections and to teach about democracy in general. It is important that teachers should not influence or vote in the election. They are facilitators, not participants.

5.3 Training/Teambuilding

Once the Student Council representatives are elected, they then have a teambuilding/training day. This consists of games and activities, in school or at an activity centre, to build a strong bond between representatives. This allows for representatives to know one another and hence feel more comfortable in speaking and expressing their views. It is essential to foster a safe space within the Student Council. During this day, Student Council representatives receive training as to how the Student Council works, such as rules during meetings, or how to effectively perform their role, as well as capacity building exercises. Lastly, there is an opportunity for the Student Council to discuss its agenda for the upcoming year, setting some issues or ideas as priorities to work on throughout the year. This allows for the Student Council to have a sense of purpose and a clear vision from the very beginning.

5.4 Online Learning Platforms

Communication between Student Council representatives both in meetings and outside of them is essential. The Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams can be used by the Student Council Prefects to communicate meeting times, and for representatives to suggest issues or ideas for the agenda of discussion.

5.5 Representing fellow students

One of the main functions of a Student Council representative is to represent the views and concerns of their peers. For this reason, it is encouraged that representatives have Q+As or brainstorm with their class during Form periods to effectively listen to them. Representatives should be clearly identifiable, through a badge for example, so that they are approachable for their peers.

Our model Student Council also has a suggestion box situated in a prominent place in the school. This allows for students to anonymously express their concerns to the Student Council. The Student Council Prefects could oversee the suggestions of this box, referring the relevant suggestions to both the teaching staff and Student Council. It may also be beneficial to use an anonymous e-consultation device, possibly through the school app, to again allow for anonymous suggestions to be made to the Student Council.

5.6 Meetings

Our model Student Council meets as a whole Council every month. However, if it is necessary to have an emergency meeting then this is arranged through the Google Classroom/Microsoft Teams. The logistics of meetings, as well as the agenda are organised by the Student Council Prefects. Any information required to make a fully informed decision is provided by the Student Council Prefect, teaching staff involved with the issue, or representatives raising the issue. It is important that it is impartial and provided in a manner that is accessible for all students. Meetings are chaired by the Student Council Prefects, who should ensure that every member has an equal opportunity to discuss. Younger students may wish to communicate through another student, the Student Council Prefect, or to write their views down, to be read by the Student Council Prefect. This should be facilitated.

In order to avoid undue influence and to ensure that the Student Council is a safe space to express views and opinions, there is no teaching staff present during meetings. In order to maintain order and control rowdy behaviour, however, the Student Council Prefects, who are senior students, are in charge. However, we feel that rowdy behaviour is unlikely as students tend to want to take Student Councils seriously if they are given the opportunity to do so. Indeed, if you treat students like adults then they will behave as such. It may be necessary or desirable, however, to have teachers, such as Heads of Department, or the Vice Principal, for example, present to answer questions or listen to concerns directly at certain meetings, either held regularly or on the invitation of the Student Council. Whilst the minutes of meetings are communicated to these parties by the Student Council Prefect, following a meeting, it may be the case that the Student Council feel they need to address these parties directly. This should be facilitated and is organised through the Student Council Prefect.

5.7 After Meetings

Following a meeting, it is essential that the decisions of the Student Council are made available and followed through on. They must be considered by those with the power to effect change. For this reason, Student Council Prefects have a week to communicate the minutes of meetings with the Vice Principle, or equivalent. This is the best person within the school to effect change and authority whilst bridging the gap between the student body and teaching staff, the senior the better. The minutes may need to be communicated to Year Heads, Heads of Department, other teaching staff, or other relevant parties. This should be done by the Student Council Prefects with assistance of the Vice Principle. The Vice Principle and Principle should discuss the minutes regularly, ensuring that an action plan is created to implement and factor in the decisions of the Student Council into decision-making.

As mentioned, it also essential that the minutes of Student Council meetings are made public to the student body. In this sense, the Student Council Prefects should distribute the minutes to all Members within a week, who may then relay the information back to their class or students that they represent. The Prefects should also oversee a notice board, which they should update with the activities of the Student Council. The school's social media platforms could also be used to publicise the work of the Student Council. In the case of large or important decisions, it may be necessary to gather the student body together in Assemblies, and this should be conducted by the Student Council Prefects in conjunction with other Members.

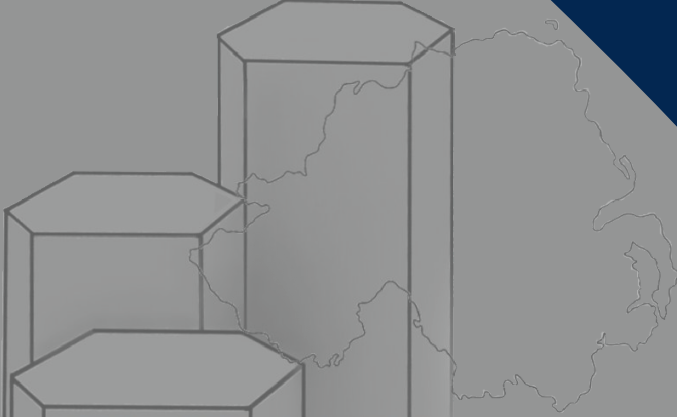
When undertaking projects, for example the renovation of common areas, it may be necessary for work to be done between meetings. This should be done by the Student Council Prefects. For example, they may need to contact furniture suppliers to price the renovation. It may also benefit here to provide the Student Council with a budget, which can allow for it to operate and plan projects such as this with certainty. This budget will help to reinforce that students are active participating members in the school environment, able to have control over issues affecting them, which is at the core of Article 12 of the UNCRC.

It may also be the case that the decisions of the Student Council are relevant to the Board of Governors. It is our recommendation that the decisions of the Student Council should be a regular item of discussion at Board of Governor meetings. It may also be of benefit for the Student Prefects to attend every Board of Governor meeting at the beginning to briefly update the Board on the views of the student body and work of the Student Council. This will further ensure that the views of the student body are listened to by those with the power to effect change, ensuring the effective implementation of Article 12.

Often, it was found that students became disillusioned when feedback was not given as to how their decisions as a Student Council were considered in the wider decision-making process. For this reason, decision-makers should provide feedback by regularly appearing before the Student Council to explain the decision-making process that was following. The following form will provide structure to this discussion and should be made available to the Student Council:

Student Council Feedback Form

WHAT WAS THE DECISION	
WHO MADE THE DECISION	
REASONS FOR DECISION	
ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED	
WHAT STUDENT COUNCIL WANTED	
BUDGET FOR DECISION	
IF BUDGET WAS AN ISSUE – HOW MUCH WOULD NEED TO BE FUNDRAISED BY THE COUNCIL	



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