

School council elections – planning for success!

Do you need to have an election?

It might sound an odd question when we're talking about school councils, but there's no reason a school council *has to* mimic local or national structures. A school is a small community, have you considered other ways you may be able to run student voice in a small community:

- Athenian democracy-style: The council is picked at random on a regular basis (e.g termly)
- Turns are taken: Everyone gets a chance in turn to represent their class on the school council.
- Direct democracy: There is no school council, all decisions are taken by the whole school (e.g. in assemblies, in class council meetings, or online).

How do we set it up?

So, you've considered the options and decided that you do want to have an election – it's a great way to teach people about one of the key processes of our local and national democracy and it can really be used to promote your school council. You need an election plan, it should include:

1. Key dates:
 - a. Publicity ready
 - b. Nominations open
 - c. Nominations close
 - d. Hustings
 - e. Election day
 - f. Evaluation
2. Structure of the election (this should be in your constitution too):
 - a. Nominations process (do people nominate themselves or others? Do they need a seconder?)
 - b. Voting method (first past the post, single transferable vote, etc.)
 - c. Constituencies (by class, by year, by house, the whole school)
 - d. Who can vote (pupils only, staff only, pupils and staff, does anyone's vote count more than anyone else's – if so why?)
 - e. How people vote (online, in booths, in classes. All should be secret ballots)
 - f. Whether people vote for an individual or based on a manifesto (i.e. they don't know who they're voting for, they just vote based on a written manifesto with no name attached)
 - g. How and when results will be announced
3. Key documents

- a. Nomination/application form
 - b. Guidance on campaigning and writing a manifesto
 - c. Ballot paper
4. Other issues:
- a. When and how candidates can campaign
 - b. Who the returning officer is
 - c. Who the election team is (helping out on the day, designing publicity, collecting nominations)
 - d. Whether the local council's Democratic Services team will lend you some voting boxes and booths (they are often keen to)
 - e. How will people find out what it means to be a good school council rep? The current school council could run some training for the rest of the school so they know what qualities candidates need to have.

How long should it take?

After you've created your plan, you need to give it at least 2 weeks between announcing the election and voting.

Promote (4-2 weeks before)

- **Publicity:** Make it as high profile event amongst, pupils, staff and parents.
- **Training:** To get a wide range of people involved there needs to be information and training for the whole school: What the school council does/could do. Why you should stand. Why you don't have to vote for your friends.

Campaign (2-1 weeks before)

- **Nominations:** Accept nominations.
- **Campaigning:** Writing/recording manifestos (I would be a good school councillor because...); giving speeches and answering questions; creating posters, websites and videos.

Voting

- **Voting:** Make sure this is an event in itself. You may want to model it closely on local and national elections.
- **Announcing results:** Do this as soon as possible. Be sensitive, do you need to read out all the results (it may be embarrassing for someone if they only get a couple of votes).

Evaluate (1 week after)

- **Candidates:** Did you get a wide range of candidates? Did they feel they were prepared and given enough time to promote themselves? Check with people who didn't stand, what would have helped them to want to stand?
- **Voters:** How did they find it? Did they have enough information to make an informed choice?