

Getting started! How to set up a Student Council/Association/Union

Deciding to start a Student Council/Association/Union

Where a number of students wish to start a Council in their conservatoire they should approach the Principal or Board of Management and ask for a copy of the rules for the establishment of a Student Council. If a copy of these rules do not exist, then contact your country's National Union of Students.

Composition of a Student Council

The composition of a Student Council and the procedures for electing members will generally depend on the size of the school. It is highly recommended that every council should achieve an equal and appropriate gender balance.

Elections

Elections are needed to decide who will be the leaders of the student body. Those who are elected are often called the student Executive Committee. The elections need to be held so the executive can claim legitimately to represent the student community. The management is responsible to ensure the elections are free, fair and across the campus. It is important that students understand the voting system to be used and it is advisable to raise any specific questions with management before the elections are held. Schools will choose the method that best suits their individual circumstances.

The details of how to run the elections should include:

- The opportunity for all students to participate, including part-time students
- A candidate's pack for those interested in standing to become a student leader
- (If more than one candidate): A question time session (hustings debate) with voters and the candidates.
- A photocopying allowance for candidate(s) wanting to become a student leader to distribute publicity during the elections
- The opportunity to vote across a whole week.
- A secure way of voting to ensure the election is fair
- Making sure at least 25% of the student population vote
- Staff and administration are not allowed to vote.

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.

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.

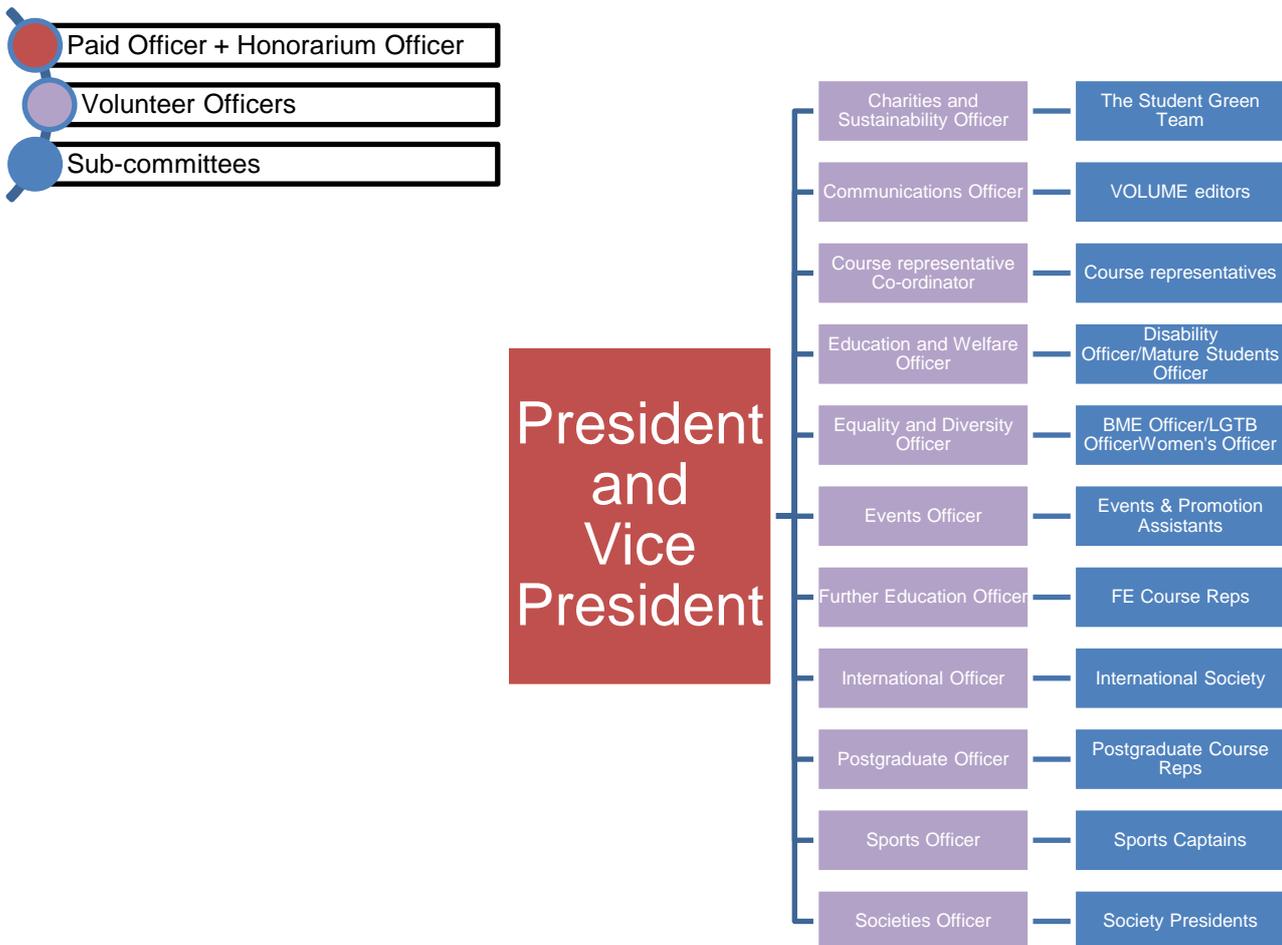
Officers

Every Student Council should appoint a Chairperson or President, a Treasurer and a Secretary. In some institutions 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.

Sample of Subcommittee Structure



The suggested roles of the Officers

Chairperson/President

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. The chairperson is usually the President of the Council.

Deputy Chairperson/Vice President

The Deputy Chairperson is responsible for assisting the Chairperson, and when the Chairperson is absent from a meeting they assumes the role of the Chairperson for that meeting. This is usually the Vice president.

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. In the absence of the secretary the Council may choose another member to take minutes.

Treasurer (if applicable)

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. If the Council chooses not to have a treasurer then the post could be shared by the President, Vice President and/or the Secretary. Advice and assistance in this regard may be provided by management. The Treasurer should provide the Council with a complete financial report, usually at the end of the academic year.

As a general rule any payments made by the Treasurer should be countersigned or endorsed by another member of the Council. To train the Treasurer, speak to your school's Finance department.

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 management on issues affecting the student body.

The student body may also choose to have departmental representatives and the council would be made of these representatives.

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 Management, Principal, staff and students 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
- providing an end of year report to the 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 institution. 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. If a member is representing a department, then they have a special responsibility to the department 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 departments 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 institution

Regular communication between the Student Council and school management and staff 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 management, teaching staff informed of planned activities; it also involves seeking their views and suggestions. It means sharing ideas with the management and staff listening to their suggestions and making sure that all sections of the institution understand the purpose and goals of the Student Council.

The Student Council and the Management

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 space for students to meet to organise the establishment of the Council, facilitating the running of fair and impartial elections across the student body. Once a Student Council has been set up the Management should give active support to it.

If the value of a Student Council is to be fully realised, it will be important that the Management involves the Council in the development of school policies.

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 Management not only to listen to the Student Council but also to respond in a

meaningful way to its concerns.

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 students and staff 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 management 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.

The Student Council and Teachers

Developing a spirit of partnership and co-operation between a Student Council and staff has benefits for both. The Student Council can play an important role in recognising the work of staff.