



HAVING YOUR SAY



>> MAKING IT WORK

Each school council must have their own rules (called a 'constitution') created by pupils and supported by staff.

Why

When setting up a school council it is vital that the council has a set of clear guidelines and rules put together in a single document. This is usually called a constitution, and helps the school council to work. The constitution can be as comprehensive or as compact as each individual school council wants.

The constitution sets out the roles and responsibilities of the school council and the rules that it must follow and needs to have in place. This provides a framework for how the council should be run.

An effective constitution will help guide the school council to operate in a professional manner at all times. It will help foster an inclusive approach and promote equality of opportunity for all within the school. This gives all pupils a sense of ownership and control.

The constitution should be developed by pupils with the support of the teaching staff or link teacher and with endorsement from the Board of Governors. This approach creates a whole school involvement with each level having the opportunity to feed into the school council's development.

How

The list below gives a simple five-step plan to developing a constitution but remember this is just a guide! Add or subtract from the headings below as the council sees fit when writing the constitution.

1. The first step is to create the **foundation** for the constitution in which you outline the general aims, the name and possible mission statement of the school council. It is important that the school council becomes known and accepted by the rest of the school population so it may be useful to develop a logo or branding for the council. The logo will be associated with every activity, report, poster that the council produces, fostering a sense of identity, recognition and ownership
2. The second step relates to **members**. Here it should be stated clearly who can be a member of the council. It should also identify what happens if a member resigns – will they be replaced, if so, what is the process involved? It should also be stated whether or not the council would like to have a liaison officer from the school staff, Board of Governors or the parents' council
3. **Election** procedures need to be explained to ensure that all pupils have an equal chance at being voted on to the council (see Insert 3). Whatever process is decided upon it must be democratic and accessible by all pupils
4. Fourthly, **management roles and responsibilities of the council** define what positions are held within the school council and explains the duties each officer will have, e.g. Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, PR officer; what training is needed (see Insert 6); how will ideas and plans be presented to the principal and governors? Will the council have a remit to liaise with other councils and outside bodies?



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5. The final section of the constitution should be dedicated to looking at the **administration / planning** of the council and may include comments on:
- Finances / budget management
 - Frequency of meetings
 - Action planning
 - Organisation training
 - Writing minutes
 - Communication plans

In summarising, the constitution should provide the framework to ensure the council is **educational**, enabling pupils to learn new skills in communication and decision making; **democratic**, open to all ensuring every pupil has a voice; **real**, solving real problems and making real decisions; **open and transparent**, working with the school management team, teachers and fellow pupils, feeding back information and decision-making details; **concerned** about their school and what happens in it and to it and **worthwhile**, ensuring pupils understand the benefits of the councils not only on a personal basis but also to their peers and whole school community.

Checklist

| Have you: | Tick |
|---|------|
| 1. Consulted with pupils on the constitution | [] |
| 2. Agreed aims and objectives for the school council | [] |
| 3. Agreed a format for the constitution | [] |
| 4. Got support for the constitution from all levels within the school | [] |
| 5. Communicated the final version to everyone within the school | [] |

For further help in developing a school council constitution, including advice on what should be included and sample constitutions, you may wish to visit the following websites:

School Council of Ireland Online:
www.studentcouncil.ie

Dept. of Education, New South Wales:
www.schools.nsw.edu.au

Dept. of Education, State of Victoria:
www.education.vic.gov.au

Ministry of Education, Ontario:
www.edu.gov.on.ca

Alberta School Council Resource Manual:
www.ahsca.ab.ca