

Coachford College



Student Council Policy

1. General

1.1 Scope

This policy applies to all members of the Coachford College community. It was drawn up in consultation with all school partners.

1.2 Relationship to the school's mission and characteristic spirit

The school's Mission Statement prioritises the wellbeing of each student, and sets the context for the achievement of each student's potential.

Coachford College is a community. Together we share mutual respect in a positive environment. We develop individual potential in all fields. As an inclusive post-primary school which aims to provide a safe, secure, welcoming and ordered community, Coachford College seeks to develop the individual potential of each student academically, socially, personally and morally and to respect both themselves and others. Under the patronage of Cork Education and Training Board, strong emphasis is placed on the following core values:

- Excellence in Education;
- Care;
- Equality;
- Community, and
- Respect.

1.3. Context

This Policy has been drawn up following consultation with all members of the school community and in keeping with the school's characteristic spirit. It should be read in conjunction with all relevant school policies and documents and Department of Education guidance.

1.4 Rationale

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Ireland's National Children's Strategy apply to all children under 18 years of age and recognise the right to freedom of expression and the importance of young people having a say in matters that affect them. Section 27 (5) of the Education Act, 1998 provides for the establishment of Student Councils, advising Boards of Management to encourage and assist the establishment and operation of Student Councils. The Education (Student & Parent Charter) Bill, 2019, also outlines the importance of including student voice in the school community.

1.5 Aims

The Working Group on Student Councils in Second-Level Schools has defined a Student Council as follows:

'A student council is a representative structure for students only, through which they can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management, staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students.'

The Student Council aims;

- To represent the students at the school fairly;
- To further the development of the school;
- To attempt to improve and maintain a healthy school environment;
- To foster healthy relationships between students, staff, parents and management.

2. Elections

2.1. Elections to the Student Council

2.1.1 Elections to form a Student Council should take place early in the school year, preferably September.

2.1.2 All students in each class / year group are 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. Where a veto is exercised, those exercising the veto must explain clearly to students the basis for their decision, and students should be given the opportunity to respond.

2.1.3. Nominations for election should be made within a reasonable period before the election.

2.1.4. Students will only vote in the elections for their respective year group.

2.1.5. All students will be given the chance to vote. Voting will take place by secret ballot.

2.1.6. Candidates shall be elected using proportional representation, single transferable voting system. The counting of votes will be carried out by a member of the staff of the school.

3. Membership

3.1 Term of Office

Elected members will have a term of one school year. Members will need to be re-elected in the next annual Student Council election to continue membership on the Council.

3.2 Array of Students

An equal number of students from each year should be elected whenever possible.

2.3 Mandatory Officers

Mandatory Officers are required roles to be filled at the beginning of the school year, elected by the newly elected Council members. These roles would include a Chairperson and Secretary.

2.4 Non-Mandatory Officers

The newly elected Council should decide which officers they would like to include in the coming school year. The number of officers can vary year by year. Non mandatory roles include Vice Chairperson, PRO, Irish Language Officer, Assistant Secretary etc.

4. Responsibilities

4.1. Council Member

A Council member must be a democratically elected student of the school. Responsibilities include;

- Attending all meetings where possible;
- Voting on any issues / elections;
- Actively representing the interests of the students in their year group;
- Making proposals;
- Reporting to their represented body on updates or events from the student council.

5. Internal Organisation

5.1. Meetings

5.1.1 Meetings should be held at least twice a month and have one third of members present to go ahead.

5.1.2. Meetings should preferably have a set day and time and will typically take 30 minutes.

5.2. Sub-Committees

The Student Council reserves the right to create sub-committees at any time. A sub-committee will be made up of at least two student council members, ideally one from Junior Cycle and one from Senior Cycle. These sub-committees would have a maximum of 10 people. Sub committees must report regularly on their progress to the council, their work must be submitted to the student council for review and approval.

5.3 Meeting with the Board of Management, the Parents' Council and Staff

Meeting with other stakeholders in the school is a vital part of building strong relationships. The student council should meet with these bodies when appropriate and possible.

6. Standing Orders

6.1. Decision making

For decisions of significant importance, as deemed by the Chair, there must be $\frac{2}{3}$ of members present.

6.2 Constitution

The Student Council shall abide by an agreed Constitution (see Appendix A). The Council may vote to change its constitution at any time but any changes made must be submitted to the Board of Management.

6.3 Removing Members

The Council retains the right to remove a member for a just cause such as ongoing lack of attendance without valid reasoning, lack of commitment to the aims of the Student Council, serious breach of code of conduct etc. Procedures for removing members are detailed in the Constitution.

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 Student Council should be given adequate notice of the proposal, and the reasons therefore, and both the Council and the member(s) concerned should be given an opportunity to appeal the decision to the Board of Management, in accordance with any local procedures which may be in place.

6.4 Filling Vacancies

Where a vacancy arises for any reason on the Council, the Council may decide to hold a by-election or to co-opt the next candidate who received the highest votes at the last election which was held.

6.5. Dissolution of a Council

A Student Council is dissolved where the term has expired or, in exceptional circumstances, before the expiry of its term on grounds of a significantly serious nature, such as:

- Where a significant number of Council members have been involved in a serious breach of the school's Appropriate Behaviour Policy;
- Where the activities of the Council have endangered the welfare of staff or students of the school etc

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' Council prior to. 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, in accordance with established local procedures.

6.5. Code of Conduct

Council members will attend all Council meetings when possible. They will be active in engagement with Student Council activities whenever possible. Members will represent their fellow students to the best of their ability, they will maintain good relationships with staff, parents, students and the Board of Management. They will uphold school policy and procedures, support, listen to and respect fellow Council members and use their voice respectfully.

This Policy was adopted by the Board of Management on

It has been made available to all members of the school community and is published on the school website.

The Policy will be reviewed annually and/or as deemed necessary.

Signed: 

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date:

Signed: 

Principal

Date: 11/12/2023

Appendix A

Student Council Constitution

Note: This document has been created using the Student Council Constitution Template issued by ISSU (Irish Second Level Students' Union). The only alterations made were ones in orange, as advised by ISSU, to suit the needs of our school.

Article 1.0 Aims

1.1 Representation

To represent the students at the school fairly.

1.2 Development

To further the development of the school.

1.3 Healthy Environment

To attempt to improve and maintain a healthy school environment.

1.4 Relationships

To ensure a healthy relationship between students, staff, parents, and management.

Article 2.0 Goals

2.1 Policy

To give students the input on the development of school policy and to ensure the student council has a contribution in making school policy.

2.2 Student Voice

Seek to hear the voice of every student in the school.

Article 3.0 Membership

3.1 Term of Office

Elected members will have a term of one school year. Members will then need to be re-elected in the next annual student council election to continue membership on the council.

3.2 Array of Students

The student council should be made up of a wide array of students from the school. An equal number of students from each year should be elected whenever possible. A Student Council may also decide to elect representative members from extra-curricular activities as well.

3.3 Mandatory Officers

Mandatory officers are required roles to be filled at the beginning of the school year, elected by the newly elected council members. These roles would include a Chairperson, Secretary, PRO, ISSU School Rep.

3.4 Non-Mandatory Officers

Non-mandatory officers are not required to be filled by a council. The newly elected council should decide which officers they would like to include in the

coming school year before electing any position. If the council feels they need to appoint a new officer position, create an officer position, or even remove an officer position they can do so. See “article 7.2” on the removal of a member if removing an officer position midterm. The number of officers can vary year by year. Non-mandatory roles include Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, Irish Language Officer, Assistant Secretary, Equality Officer and much more.

Article 4.0 Responsibilities

4.1 Council Member

A council member must be a democracy elected student of the school. It is the responsibility of each council member (regardless of their role on the council) should be held accountable for their actions. This means that every student is expected to carry out several functions, these responsibilities include:

- Attending all meetings where possible of the council,
- Voting on any issues that may arise in meetings of the council
- Making proposals and being the voice on behalf of the students they represent to the council,
- Actively representing the interests of their peers,
- Reporting to their represented body on any updates or events from the student council.

4.2 Officer Positions

Mandatory officer positions must be filled by an elected student council member only. Non-mandatory officer positions that the council decides are required in their council must also be filled by an elected student council member only. No council member can take up two officer positions, they may run for multiple positions in election but if elected in one position they must step down from election in the other roles. Officers must report to the council on the work they are doing as part of their role, attend all officer meetings where possible, work to continuously improve and hear the voice of each student regarding their role’s description.

**Depending on your council you can decide which council members can run fairly for different positions based on year groups, options would include (A) any year), (B) a senior student ‘4th to 6th’), (C) a junior student ‘1st to 3rd’), (D) 6th year when possible), (E) 3rd year when possible). **

4.3 Chairperson

The Chairperson can be from *any year group*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson to make sure that the running of the meeting is at a satisfactory level, when decisions come to an impasse the chairperson takes all information into consideration and makes the final decision, it is also the responsibility of the chairperson to overlook minutes and documents make sure the council is running to the standards and goals we set. The minutes to be confirmed within a day of receiving them from the Secretary.

4.4 Secretary

The Secretary can be from *any year group*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. It is the

responsibility of the Secretary to keep an accurate account of the proceedings of each meeting and record the decisions of the council. The Secretary is to record the meeting minutes by written source such as minutes template or secretary book and on an online source that can be sent through email. These are to be checked between both the chairperson of that meeting and the Secretary before being sent out via email to the rest of the members of the council. It is also their responsibility to arrange the venue and times of meetings. Council members to notify the Secretary if they wish to add items to the agenda. Agendas and meeting info is to be sent to the student council and liaison teacher at least 3 days before the next meeting begins. The secretary must read aloud the minutes of the previous meeting at the beginning of the preceding meeting. The Secretary also has the responsibility of making sure all council forms and documents are organised and if there are any problems with these forms of documentation, they must inform the chairperson and liaison teacher.

4.5 ISSU School Rep. (Irish Second-Level Student Union School Rep.) The ISSU School Rep. can be from any school year. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. It is their responsibility to keep in contact with the ISSU through social media, email, and the Regional Officers in their region, to let the council know of any upcoming events, campaigns or released information about the ISSU or ISSU lead training. It is also the responsibility of the ISSU School Rep. to raise awareness and help the school to further understand the work of the ISSU. Other responsibilities can be found in the ISSU Constitution and in ISSU School Rep. resources.

4.6 Public Relations Officer (PRO)

The PRO can be from *any year group*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. It is the responsibility of the PRO to relay and publicise information about the council to the public and school community using forms of media and communication. The PRO deals with enquiries from the public. It is the responsibility of the PRO to make sure that the council is fairly represented in the local media and the school. It is there a job to find ways to improve the communication between the council and the public as well as internal communication. It is also their responsibility to improve social media presence and improved advertising methods within the school such as notice boards, intercom or assembly announcements or local school paper or podcast. The PRO also has the job to find new ways to communicate with fellow students such as an online enquiry system or a student council letter box for suggestion box.

4.7 Treasurer

The Treasurer can be from *senior cycle only*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. Is the responsibility of the treasurer to look after the economy of the student council. They keep an accurate and updated account of all money raised and in the name of the student council. At the last meeting of the year, the treasurer will present an annual report. The Chairperson may ask at any time during the year for a current account report and they must provide it in each deadline. The treasurer should also set a budget for the council with any money accessible to the council. They should present this to the Board of Management and other councils such as the Parents Association when necessary.

4.8 Vice-Chairperson

The Vice-Chairperson can be from *any year group*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. The role of the Vice-Chairperson is to continue the Chairperson's duties if a chairperson is absent. Overlooking or accessing documents of a person as necessary by the Chairperson. If documentation needs to be accessed immediately, the Vice-Chairperson requests documentation from the secretary if the Chairperson cannot be reached. The Vice-Chairperson may also help review the progress of meetings alongside the Chairperson. When taking on the Chairperson's duties they will report to them on the work they did in their name. Depending on your council they may have more duties to carry out.

4.9 Assistant Secretary

The Assistant Secretary can be from *any year group*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. The role of the Assistant Secretary is to continue the Secretary's duties if the Secretary is absent, or the Secretary requests them to do so. If the assistant secretary is taking minutes or the agenda in the place of the Secretary, they must get them approved by the Chairperson of that meeting. They are then to be sent to the Secretary you will then email the rest of the council via email.

4.10 Irish Language Officer

The Irish Language Officer can be from *any year group*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. The role of the Irish language officer is to translate documentation into the Irish Gaelic language or Gaeilge, it being the native language of Ireland or Éire. The purpose of this is to make sure there is accurate representation of both our native and primary languages. The Irish language officer is also responsible for the promotion and representation of the Irish language and culture in the school behalf of the student council. If the Irish language officer is requested to translate documentation, they must consult with both the chairperson and secretary to access the files needed to be translated.

4.11 Equality Officer

The Equality Officer can be from *any year group*. They will hold their position for their one-year council term unless removed from office. The responsibilities of the Equality Officer are to improve the personal and social development for every student in the school equally. This includes representing the student level outside of learning and teaching. They do this by liaising with different groups outside of the school. They must make sure every student of a minority group including those in the LGBTQ+ Community, Traveling Community, low income and disadvantaged families, disabled students, direct provision families and those affected by racism, religions discrimination, bullying and much more. The equality officer should make sure all these students are represented equally and so facilities and extracurricular clubs are available to students if you are more comfortable in the school. It is their responsibility for the defence and promotion of equality on a student level and to inform the council of any upcoming events campaigns or other information regarding student level equality.

4.12 Liaison Teacher

The Liaison Teacher is to attend meetings, they may stay for the whole meeting or just the commencement and completion, this is to be decided by most of the council. They are to be the active link between the student council and staff. They have a voice but not a vote in the student council. They are a source of information for the council. The liaison teacher may appoint a temporary sub-stature in their place. When the position for a liaison teacher is available, candidates should submit portfolios and a suitable candidate should be chosen at a meeting between the council and the principle or Board of Management.

Article 5.0 Elections

5.1 Election Procedures

The election procedure is the voting process between the elected council members. These elections occur when electing positions or voting on decisions/motion. There are usually two types of elections in councils.

5.2 Voting

The elected Chairperson should not vote in an internal election unless there is a split decision in which the chairperson takes in all information into account and makes the final decision. There should be an odd number in voters, when possible, to avoid a split decision. Each member has one vote in elections and must be present at the election/vote to cast their ballot/vote.

5.3 'Vote by Show of Hand' 'Vote by show of hand' should be used when making smaller decisions within a council. If the Chairperson is not using their vote, they should count the hands for the vote.

5.4 'Secret Ballot' 'Secret ballot' elections are used when electing someone to a position or voting on a decision of significant importance. These elections are more complex. This way you rank the candidates from favourite to least, 1 being your favourite. You do not have to put a number or vote for all the candidates at all; it is your own choice.

The quota is the number of votes needed to be elected. There is a detailed example and description in this handbook under 'internal elections.

Article 6.0 Internal Organisation

6.1 Meetings

Meetings should be held at least twice a month and have $\frac{1}{3}$ of its members present to go ahead. The Chairperson or Vice/Deputy is the only member allowed to officially call a meeting. The Chairperson then must notify the Secretary, who will organise the meetings' location, date, and time with the input of the Chairperson. This information is then to be shared with the rest of the student council at least 5 days before the arranged meeting takes place. The Secretary should inform the council members and the Liaison teacher with this information through online communication that works for the council E.g., Email.

6.2 Date & Time of Meetings

When should council meetings take place, maybe a set day and either during lunch break or a set time during school hours? Aim to have a council meeting of 30 to 60 minutes (Depending on your agenda).

6.3 Sub-Committees

The student council reserves the right to create sub-committees at any time. A sub-committee will be made up of at least two student council members ideally one from junior cycle (1st, 2nd, 3rd year) and one from senior cycle (4th, 5th, 6th year). These sub-committees would aim to have a maximum of 10 people and made of a variety of council members and fellow students. The planned activities and ideas of the subcommittee must be submitted to the council for review and approval. Sub-committees must report regularly on their progress to the council.

6.4 Finance and Fundraising

The Treasurer will keep an accurate and up to date account of all money in the council's names including money they raised. The Treasurer will provide an annual report to the council at the end of the year. They will consult with staff, parents and management when planning fundraising events.

6.5 Communications

Good communication means everyone feels included, motivated and feels that your voice is making a difference. Keeping transparency between the student council and our fellow students is vital. A Public Relations Officer (PRO) or Public Relations Team may be appointed to look after these responsibilities. They may use forms of communication such as social media, notice board, announcements and much more. They will continuously report to the council on their progress at each meeting.

As the representative body for students is important to let them know what you are planning and discussing on behalf of them. It is everyone's responsibility to communicate in the council and use their voice to represent others. The Chairperson is to overview the communication within the council and try to improve it where possible.

6.6 Officer Meetings

Officer meetings should take place at least once a month and should require $\frac{1}{3}$ of the officer's present to proceed. Ideally you would have an officers meeting after each meeting to discuss what is working and what can be improved on in the council. It is important to remember that the officers are not above any other council member. It is just that these people have more responsibilities and jobs.

6.7 Event Planning

When planning an event, the council will consult with the principal and liaison teacher as well as the Parent's council and the Board of Management. It is important to consult with the student council treasurer, to allocate a budget for the event. The student council or PRO should get in contact with the student body and run surveys about how the students would like an event to be held and find an equal option between the student body and use this information to set the foundations for their event.

6.8 Invited Meeting Guests

All invited guests need to be approved by the Chairperson to allow them to sit in at a meeting and possibly present to the council. These people will not have any vote in student council elections and must shear to student council ruling and their constitution. They may be asked to leave at any time by the Chairperson.

6.9 Campaigns

The council may set up campaigns or share campaigns once the council agrees. They may be run by the appropriate officer or sub-committee. They can share this through communication sources with the PRO.

6.10 Meeting with the Parents Council or Staff

Meeting with other bodies in the school is a vital part of keeping a strong student council with voice in change. The student council should meet with these bodies whenever possibly to build relationships and connections as you can all help each other out. Organises times and dates to meet and invite parents or staff to your meetings and try to attend theirs as well. Plan what you are going to discuss and present to these bodies and be prepared for questioning.

6.11 Meeting with the Board of Management

Like meeting with the Parents or staff, having a strong relationship with the Board of Management is a vital part of having a say in the school. This Board has a huge say in what the council can do in the school, and it is important to try and meet them to negotiate issues, funding, event planning and much more.

Article 7.0 Standing Orders

7.1 Decision Making

For decisions being made of significant importance as deemed by the chairperson they must be $\frac{2}{3}$ of members present.

7.2 Removing Members

The council has the right to remove a member there must be a 'just cause' such as lack of attendance without valid reasoning, not committed to the aims of the student council, breach of code of conduct, if a student leaves the school or breaches school policy. The member must be given a week's notice of the vote and may address the council in their defence.

Procedures:

The liaison teacher must receive several complaints from individual council members. A warning may be given. If serious violations or continued breaches occur, they will be asked to resign once the council has been made aware of the issue. The council member in question has the right to defend themselves which may lead to a continued reviewed membership until the Officers and Liaison teacher are satisfied with the outcome. In which a vote requiring $\frac{2}{3}$ of its members will take place, this outcome will determine the membership of the council member. If the Board of Management informs the council that a member has seriously breached school ruling with valid reasoning. They will consult with the Liaison teacher, Chairperson and Vice Chairperson in the removal of a member this may lead to expulsion immediately. This may occur when legality is in question in which only officer members over 18 years of age and the liaison teacher are to be in discussion on the member, where they will try and fairly represent the views of the council.

7.3 Removing Officers

If the council feels an officer is not fulfilling their roles responsibilities and there is a lack of confidence in their position, the council will propose to remove their title and they will be given a week's notice to address the

council in their defence. If the council is still not satisfied that a council member is removed from that position but stays in the council unless they have violated the code of conduct or school policy.

If most of the council feels a non-mandatory position is no longer necessary on the council, we feel that the council should try to find ways in which to improve the role and bring new responsibilities to the position. At the end of the year the council can review the position and write a report for the new council in the coming school year so they can decide if they want to keep on that position for another school year.

7.4 Filling Vacancies

To fill vacancies the council may decide to hold a by-election or to Co-opt. the next candidate who received the highest votes at the last election which was held.

7.5 Changes to the Constitution

The council may vote to change its constitution at any time provided that any proposed change at a meeting is then circulated to all its members at least 7 days in advance of the commencement of the vote, which needs to be done at an official council meeting where 2/3 of the members must be present. Any changes made to the constitution must be submitted to the Board of Management.

7.6 Code of Conduct

Council members will attend all council meetings whenever possible. They will be active in engagement with student council activities. They will set a good example to others. Members will represent their fellow students to the best of their ability. To support the decisions made by the council. They will maintain good relationships with staff, parents' council, students, and Board of Management. Support fellow council members and abide by the school rules. They will respect fellow council members and give them a fair chance to speak and use their voice, respectively.

7.7 Democracy

All decisions and elections made by the student council are to be made democratically.

7.8 Equality

Every student is given an equal say on the council and in decision making. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson and Equality Officer to make sure that each council member is equally heard and listened to.

7.9 Student Council Training

Official student council training should take place once a year.

7.10 Exclusion from Discussions

The council is not to discuss; any uncomplimentary mention of a staff, management or student by name or implication, individual grievances between staff and student, ongoing disciplinary matters involving a student or group of students.

7.11 'Null and Void' Decisions

Any decisions made by a council member without the majority vote of the student council will be made 'null and void' and will be addressed accordingly.

Appendix B

Section 27 of the Education Act, 1998

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.

This Policy review was ratified by the Board of Management on 11/12/2023. It has been made available to all school partners and will be reviewed on an annual basis and/or as deemed necessary.

Signed by:

Niamh Lehane

Chairperson of the Board of Management:

Date: 11/12/2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. K. Kestem".

Principal

Date:11/12/2023