



NUSS
National Union of
School Students

Student Democracy in Schools

Guide to a Representative School Council

Part 2: Elections

Once you've designed an effective system of student governance for your school or college, it's time to hold an election.

It is really important that the student council are elected into their roles so they are **democratic representatives** of the student body. Elections can feel overwhelming, but if you focus on the basic principles of fairness and accessibility, so that all school students feel encouraged to stand for election if they want to, you are unlikely to go wrong.

Many school students have no experience of democratic participation, so they may need a lot of proactive engagement in order to take part. **With votes at 16 on the horizon, it's vitally important to foster passionate, conscientious voters from a young age.**

Running an Election: step-by-step guide

How?

Consider the infrastructure of the election.

Who is responsible for running elections and supporting the council? Ideally this would be a senior leader with some operational authority. Current student reps should not be involved in managing elections, to avoid (perceived) bias.

Electoral system - ranking systems like Alternative Transferable Vote are more democratic than First Past the Post - watch this video for further information.

Will you use voting slips & ballot boxes, or will it take place digitally e.g. Microsoft Forms?

When?

You'll need to set a **timetable** for the election process, ensuring it does not interfere with important events like exams. Most schools hold their elections in September to build momentum at the start of the academic year. Publicise details of the election well in advance.

A simple election timetable often includes:

1. **Launch:** communicate the roles available & what they involve
2. **Nominations window:** time to ask questions and submit nominations
3. **Campaign period:** typically around a week
4. **Voting period:** often 3–4 days (but flexible)
5. **Close:** count, publish results

Candidate support

Consider barriers to students standing for election. How can you make this more widely accessible across the student body, and avoid it becoming a popularity contest? Support students to create a well-rounded campaign in their own style:

Invite students from every class to **create a pitch** about their school-wide ambitions.

Get students to **think critically** about the qualities of a good representative.

Offer a **drop-in session** for students to ask questions about the council.

Provide opportunities for candidates to **share their manifestos**, like a hustings, poster board, school email.

Encourage candidates to write a speech, perform a song, or make art that showcases their strategy, to make the process **more engaging** for everyone.

Read **Part 3: Democracy & Inclusion** for more in-depth guidance on widening participation in your student nominations.

If nobody stands, you will need to evaluate **why** - perhaps the election timetable was too short, candidates need more support to brave nomination, or further student engagement is required to show the importance of democratic participation.

Voter engagement

While we encourage democratic education all year round, extra student engagement is needed during the voting period. Think about creative ways to reach different students and tap into their existing interests.

- Advertise the election in **assemblies**, tutor time and PSHE
- Multiple **emails** explaining why student council is important, how to stand, how to vote
- Create posters, art, or a stall promoting the election
- Host **debates and hustings**, preferably during school hours
- Ask students to vote more frequently, on important school issues or on what flavour of cake they want in the cafeteria, to demonstrate the power of voting
- If students have complaints or suggestions, recommend that they stand for election
- Ask **parents** to talk to students about voting

Evaluate

Consider how fair and accessible the election was. Did you have a diverse slate of candidates? Was there a good voter turnout? Do you have a full council?

Ask students how the election went, and what could be improved next year. Then implement this feedback, planning months in advance once again!