

Inclusive Committee Procedures

Earlier in *Connect*, we discussed issues associated with students on bodies like School Councils. Students have complained that procedures here are obscure and difficult to follow, and that this locks them out from being able to participate fully.

It's not just the students who have to change and learn! If a School Council or any other body is serious about supporting the participation of students, then it needs to look seriously at how it operates. It might also find that improvements in its processes serve to empower others on those bodies.

The following ideas about changing committee procedures to encourage the active participation of students were first drafted in 1984. While they were particularly written about students on central Education Department committees, they have wider relevance to other representatives and other committees - both of student groups and where student representatives share decision making with others (eg at School Councils).

Before the Meeting

1. A detailed agenda should be sent out, giving (where possible) recommendations to be moved.
2. Discussion meetings should be held before the main meeting, to go over the agenda and the main business. For example, students could meet with other students and with an advisor, to talk over what is likely to happen.
3. Meetings beforehand could be held with other committee members where they explain to students what they aim to do in the meeting and how they will do it.
4. In particular, experienced committee members who will act as in-committee 'mentors', should meet with students before the meeting.
5. Pre-meeting meetings should be seen as part of committee members' commitments. In particular, accurate time commitment information should be given to students when approaches about committee membership are made.
6. A support person should be allocated to meet with students before the meeting and, where possible, to sit with students during at least the initial meetings.
7. The meeting should be held at a time when student representatives can attend with minimal disruption to their studies.

At the Start of the Meeting

1. An experienced committee member should be nominated as 'mentor' to each student member for each meeting. This role could rotate between members, with attention paid to positive gender role models.

2. All members should be introduced and identified, for example, with a place name. This should show both the name and the organisation/role represented.
3. All documents should have a face sheet summarising the main ideas and recommendations.

Procedure of the Meeting

1. The meeting should stop before decisions are made, to allow time for students to:
 - talk with each other;
 - talk with committee tutors/mentors;
 - talk with any support persons present;to make sure they understand the issues involved.
2. Motions should be written out and, where possible, copied for and circulated to all members of the Committee.
3. There should be a clear statement about the **style** of each part of the meeting, identifying 'brainstorming' and 'formal' times.
4. Arguments and discussion from subcommittee meetings should not be repeated in committee meetings.
5. At the end of each item of business, the chairperson should summarise the decisions on action to be taken and clearly indicate responsibility for action.

Language

1. All members should avoid forms of jargon:
 - initials should be avoided except where they're explained in documents;
 - other groups, committees or individual roles should be explained fully;
 - an attempt should be made to put motions and discussion in direct and plain language.
2. Any member should be able to query the use of a name, word or phrase and have that query treated seriously.

After the Meeting

1. At the end of the meeting, the chairperson or Executive Officer should summarise the major decisions made, especially indicating what action is to be taken, by whom and by when.
2. The committee mentors and/or support person should meet with the students to talk over what happened in the meeting. This should also be regarded as part of the meeting commitment.

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