Democratising the SRC

A How-To Guide

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This guide will show you how to organise your school's Students' Representative Council (SRC) to be consistent with democratic principles. Structuring the SRC in this way will help students to relate their in-school experience to the structure and principles underlying Australia's democracy and institutions – an important piece of effective civics education and engagement.

The important democratic principles that this structure embodies are:

- Informed choice and the free flow of information
- Democratic institutions (including political parties) and their responsibilities
- Effective and responsible government
- Accountability of government to the electorate

In 2024, a trial of this SRC model was conducted in four NSW primary schools with promising results. A copy of the report on the trial can be found here.

1. Student Education / Rules for Election

Before implementing the new structure (see details in the further points below), you should inform students about how SRC elections and operations may differ from previous years, the reasons for the changes, and how they tie back to democratic principles. If you have a set of rules for administering SRC elections etc, these may also need to be amended. A short video explaining the SRC model and its connection to Australia's democracy, pitched at students, can be found here: youtube.com/watch?v=2Dlh1dB9BDU.

2. SRC Elections

a. **Themes:** it is recommended that the SRC coordinator select three broad themes, of importance to the school (for example, wellbeing, charity and the environment), to guide the elections and operations of the SRC and encourage informed debate.

b. **Students to run in teams of two:** students should run for election in teams of two (as democratic institutions are often party-based and require teamwork to achieve a shared objective) and focus their campaign on one of the three themes.

c. **Students to deliver campaign speech:** students who run for election should be required to deliver a speech to their peers explaining why they are well-placed to represent their peers on this particular theme (with reference to, for example, past activities, contributions or special insight or interest in the theme).

d. **Elections to be democratic:** elections should be democratic (free and fair, anonymous, and permitting one vote for each student).

3. SRC Formation

a. **Committee formation:** once elected to the SRC, students should organise themselves into three "committees" or "working groups", one for each theme. The objective of each committee will be to create and execute an action plan that advances their theme.

4. SRC Operations

a. **Division of terms:** the term for the SRC should be divided between "planning" and "implementation" based on the school terms calendar.

b. **Planning terms:** Terms 1 and 3 should be treated as "planning" terms. Each working group should use this term to conduct research, goal-setting and planning for the activities they will undertake in Term 2/4 relevantly.

c. **Implementation terms:** Terms 2 and 4 should be treated as "implementation" terms. Each working group will put their action plans into effect.

5. Mid-Year Elections:

a. **Length of term:** the length of a standard SRC "term" should be shortened to half a year (ie two terms) instead of one full year.

b. **Re-election:** to encourage accountability, there should be two SRC "terms" each year (Terms 1 and 2 are one "term", and Terms 3 and 4 are one "term"), and new elections should be held in Term 1 and Term 3. Students elected to the SRC in the first term may also be on the SRC in the second term, however they must run for re-election, and be accountable to their peers for what they achieved in the first term.

   i. Some schools have a "year-on/year-off" policy, this can be maintained to prevent students from running again in the subsequent year, however they should be permitted to run for election in each "term" of a single SRC year.

Flexibility

The above structure is suggested as a guideline for how to elect and organise an SRC in line with democratic principles. Each school is different, and you can choose to implement some elements of structure and not others, subject to what will work best at your school.

Training and Support

If you have questions about the model and how to implement it at your school, please contact:

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