

Being a Student Council President – a view from Ballyfermot CFE



Maria Mann

Maria Mann is in her second year in Ballyfermot College of Further Education (BCFE) where she is studying for a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Music Production. Here she explains why she decided to put herself forward for election to the college's Student Council, how the council works and why she would encourage other students across City of Dublin FE Colleges to become involved if their college or centre has a Student Council.

Hello everyone! My name is Maria Mann and I have served as the President of the Student Council in Ballyfermot College of Further Education since last year. This is my second year in this college and second year on the council. I decided to run for this position because it presented a great opportunity to bring about a stronger sense of community within our college, especially because of the limited activities and events in the college due to the impact of the COVID pandemic.

I believe that the Student Council plays a crucial role in benefiting both the college as a whole and the individual students on the Council. It does so by enhancing community spirit, amplifying student voice, and offering valuable experience in planning and communication for those serving on the council.

At our college, each class elects two class representatives. Guided by our deputy principal, Kenneth Rea, these representatives come together to elect our Student Council. Each candidate for the council has the opportunity to give a short talk explaining their reasons for running.

There are seven roles on our Student Council: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Communications Officer, Entertainment Officer, Treasurer, and Clubs & Societies Officer.

It's understandable that some students may hesitate to run for the council for several reasons. Concerns I have come across include worries about the time and effort it may require, not liking the idea of getting into "politics," or not knowing much about what the council does. Each of these concerns can be easily addressed.

The amount of time and effort you invest in the council is quite flexible. From my experience, I spent about two hours a week doing council work last year. This included replying to emails, attending meetings, and helping plan and promote activities. On average we meet once every two weeks and at a typical meeting, the agenda might include planning for various events, addressing problems that were brought to our attention since the previous meeting, and discussing requests for new facilities or equipment which would then be brought forward to the management of the college.

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Being part of the Student Council is quite different to getting involved in politics. It's more about working with fellow students and class representatives to bring their ideas and concerns to the college's management, all in the spirit of building a supportive and lively college community.

In colleges where learners are reluctant to get involved, I think it's important for teachers to provide information about the Student Council's roles and responsibilities. Because many students are often only in college for a year, teachers could also suggest reaching out to past Student Council members or Student Councils from other colleges. This way, students can ask questions and better understand what it's all about.

Personally, my experience of being a member of the Student Council has been a positive one. I've gained valuable experience in various aspects, including event planning and promotion, organizing meetings, and gaining insights into how our college operates.

One project we initiated last year, and which is continuing into this year, is our weekly open mic afternoon. This was a collaborative effort where Music Production students took charge of setting up and managing the sound engineering for the event.

Radio students stepped in as MCs, while TV students were responsible for handling lighting and recording. We had Performance students performing, and the event was open for participation to anyone who wanted to join in. This open mic is run entirely by students for students! So far, more than 50 students have seized the opportunity to get up and perform for weekly audiences of up to 100.



Ballyfermot Learners in action at the Open Mic

For me, being on the Student Council has been a positive experience. I'd really encourage anyone interested to give it a go in their own college. I'm excited to continue working with the Student Council to make our college experience even better!