



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891

# COMMITTEE HANDBOOK

“Committees are an integral part of every organisation. A committee with a clear purpose, a well-informed leader and dedicated members is on its way to success.”

([www.mycommittee.com](http://www.mycommittee.com))

Guidance for  
members of  
University  
Committees

## Contents

<b>An Introduction to Committee Work at the University .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Guiding Principles .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Standing Orders.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Guidance for Committee Chairs and Officers .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Freedom of Information and Data Protection.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Abbreviations and Glossary.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Templates .....</b>	<b>28</b>

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Approved by: **Senior Management Team**  
 Version No. **1.2**  
 Owner: **Academic Quality Directorate**

Date first published: **Jun-2014**  
 Date updated: **Sep-2015**  
 Review Date: **Aug-2016**

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## An Introduction to Committee Work at the University

### Purpose of this Handbook

- 1 This Handbook is designed to help all staff and students involved in the University's committee work. It aims to provide an overview of committee work, identifies good practice, and details specific guidance for committee Chairs and Officers.
- 2 A major benefit of committee work is that it brings together staff and students from across the University to allow consensus and ownership in decision-making. Committees combine expertise gathered from several areas and stimulate new ways of thinking, and are often required to take difficult decisions. The committee structure is an essential part of university life.
- 3 Throughout the Handbook, the term 'committee' is used to mean Board, committee or sub-committee unless the context clearly shows otherwise.

### Decision-making process and committee structures

- 4 Three separate bodies have responsibility for the character, organisation and function of the University. These are: Council, the Senior Management Team (SMT), and Senate:
  - **Council** is legally responsible for determining the educational character and mission of the University and overseeing its activities. The Council appoints the Vice Chancellor and other members of SMT.
  - **SMT**, under the leadership of the Vice Chancellor and comprising Deputy and Pro Vice Chancellors in the University, has responsibility for organising, directing and managing the University.
  - **Senate** advises the Vice Chancellor on the University's academic activities. In particular, it advises on matters relating to the awarding of degrees. To assist it in carrying out its duties, Senate delegates responsibility for some matters relating to quality management to its sub-committees.
- 5 Structure diagrams and terms of reference for these Committees are available in *University Committees: Constitution and Terms of Reference (Deliberative)* and *Council Committees: Constitution and Terms of Reference*.
- 6 The way in which these three bodies operate and connect with each other is fundamental to securing and improving quality and standards within the University. This handbook looks at the way in which Senate and its sub-committees operate and focuses on the role of the Committee Chair and Officer in promoting effective decision-making.

### The key players

#### Committee Chair

- 7 The Chair is the Presiding Officer of an assembly, meeting, committee or board.
- 8 The Chair manages committee business in consultation with the Officer, committee members and other colleagues. The Chair works with the Officer to ensure appropriate action has been taken on the basis of the committee decisions. The Chair will support

the Officer in obtaining the required documentation, and approve agendas and draft minutes in good time. A key responsibility is to ensure that meetings are conducted in a manner that draws upon the full range of expertise and opinion of committee members. The Chair should ensure that there is open and constructive dialogue between committee members resulting (where appropriate) in an agreement on action that needs to be taken.

- 9 Senior members of staff usually act as Chair for University-level committees. Chairs should bear in mind that the role of Officer can be daunting for Professional Service Employees (PSEs); the Chair has an important role to play in putting the Officer at ease, and providing an appropriate welcome and induction to the role.

### Committee Officer

- 10 The responsibilities of the Officer (also known as the Secretary) are to:
- Publish the date, time and venue of meetings, taking into account any reasonable adjustments required by members
  - Call for agenda items and set agendas in consultation with the Chair
  - Investigate the status of actions agreed at previous meetings
  - Ensure that all relevant documentation is received within the agreed deadlines
  - Check that committee papers are complete
  - Compile and distribute agenda and supporting papers
  - Record a register of all members in attendance at each meeting
  - Take notes during the meeting
  - Draft minutes and action sheets of meetings
  - Ensure (with the Chair) that the terms of reference and membership records of the committee are upheld and regularly reviewed.

**Good Practice:** Officers are encouraged to liaise with other Committee Officers from time to time to ensure consistency across the University.

- 11 For larger committees a second Officer, or Minute Secretary, may be appointed who is responsible for some of the duties normally the responsibility of the Secretary. These can include:
- Distributing the agenda and supporting paperwork to members
  - Taking notes during the meeting and drafting minutes and action sheets
  - Other duties of the Secretary as outlined above if they are absent or indisposed.
- 12 The relationship between the Chair and Officer is key to the success of a committee. The majority of committee business and how it is conducted will be decided through the interaction between Chair and Officer. The members of staff occupying these posts will change over time, but the benefits of a solid partnership between the two should never be underestimated. Officers and Chairs must work as a team, organising, conducting and recording committee business.
- 13 Servicing of the key University-level Committees, i.e. Senate and its sub-committees, will normally be co-ordinated by the Academic Quality Directorate (AQD) in liaison with the Directorate or Faculty responsible.

## **Committee members**

- 14 Members are expected to:
- Submit agenda items and papers in line with the Standing Orders
  - Contribute to the discussion appropriately
  - Undertake any actions that have been assigned to them by the committee
  - Disseminate information to and represent the views of their colleagues
- 15 It is important that committee members prioritise attendance at meetings to enable proper discussion to take place. However, if a member cannot attend, for good reason, they should notify the Officer in order for apologies to be explained and recorded at the meeting.

## **All staff and students**

- 16 All members of staff and students are able to contribute to the committee structure. The University has a duty to ensure that the views of its staff (academic and PSE) and its students are represented through the relevant committees.
- 17 There are a number of ways in which staff and students can become involved in committee work including:
- Standing for election to a committee
  - Encouraging colleagues and students to stand for election
  - Accepting an invitation to attend
  - Attending as an observer
  - Submitting agenda items and papers for consideration
  - Providing feedback to Chairs, Officers or AQD on the effectiveness of the committee system

## Guiding Principles

- 18 The University is committed to celebrating diversity and promoting equality of opportunity across all the 'protected characteristics' as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This commitment underpins many of the principles outlined in this Handbook.
- 19 All University committees and groups should operate in accordance with the University's overarching CORD principles of: **Clarity; Openness; Respect; and Delivery on commitments.**
- 20 All committees and meetings should have a clear **purpose** and involve the right **people**, who are thoroughly **prepared**.
- 21 Committees should review their effectiveness annually and consider their terms of reference and membership as follows:
  - At the last meeting of the academic year to propose any changes
  - At the first meeting of the academic year to confirm membership and remit

Good Practice: Before the final meeting of the year the Chair and/or Officer may wish to circulate a committee effectiveness questionnaire to members to identify any gaps in the work of the committee.

- 22 The following should be clearly published and accessible on the University website:
  - Constitutions and Terms of Reference
  - Current memberships
  - Open minutes (once approved by the Committee responsible at a subsequent meeting). Provisional minutes will be published internally and circulated to any employees who request them as soon as possible after the meeting.
- 23 University committees should take account of equality and diversity considerations in relation to the operation of meetings. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - **Scheduling:** A calendar of meetings will be set and published in advance by the University to enable members to plan ahead. Changes to the schedule should be limited and communicated to AQD to ensure that the calendar can be updated.
 

Care should be taken where possible to avoid scheduling meetings that coincide with significant or major religious festivals and feast days that fall outside holiday periods, e.g. Eid-UI-Adha, Eid-UI-Fitr, Purim, Yom Kippur. The [Interfaith calendar](#) can be used to check specific dates to identify potential clashes.
  - **Travel:** To reduce unnecessary travel, meetings should take advantage of video or telephone conferencing capability as appropriate.
  - **Accessibility:** Consideration should be given to the location of the meeting to ensure that any accessibility issues can be arranged, e.g. staircases, hearing loops etc. This should be identified during induction of a new member of the committee.
  - **Filing of committee documentation:** Agenda and paperwork will normally be published on the University's Virtual Learning Environment and uploaded at least five working days in advance of the scheduled meeting. Committees should seek to avoid the tabling of papers to ensure members can read them in advance. Once

submitted to the Officer papers should not be amended, unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so.

- **Timing / length of meeting:** Meetings should have a clear start and end time to enable members to make appropriate arrangements to attend, and should be considerate of normal working hours.
- 24 Scheduled University meetings should be prioritised over other work commitments. Members should ensure that they have the time to commit to the work of the Committee before accepting an invitation to the membership.
- 25 Members should attend for the meeting's published duration. Apologies for absence should be used sparingly and only in extreme circumstances.
- 26 The University community should accept and abide by the decision of committees with the relevant remit. This demonstrates trust in the decision-making process and in the committee structure and membership.
- Good Practice:** Chairs should agree a communication strategy for updating the wider university community on issues being taken forward by the committee.
- 27 Members and the wider University should feel that committees / groups are useful, necessary and achieve workable outcomes.

## Purpose

- 28 All committees, working and advisory groups must have a clear purpose or goal which clearly defines their remit ensuring:
- They are distinct from other committees
  - Their purpose is articulated to all members so that they can work collectively to achieve them.
- 29 A committee or group should only be constituted if delivery of the purpose / goal requires a committee or group to achieve it. A committee or group should not be created if the purpose or goal can be achieved by one or two individuals.
- 30 Committees should NOT be 'talking shops' – they should have clear objectives to be achieved, and consideration should be given by the Chair and Officer how best to enable the objectives to be met during the meeting.

## People

- 31 Membership of committees and groups should be derived from as wide a spectrum of the University community as possible (academic employees, PSEs, and students).
- 32 With the exception of ex-officio members, no individual should sit on more than two formal University-level committees. This ensures that members are able fully to contribute to the work of the committee.
- 33 The ex-officio membership of a committee or group will not be more in number than the other members. This ensures that the wider university community is able to contribute to the University's ongoing development in a collegiate manner.
- 34 Committee members should be carefully selected. Members need to be willing participants and interested in achieving the purpose / goal of the committee. Members

should normally be somewhat knowledgeable in the area of the committee's remit and responsibility.

- 35 It should be clear as to the capacity in which an individual is serving on a committee or group as representing:
- Their Department, School or Faculty
  - The staff view (academic or professional service)
  - Their informed or expert view (i.e. normally relating to their role within the University)
- 36 Committee members should be receptive and open to new ideas and others' opinions as objectives will be accomplished through the give and take of open discussion.
- 37 There is an expectation that work is undertaken by members (and others) outside of the meeting, i.e. preparing policies, discussion papers etc.

### Preparedness

- 38 All committee members are expected to prepare thoroughly for a meeting including:
- Reading all papers and familiarising themselves with the supporting material
  - Discussing aspects with their colleagues in order that they can give the Faculty / staff view or take appropriate action prior to the meeting
  - Taking notes, asking concise follow up questions, listening actively and looking for opportunities to build on the thoughts and ideas of others.
- 39 All committee members are responsible for proactively feeding back information from the committee to their respective Faculty, Directorate or equivalent.

### Meetings Protocol

- 40 The University has also published a Meetings Protocol, which is included below and reiterates many of the principles referred to above:
- **Be punctual** – meeting attendance is an indicator of the way people view the importance of others' time
  - **Be prepared** – the key to a successful meeting lies in the preparation of the facilitator and the attendees
  - **Be participatory** – a good meeting involves positive interaction among the facilitator and the attendees
  - **Be positive** – share ideas, shape and challenge opinions, and propose new approaches to solving problems
  - **Be productive** – every meeting should have goals or objectives, to work toward
  - **Be polite** – show respect for other meeting attendees
  - **Be proactive** – ensure the meeting ends with a successful conclusion.



## Standing Orders

### Introduction

- 41 The Standing Orders described in this Handbook are intended to apply to all University committees and explain the rules of behaviour that apply to all committee members.
- 42 Whilst it is expected that the majority of committees will meet these expectations, there may be occasions where a Chair feels that elements of the Standing Orders are not appropriate for their committee; in such cases, matters should be discussed with AQD.
- 43 The 'Constitution' of a committee refers to the composition / membership and terms of reference of a particular committee. Each committee has specific 'Terms of Reference' that determine the nature of its work, including its powers, duties and responsibilities. See paragraph 5 above.

### Planning committee business

- 44 It is advisable for the Chairs and Officers of the Council and Senate to plan a co-ordinated agenda and set objectives for the University. This planning should take place towards the end of the academic year. The outcome of this planning should be reflected in the agendas and objectives of the Senate and its committees in the following academic year.
- 45 The University Committee Schedule (Calendar of Meetings) is devised and managed by AQD in consultation with other directorates and faculties. The Schedule (Calendar of Meetings) is published on the University website.

### Committees, sub-committees and groups

- 46 All committees and groups should be clearly defined and categorised as per the following classifications:
  - **Standing Committee:** Created by Standing Orders, rules, by-laws or regulations of an organisation i.e. formal University Committee, e.g. Senate and its sub-committees
  - **Non-standing Committee:** A Non-Standing Committee is a committee that meets intermittently or only when needed, e.g. Mitigating Circumstances Panel. Non-Standing Committees generally report to Senate.
  - **Sub-group:** A sub-group is a subordinate entity of a Standing Committee normally set up to discuss specific topics, e.g. a QEC Validation Sub-group established to approve a particular course or programme.
  - **Working Group / Task and Finish Group:** Created for a particular purpose and timeframe. The group is dissolved once the job has been completed

### Standing Committees and sub-committees

- 47 Senate establishes its committees and sub-committees to assist it to fulfil its responsibilities and function effectively.
- 48 A committee of Senate may propose the establishment of a sub-committee, subject to the approval of Senate. In all cases, where the creation of a sub-committee is proposed the Constitutions (membership / terms of reference) must be provided. In preparing the constitution consideration should be given to the following:

- The functions of the committees and sub-committees should be distinguished in terms of their respective 'strategy / policy and 'operational / specialist' responsibilities
  - The decision-making powers of a committee or sub-committee and general duties and responsibilities should be clearly specified
  - It is advisable that the Chair of a sub-committee is a full member of the 'parent' committee
- 49 In approving the establishment of a committee or sub-committee, Senate should give careful consideration to the following:
- Is there really a need for this committee?
  - Do the terms of reference overlap with that of another committee?
  - Is the composition appropriate for the terms of reference?
  - Is the membership sufficiently representative?
  - Are there any omissions from the membership?
  - Is the proposed membership larger than is necessary?
  - Do the proposed terms of reference and membership reflect the principles of equality and diversity?

### Working Groups / Task and Finish Groups

- 50 A committee may set up a working group to review, investigate, assess, evaluate, audit, consult, develop or implement a specific development. Where this occurs the committee is responsible for determining:
- the remit and membership of the working group and setting a time limit for the group's existence
  - the membership which can be drawn from the wider University community, although each group should be chaired by a member of the committee
  - who from the membership will have responsibility for the production of notes and final reports (Working groups are not normally serviced by Officers)
  - the establishment and remit of the working group to minimise the proliferation of such groups.

### Membership

- 51 There are five categories of membership at any given meeting:
- **Ex-officio:** A member of staff automatically becomes a member of a committee because of their title or role within the University. Ex-officio members continue in membership as long as they hold their qualifying post.
  - **Representative:** A member of staff who is nominated as a member of the committee to represent a particular area, e.g. a particular Faculty, School or Directorate. A representative member is normally appointed for a period of two years.
  - **Co-opted:** A member of staff is asked to become a member of a committee because of expertise in a given subject. The co-option of a member is at the discretion of the committee, and co-opted members will attend for as long as the committee deems necessary.

- **Elected:** Staff elected by other members of staff of the University. An elected member normally serves for a period of two years.
  - **Student representative:** Students chosen or elected from among the student body to represent their fellow students, normally for a particular course / programme of study. Student representatives are confirmed annually.
  - **In attendance:** Member(s) of staff with responsibilities in the areas of the work of the committee may choose to attend, or be requested to attend. Those in attendance do not have voting rights.
- 52 Standing invitations and occasional invites are also at the discretion of the committee to prevent the unnecessary co-option of members.
- 53 Membership of University Committees is managed by AQD in consultation with other directorates and faculties. Details of membership are published on the University website.

#### Template – Committee Membership

### Appointment of Committee Chairs

- 54 The Vice Chancellor will act as the Chair of Senate and may nominate a Deputy Chair from the members of Senate to take the Chair as necessary. This role is usually taken by the Deputy Vice Chancellor.
- 55 The appointment of committee Chairs is informed by a set of principles agreed by Senate. In each case, there is a need to balance:
- The independence of the deliberative structure with the need to strengthen its relationship with management and executive functions. At present committees of Senate are usually chaired by members of SMT.
  - Potential conflicts of interest with the possession by a committee Chair of the expertise and experience necessary to discharge their responsibilities.
  - The inclusion of a wide range of staff in the work of sub-committees with the desirability of establishing a group of committee Chairs that is capable of co-ordinating work within the deliberative structure.
- 56 The accountability of Chairs to 'parent' committees is secured through ex-officio membership of the 'parent' committee.

### Appointment of Committee Officers

- 57 The Directorate, Faculty, or Department with responsibility for managing the Committee is responsible for appointing the Officer in liaison with AQD. Officers may need to delegate their responsibilities to other members of staff on occasion and this should be managed locally.
- 58 A PSE from the Faculty will act as Officer to committees operating at Faculty, School, Department and course / programme level. The Faculty Operations Manager, in consultation with the Academic Dean, will ensure that all Faculty committees receive appropriate support.

### **Appointment and election of committee members**

- 59 The Committee session or term will run from 1 September to 31 August each year unless specified differently in individual constitutions. Both elected and nominated appointments will normally last for a fixed term of two years.
- 60 The Officer and / or Chair of the Committee will inform the committee of forthcoming ends of terms of office that are due to arise during the academic year to allow time for the appropriate nomination process to take place. The Officer should provide administrative oversight of the election process where relevant, e.g. Senate.
- 61 The Chair and Officer will review composition / membership before the first meeting of the academic year and the Chair will invite nominations for co-option to be presented. Membership should be an agenda item for each committee at the first meeting of the academic year.

### **Induction of new committee members**

- 62 Wherever possible, newly appointed members will be invited to meet the Chair and / or Officer before their first meeting. Each new member should be sent an induction pack. As a minimum, the pack should include the following relevant documents:
- The Committee Handbook
  - Constitution (Terms of Reference and current membership list)
  - Contact details for the Chair and the Officer
  - Minutes of the previous meeting
  - Dates and venues for future committees and meetings
- 63 The Officer should check whether new members have any accessibility requirements and make provision as necessary to enable everyone to fully participate in meetings.

### **Status of members, members' nominees and student representatives**

- 64 Subject to the exception below all committee members have equal status, regardless of their membership category. With the approval of the Chair a member may nominate a substitute; any such substitute will attend with full membership rights.
- 65 The only exception to this rule is where student representatives may be required to withdraw for some items of reserved business, particularly items that relate to the consideration of individual students.

### **Termination of membership**

- 66 There are occasions when a Committee Member will need to be replaced part-way through a term of office (including sabbatical, maternity leave, illness, change of circumstances or teaching pattern, leaving the employment of the University). If the filling of the vacant position requires elections to be held this should be done as soon as possible. Otherwise the Pro Vice Chancellor of the Faculty or equivalent can put forward a suitable nomination. The new Committee Member will only serve until the end of their predecessor's term of office, and will then need to be replaced, or renewed.

## Observers

- 67 Observers may attend committee meetings at the discretion of the Chair but must withdraw from the meeting room during discussion of reserved business (see paragraph 103 below).
- 68 Observers will normally remain silent for the duration of the meeting and may only contribute at the invitation of the Chair.

## Organisation of meetings (including rules on quoracy)

### Regular and extraordinary meetings

- 69 Senate and its committees will meet as often as necessary to execute their powers, duties and responsibilities. This will be at least once every term. Regular meetings will normally commence at 2.00pm. The Officer should post or email notice of a committee meeting to members at least five working days before the date of the meeting, unless the Chair decides that the circumstances justify shorter notice.
- 70 Exceptionally, planned meetings may be cancelled, brought forward, adjourned or postponed by the Chair. Members will be given as much notice as possible.
- 71 The Officer will convene an extraordinary meeting at the discretion of the Chair and the agenda for such meetings will only include the specific items for which the extraordinary meeting has been convened. Extraordinary meetings will not consider and approve the minutes of the previous regular meeting and will not take any other business.

### Length of meetings

- 72 It is advisable to plan meetings for periods of up to three hours. Meetings in excess of three hours may occasionally be necessary but should be subject to members' agreement and the Chair should provide the opportunity for a break.

Good Practice: Meetings in excess of three hours should be avoided wherever possible as they can become ineffective.

### Attendance at meetings

- 73 If a member cannot attend, they should submit apologies and reasons for absence to the Officer prior to the commencement of the meeting.
- 74 The Chair and Officer should review attendance at the end of each academic year. The Chair should deal with individual concerns over attendance as they arise during the academic year.

### Quoracy rules

- 75 A quorum is the minimum number of people required to be present at a meeting in order to conduct the business of the meeting.
- 76 The quorum for all committees is 50% of the membership excluding the Chair and Officer(s). If a quorum is not present after 30 minutes of the meeting have elapsed:
- The meeting will be adjourned; OR

- The meeting will go ahead but no decision can be ratified.
- 77 If during the course of a meeting attendance falls below quorum the meeting should be adjourned. The Chair should consider whether remaining business can be dealt with by Chair's Action.
- 78 If a meeting proceeds on an inquorate basis, official minutes cannot be written. In this case, **notes** are prepared which inform the next quorate meeting. The notes should be careful not to record any decisions, but to 'suggest' and 'advise' the next meeting or 'support' or 'recommend' a Chair's Action as appropriate. Notes should be approved by the Chair as an accurate record of the inquorate meeting but they will only be published internally. Numbering of items should carry on from the previous set of minutes.

### **Delegated authority of sub-committees**

- 79 Provided they are acting within the remit of their terms of reference, sub-committees (but not working groups or other groups) have delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of their 'parent' committees. Decisions taken by sub-committees should be reported to 'parent' committees. Each sub-committee must be able to provide evidence (through the minutes of meetings and other documents as appropriate) to show that it has exercised its delegated authority.

## **Agenda setting and preparation**

### **Agenda setting**

- 80 In consultation with the Chair, the Officer will prepare an agenda for each meeting in line with the committee's terms of reference. Other matters may be introduced and considered at the discretion of the Chair.
- 81 Members should normally receive the agenda and papers at least five working days before the meeting. Where it is practicable, committee agendas and papers should be made available electronically, normally via the University's Virtual Learning Environment, i.e. Blackboard.
- 82 The order of business for a regular meeting shall be as follows:
- To receive apologies for absence
  - To declare any conflicts of interest
  - To receive, correct if necessary, and approve the minutes of the previous meeting
  - To consider any matters arising from the minutes which do not appear elsewhere on the agenda
  - To note the action sheet from the previous meeting and the status of actions
  - To endorse any decisions approved by Chair's Action since the previous meeting
  - To receive a report from the Chair on any news of significance (as necessary)
  - The bulk of the agenda can then be ordered by themes or categorised as follows:
    - Items for approval, recommendation or endorsement
    - Items for consideration (and occasionally approval) through debate and resolution

- Items for note and receipt, e.g. minutes from sub-committee, advisory groups and / or working groups
  - To consider any other business (at the Chair's discretion)
  - To confirm the date and time of the next meeting
- 83 The order of the items on the agenda may be changed with the consent of the meeting.

Good Practice: Where items are for receipt only, e.g. minutes for a sub-committee, it can be good practice to identify these at the outset and take those items as read unless any member has a specific comment in relation to their content.

### Proposing agenda items and submitting papers

- 84 Call out for items: the Officer will ask members for agenda items, and provide a deadline for the submission of papers, at least three weeks before the meeting. Members should send proposed agenda items to the Officer no later than two weeks prior to the meeting to enable the agenda to be set in good time.

Good Practice: The Chair and Officer should establish an annual business cycle for the committee to help the committee to plan ahead.

- 85 Agenda setting meeting: the Chair will decide which items are to be included during an agenda setting meeting with the Officer. When making this decision the Chair will bear in mind the committee's terms of reference, existing business, planned priorities, and the strategic aims of the University. If a Chair rejects an agenda item, he or she will report the reasons for this to the individual concerned. The agenda-setting meeting should occur at least two weeks before the meeting.

Good Practice: Normal practice will be for the Officer to draft an annotated agenda accompanied by explanatory notes in preparation for discussion with Chair.

See Template – Open / Reserved Agenda

- 86 The submission of late papers is bad practice and should be rejected by the Chair under normal circumstances. In exceptional cases, however, late papers should be made available to members as soon as possible and confirmed by email. The agenda should clearly state which papers are attached and which are 'to follow'.
- 87 Tabled papers will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances. If a paper is tabled, the Chair should either allow suitable reading time or ask the presenter for a detailed introduction.
- 88 Items of 'any other business' must be approved by the Chair before the start of the meeting. Consideration is at the Chair's discretion.
- 89 Papers should include a coversheet summarising the key issues and specifically the action required from the committee.

Template – Paper Coversheet

- 90 To provide consistency across the University, the following actions should be used for agenda items:

Action	Definition
To note	To acknowledge information given. Generally there is no need to discuss the particular item
To receive	To formally receive the document or piece of information. The committee is not being asked to make a decision
To consider	To discuss the topic / document. The committee is not being asked to make a decision about it, but is being asked for its views and any follow-up actions
To approve	To discuss and reach a decision about something wholly within the committee's remit. This may take the form of straightforward acceptance or it may involve substantial discussion
To recommend	To discuss an issue and recommend action to another body
To endorse	To support a decision approved elsewhere by an authorised body. Endorsement signals reinforcement and full support for the decision to approve.

### Referencing papers

- 91 All reports and papers, with the exception of the agenda, minutes and action sheet of the previous meeting, should be given a reference number. This should be quoted on the agenda, on the paper coversheet and in the minutes.
- 92 Reference numbers indicate the committee initials, the calendar year and a unique sequential number, e.g.

Committee	Calendar Year	Sequential No.	Paper No.
Senate (SEN)	2013	01	SEN13.01

- 93 At the start of the new academic year the sequential numbering of papers will continue. A new series of sequential numbers will recommence at the start of the following January.

Good Practice: Officers may wish to maintain a spreadsheet of papers and the meeting to which they relate for clarity.

- 94 Papers should normally be numbered sequentially through the agenda to avoid confusion. Any papers received late, i.e. after papers have been distributed, will be given the next number in the sequence.

### Format and accessibility of documents

- 95 See Templates, below on page 26.
- 96 Although hard copies of meeting papers and minutes should always be kept for reference and made available on request, as far as it is appropriate and practicable, committee information should be published via the University VLE. This is at the Chair's discretion.



- 97 Documents should also be made available in other formats on request. Where possible, documents should be made available electronically so that whoever receives them can choose their preferred format.

## **During the meeting**

### **Participation**

- 98 Subject to the Chair's duty to manage the meeting and make sure it is conducted properly, committee members can speak freely and openly on any subject of discussion. In carrying out their duties on behalf of the committee, members are expected to act in the interests of the University.
- 99 Members may speak on more than one occasion on any item. The Chair may, however, with the consent of the meeting, impose a time limit on any item or speech.
- 100 Members are expected to behave respectfully and courteously to one another and to make sure that their behaviour and contributions respect the purpose of the meeting. See also the University's CORd values (paragraph 19 above) and Meetings Protocol (paragraph 40 above).

### **Speaking for the Committee and Chair's authority**

- 101 No-one apart from the Chair should speak on behalf of a committee without the committee's permission. On matters of procedure or conduct, the decision of the Chair will be final.

### **Members' interests**

- 102 If a member has an interest in an item being discussed that is greater than the interests of other members of the committee, they should tell the Chair. The other members at the meeting will decide whether the member in question should withdraw from the discussion or decision.

### **Reserved business**

- 103 Reserved business is any business that is of a sensitive nature that is likely to cover one or more Freedom of Information exemptions, i.e. typically items which have been received in confidence, refer to commercial interest or relate to individual or identifiable staff or students. See paragraph 158 below for more information on Freedom of Information exemptions and the consideration of Reserved Business.
- 104 A Reserved Agenda will normally be produced if a committee is likely to consider reserved business for that part of the meeting. This will be recorded separately and the reserved minutes will be withheld from general circulation.
- 105 If reserved business is discussed, the Chair will ask any observers to leave the meeting. Depending on the nature of the reserved business, student representatives may also be asked to leave.

## Decision-making, voting and Chair's action

- 106 All papers, motions and amendments will be formally proposed and seconded by a member present. A paper, motion or an amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the consent of the meeting.
- 107 For most meetings decisions will be taken by consensus with no need for a formal vote. Where there is no obvious consensus, or where there is a particular reason, decisions will be agreed by the majority of members present who will be asked formally to vote on the proposal. The Chair will be able to vote normally.
- 108 Votes will be by show of hands for all Committees except Senate where a ballot may instead be requested by at least five members.
- 109 The Officer(s) and any observers or those in attendance are not entitled to vote.
- 110 Abstentions do not count as votes cast against. Where votes are equally split the Chair has a second, or casting, vote.
- 111 The Chair may, on occasions, make a decision on behalf of the committee by taking **Chair's action**. This would normally only take place if a decision on a matter was needed urgently or in the case of routine business delegated to the Chair by the committee. In all cases, the committee should be asked to confirm Chair's action at its next meeting.
- 112 The Officer should maintain a formal record of decisions taken by Chair's action using the relevant template.

### Template – Chair's Actions for report

- 113 Business not completed at a meeting will either be adjourned to the next meeting or the Committee will determine whether to hold an additional meeting.
- 114 At any time during a meeting a point of order may be raised. Points of order will be dealt with immediately and the ruling of the Chair will be final.

## After the meeting

### Preparation and approval of minutes

- 115 The Officer should aim to prepare draft minutes for the Chair's approval within five working days of each meeting. Chairs should approve the minutes no later than five days after receipt. Following approval by the Chair, the status of the minutes changes to **unconfirmed**. At this point the Officer may distribute the minutes to committee members, those on the circulation list and non-members as appropriate.

Good Practice: Officers should aim to publish minutes within five working days of each meeting.

- 116 The unconfirmed minutes remain the responsibility of the Officer until they are **confirmed** by the committee at the following meeting.
- 117 Members will be asked to confirm whether the minutes are an accurate record of the discussion and outcomes at the next meeting of the committee. Minutes should not be published via the University website until they are confirmed.

- 118 For sub-committees an Executive Summary will normally be prepared and sent to the 'parent' committee

Template – Executive Summary

### **Numbering and ordering of minutes**

- 119 Minutes are numbered consecutively throughout the calendar year, i.e. 13.01, 13.02, 13.03...14.01. Within each set of minutes the order of minutes should reflect the order of the agenda for that meeting.

Template – Open / Reserved Minutes

- 120 'Matters arising' are recorded individually under a 'matter arising' sub-heading. For each item, the previous minute number should be listed to allow staff to refer back to earlier discussion on the issue.
- 121 'Any other business' items, where applicable, should be recorded separately and have their own minute number.

### **Action Sheets / Notice**

- 122 It is considered good practice for the Officer to circulate an Action Sheet to members (and any other staff who have a specific interest in the discussion) shortly after the meeting. The Action Sheet should provide a record of the outcomes and action required by members / other staff. This will ensure that urgent action is taken swiftly. The Officer is responsible to updating the status of each action and reporting to the next meeting.

Template – Open / Reserved Action Sheet

- 123 Committee members and general members of staff have a responsibility to investigate the actions allocated to them. If individuals do not understand the action allocated to them clarification should be sought from the Officer and / or Chair. Individuals should be prepared to report back on progress at the next meeting of the Committee.

### **Delegating business to other committees**

- 124 Items delegated to committees and sub-committees must receive appropriate consideration at the next meeting. In most cases, the receipt of minutes from the committee or sub-committee will provide evidence of the consideration and the outcomes reached. It is the responsibility of the Chair and Officer to ensure that delegated business is dealt with in good time, and that outcomes are provided to the Officer of the delegating committee.

### **Terminology**

- 125 The non-gender specific term 'Chair' should be used at all committees. The use of the term 'Chairman' as a generic term for both Chairmen and Chairwomen is inappropriate.

## Guidance for Committee Chairs and Officers

- 126 This guidance is offered in the spirit of good and best practice, and contains recommendations for conventions that should result in reasonable consistency in practice, with some necessary discretion to adapt to circumstances.
- 127 The skill of being a good Chair or Officer primarily develops from two things: the ability to think clearly, and a commitment to learn from experience and continuously improve. The theme of this guide is that Chair and Officer need to work as a team organising, conducting and recording the meetings of their committee.

### Planning is key

- 128 The key to a successful meeting is the planning, organisation and structuring of the meeting. This includes considering the scope of the meeting, the aims of the meeting, the volume of business, commissioning the papers required to ensure informed discussion, clarity of tasks for those attending the meeting and the ordering of business. If a meeting is well planned and chaired there is an excellent foundation for useful minutes.
- 129 It is a good principle to require that all substantive items have a supporting paper. Oral reports are usually difficult to absorb unless they are short and well delivered. In addition, the Officer should ensure that the agenda, including all papers, is received by members well in advance of the meeting. Adoption of this practice gives participants the opportunity to prepare their contribution and reasonable confidence that the meeting will be productive. Failure to deliver papers to members on time can seriously undermine the prospects for an effective meeting.

### Call for items

- 130 Members value being given the opportunity to be fully participative. The Chair may choose to have a final agenda item requesting business for the next meeting, or the Officer may invite items from members in advance of the meeting. The Chair should be proactive and commission papers from members (or others with specific responsibilities or interests) well ahead of the meeting. A call for items at least three weeks before a meeting has the further benefit of reminding members of the forthcoming meetings.

### Advice for authors of papers / reports for meetings

- 131 Papers should be concise and purposeful. One to two pages are normally sufficient. Long papers are often counterproductive. When the Chair commissions a paper it may be helpful to give the author a guide length. A report on a project needs to focus on the issues and outcomes. It is advisable to provide a summary followed by recommended actions. The outcomes and the proposed actions must be crystal clear. If the report is substantial it may be advisable to send the paper electronically and enclose a hard copy of an executive summary in the pack.

Template – Paper Coversheet

## Structuring the meeting

- 132 It is advisable to structure meetings to bring cognate items together. A pattern with a natural flow of items helps the participants and improves the effectiveness of the business. The Chair is advised to identify the most important items that require committee time and place them early on the agenda so that the members devote their time to the consideration of the item. A committee may evolve a series of thematic headings that can be followed at each meeting. The order of the thematic headings can be varied according to circumstances. The agenda should indicate who would lead the item.

### Template – Open / Reserved Agenda

- 133 It is advisable to minimise the lead from the Chair – it is all too common for a Chair to overpower the committee and restrict open discussion. The Chair may wish to pass the Chair role to another member of the Committee in instances of personal interest.
- 134 The greatest risk for a committee is to be overburdened with business. It is therefore essential for the Chair to ensure that there is a realistic schedule. Members expect the meeting to start on schedule and have some indication of the length of meeting. Meetings of 2-3 hours are normally acceptable and effective. Meetings in excess of 3 hours may begin to diminish in effectiveness. A planned meeting of 3 hours probably needs a short mid-meeting break.
- 135 Many Chairs keep a private schedule for the items of business so that they can move the meeting on through the business purposefully. It is necessary to use such schedules with discretion so that the Chair can respond positively to circumstances where participants have deeper concern or where the matter is more straightforward than envisaged. The effectiveness of the meeting depends on the clarity of purpose of each item.

## Type of action required

- 136 The agenda needs to be perfectly clear as to what the task of the committee is with regard to each item. It is not sufficient to just list the project or the subject. Members need to know if they are to receive information, give advice, accept and recommend, approve or endorse a paper or report.
- 137 Some committees find it useful to cluster the 'decision items' high on the agenda so that important matters are taken first. However, a Chair may wish to structure the agenda with a thematic cluster.

## Conduct of the meeting

- 138 It is a matter of courtesy that everyone present should either know each other or be introduced. A round of introductions is usual when a new member joins or the committee welcomes a visitor or observer. Normally all papers should be circulated before the meeting. There may be occasions when the tabling of papers is necessary but this should be rare. If a paper is tabled it is good practice to allow a few minutes reading time or ensure that the presenter makes a thorough introduction.

- 139 Chairs should ensure that matters arising are no more than brief matters of report. If there is a possibility or expectation of substantial discussion, then the matter should be an identified item on the agenda.
- 140 Much time can be lost in committees if the presenter re-iterates the contents of a paper. Chairs may inform participants that they should read the papers in advance of the meeting. This enables Chairs to instruct presenters that they should only highlight critically important points or information which post-dates the paper. Introductory comments should be no more than a couple of minutes. The Chair may wish to focus attention on particular points. If the committee is to consider a recommendation from a sub-committee of the committee this should be evident on the agenda. There should be sufficient time for members to question the recommendations but with the exception of core items of primary concern, the committee should not normally need to discuss such recommendations at great length. The purpose of a sub-committee is to ensure that items relating to its remit have received a full and balanced discussion, thus performing a task on behalf of the parent committee.
- 141 Following introduction of the item for discussion the Chair should invite comments from members. It may be useful to gather several comments or suggestions before inviting the presenter to respond. This is more efficient than a response to each question. It is helpful for the Chair to keep a record of those who wish to speak and invite members to speak in turn.
- 142 At the conclusion of each item it is essential for the Chair to summarise the discussion and to announce the action agreed. This should match the original task indicated on the agenda.

## Recording the meeting

- 143 The task of the Officer to the committee is to make an informative record of the meeting and the outcomes. Minutes should be concise, informative and accurate but they should not be a verbatim record. The Officer should understand the general purpose of each business item. This enables the Officer to ensure that for each substantive item, the minute outlines what the issue was, the principal aspects considered at the meeting and the action agreed. The individual / group responsible for implementing the action should be clearly identified.
- 144 The minutes should enable the reader to understand the issues that were discussed and why the particular outcome was reached. The minutes may attribute views expressed by individuals acting in roles responsible for the business under discussion, e.g. 'the Course Leader, Dean, Chair stated that...' etc. However, minutes should not normally attribute other views expressed by member by their name. General discussion should be recorded in terms of the views of committee members, e.g. 'the committee agreed that...'
- 145 The written style and presentation of minutes is important. Minutes should be accessible and digestible. The members presented should be listed on the front page of the minutes, as well as any absences with or without apologies being received.

**Good Practice:** It is good practice to keep an attendance record so that members' attendance can be easily tracked and changes made to the membership if necessary.

This record may form part of a committee effectiveness review undertaken prior to the final meeting of the year and used to identify any patterns or trends in attendance.

Template – Open / Reserved Minutes

## Training for Committee Chairs and Officers

- 146 Training for Committee Chairs and Officers is available via the Human Resources Directorate, whatever the level of prior experience.
- 147 As correct at the time of publication, two courses are offered:
- *Committee servicing and minutes* looks at minute-taking in both formal and informal meetings and is intended to provide you with the skills to take accurate minutes. The session is principally aimed at Committee Officers.
  - *Managing meetings* is delivered by Thames Valley Training & Development, a subsidiary of the University. It will provide you with the opportunity to apply the University's Meetings Protocol and is aimed at people who facilitate meetings, but will also be beneficial to anyone who attends or chairs meetings.
- 148 Please contact the HR Directorate for more information on courses that may be available.

## Summary Guidance

- 149 The Chair and Officer need to work as a team to plan, conduct and record meetings:
- The agenda should be structured to cluster cognate business
  - It is essential for the Chair to indicate the task for the committee in regard of each item of business
  - Committee members should receive the agenda and papers five working days before the meeting
  - The Chair is advised to prepare an approximate (private) schedule for the meeting
  - Minutes should be concise, informative and an accurate record but not verbatim notes
  - Minutes should outline the issue, the main concerns and the action outcomes
  - Minutes should identify who is responsible for implementing an action.

## Freedom of Information and Data Protection

### Legal background

- 150 The University is subject to the [Freedom of Information Act \(FOI\)](#) and the [Data Protection Act](#). The Legislation applies to recorded information held by Bucks, including information produced by committee work: minutes, agendas, supporting papers and tabled papers. Consequently:
- Information in committee records can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act, by people who submit FOI requests
  - Individuals can use the Data Protection Act to request access to personal information relating to themselves held in committee records
  - The Data Protection Act has created privacy rights which have to be respected in how the University handles committee records. For instance, the University should not release committee information into the public domain if that would release personal data about individuals in a way which would violate the Data Protection Act.
- 151 The access rights created by the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts are subject to a number of exemptions and limitations, which serve to balance the right of access against the legitimate interests of the University and other organisations and individuals. Where exemptions apply, committee records do not have to be made available – and in some cases, it would be unlawful or actionable to do so. The right of access covers both electronic and paper copies of committee records.

### Publication of documentation

- 152 The University's aim is to make as much committee information as possible accessible, taking into account confidentiality and privacy requirements. Where necessary, committee proceedings should be structured into open business and reserved business as follows:
- Information should normally be placed into open business as a default
  - Information which is likely to be sensitive and subject to an FOI exemption should be placed on the reserved agenda for the meeting and the discussion recorded in reserved minutes
- 153 Currently the University publishes on its website open minutes for its Deliberative Committees and Sub-committees of Senate. The University does not publish agendas, supporting paperwork or reserved minutes. Reserved minutes will be kept by the Officer.
- 154 Committee minutes will contain information about committee members and other persons (including student representatives and external members) attending meetings (their attendance, reports of their views and opinions, actions upon them), and information about third parties who are mentioned in discussions. Such information will be published in open minutes as it does not represent personally sensitive data and members are attending meetings in a professional capacity.



Good Practice: The Information Commissioner's Office has indicated that it may not always be fair to attribute specific comments or opinions to named individuals. Instead, it is generally considered good practice to depersonalise minutes as much as possible.

- 155 Information in committee records which is not published on the website can still be requested under FOI or Data Protection; such requests will be dealt with on a case by case basis in accordance with the University's Freedom of Information Policy.
- 156 Open minutes for a particular Committee will appear on the website after they have been approved at the next meeting of that committee. This gives the Committee the opportunity to check the accuracy of the minutes before they are made more widely available.
- 157 Once confirmed by the committee, open minutes should be sent in electronic form to [minutes@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:minutes@bucks.ac.uk) where they will be uploaded to the University website.

## Reserved Business

- 158 If you are a Committee Chair or Officer, this section outlines what you should consider when deciding what should go on the open agenda and what should go on the reserved agenda for a meeting, taking into account the overall aim to make as much business as possible accessible.
- 159 An item should only go on the reserved agenda if it is likely to cover areas that correspond to one or more FOI exemptions. This will ensure that only genuinely sensitive information goes into reserved business. Where papers are produced, these will be printed on pink paper clearly to distinguish between open and reserved business.
- 160 The FOI exemptions which are likely to be relevant are section 40 (Personal information), section 41 (Information provided in confidence), section 42 (Legal professional privilege) and section 43 (Commercial interests).
- 161 Items will generally be of a sensitive nature where they refer to commercial interest or relate to individual or identifiable staff or students.
- 162 If, during the course of an open part of a meeting, information arises which should not be released because it is likely to be exempt the Committee Officer should place the record of the discussion in the reserved minutes. The open minutes should indicate that an item has been moved to the reserved minutes, which should indicate the item on the open agenda to which the record of the discussion relates. This may require producing reserved minutes for a meeting where there was originally only an open agenda.
- 163 In the majority of instances a meeting will only deal with open business, in which case there is no need to produce a reserved agenda or reserved minutes. Similarly, some meetings will deal only with reserved business. In both instances the resulting minutes should record that no open / reserved business (as appropriate) was transacted.

## Abbreviations and Glossary

Abbreviation	Explanation
Action Sheet	An Action Sheet is a list of actions made by a particular committee and which indicates who is responsible for undertaking those actions. Actions are generally taken outside the meeting and are updated at the following meeting.
Agenda	An agenda is a list of items to be discussed at a particular meeting. A typical agenda is made up of standing and non-standing items. Standing items appear on the agenda for each meeting, while non-standing items represent individual items within the committee's remit.
AQD	Academic Quality Directorate
Chair	The Chair is the Presiding Officer of an assembly, meeting, committee or board.
Chair's Action	Chair's Actions are actions taken by the Chair outside of and on behalf of the committee, normally to approve or reject a particular document or decision. All Chair's Actions are subject to endorsement at the next meeting.
Committee	Committees are an integral part of every organisation. They are formal bodies with defined membership which act in accordance with and make decisions relating to their remit or terms of reference.
Constitution	The constitution of a committee consists of its membership and terms of reference.
CORD	The University has identified overarching CORD principles of Clarity, Openness, Respect and Delivery on commitments
Data Protection Act	The Data Protection Act is a piece of government legislation relating to data and the use thereof. The University is bound by the Act in the way in which it reports data, e.g. through the committee structure.
Executive Summary	An Executive Summary is a report of a meeting completed by the Chair, normally for reporting to another part of the committee structure. Executive Summaries do not represent the complete record of the meeting which is contained within the minutes.
FOI	The Freedom of Information Act is a piece of government legislation relating to information which should be released into the public domain. Information in committee records can be requested under FOI following the receipt of a formal FOI request. See also Reserved Business.
Meetings Protocol	The University has published a Meetings Protocol which it expects its staff to exhibit during all meetings, formal or informal.
Minute Secretary	A Minute Secretary may be appointed to larger Committees to support the Secretary or Officer. The Minute Secretary's primary responsibilities will be to distribute paperwork ahead of a meeting, take notes during the meeting, and draft minutes after a meeting.
Minutes	The minutes are the official record of the meeting in question and should record at a minimum the decisions taken and actions agreed.

Abbreviation	Explanation
Officer	The Officer of a Committee (also known as the Secretary) is responsible for the administrative side of the committee business. The Secretary may be supported by a Minute Secretary.
PSE	Professional Service Employee within the University. PSEs will normally function as Officers within the committee structure
Quorum	A quorum is the minimum number of people required to be present at a meeting in order to conduct the business of the meeting.
Reserved Business	Reserved Business relates to information within the committee structure which is intended to be withheld from publication. Information is normally placed under reserved business or 'reserved cover' if it relates to one or more defined Freedom of Information exemptions.
Secretary	The Secretary is the main Officer of a meeting. The Secretary may be supported by a Minute Secretary.
SMT	Senior Management Team
Standing Orders	Standing Orders are the set of rules defined in this handbook which govern how a committee is managed.
Terms of Reference	Terms of reference define the remit and membership of a particular committee. The Terms of Reference, together with the actual membership, function as the constitution.
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment, normally Blackboard™

## Templates

Note: Templates are available from the Academic Registry

### General documents

- Committee Membership
- Paper Coversheet
- Chair's Actions for report
- Executive Summary

### Open Business

- Open Action Sheet
- Open Agenda
- Open Minutes

### Reserved Business

- Reserved Action Sheet
- Reserved Agenda
- Reserved Minutes

**Employment Secretary:** Prime Minister, why was my request for a further discussion and your reply not minuted?

**Sir Humphrey Appleby:** Ah Prime Minister... It is characteristic of all committee discussions and decisions that every member has a vivid recollection of them and every member's recollection of them differs violently from every other member's recollection. Consequently we accept the convention that the official decisions are those and only those which have been officially recorded in the minutes by the officials, from which it emerges with an elegant inevitability that any decision which has been officially reached will have been officially recorded in the minutes by the officials, and any decision which is not recorded in the minutes has not been officially reached, even if one or more members believe they can recollect it, so in this particular case if the decision had been officially reached it would have been officially recorded in the minutes by the officials. And it isn't so it wasn't.

"Man Overboard", *Yes Prime Minister*, BBC TV, First broadcast 3 December 1987 on BBC TWO