

Good Practice Guide to Committee Servicing

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Important Changes for the 2021/22 Session:

The University's Major Recovery Team has issued Guidance for the Conduct of Meetings in 2021/22 which may supersede some aspects of this guidance. Please read and make sure you understand and adhere to the [Guidance for the Conduct of Meetings in 2021/22](#) and the accompanying Meetings Generic COVID-19 Risk Assessment.

Background to this Guide

This guide has been produced both for new and existing committee secretaries in order to establish a level of consistency in the approach to committee servicing and to share existing good practice. It is also hoped that the guide will be helpful in setting the expectations of Chairs in relation to the role of committee secretaries.

If you have any queries about committee servicing, please contact governance@reading.ac.uk.

Paperless Committees

In general, most committees and working groups can be serviced without needing to circulate hard copies of papers. It is recommended that any administrative and clerical staff involved in servicing committees have access to a supported version of Adobe Acrobat (currently Adobe Acrobat 2017) which enables the collation of multiple files into a single PDF as well as a range of editing and formatting tools not available in Acrobat Reader.

Microsoft Teams

The University encourages the electronic management of meetings. Microsoft Teams offers a shared workspace for the various applications in Microsoft Office, including PowerPoint, Word, Excel, Planner, OneNote amongst others. Teams is a unified communications platform that combines file storage, sharing and file collaboration and is a useful tool to use for a Committee or Working Group. However, Teams is primarily a collaboration tool, which means all members of a Team have full access to documents. This means the Secretary should keep a definitive version of the documents that went to a meeting by copying them onto their shared collaborative drive to ensure resilience within their own teams.

For further information on Teams, and to apply to have a Team created for your committee, visit the [DTS homepage](#).

AdminControl

Since this guide was first published, the University has introduced electronic board meeting portals for a very small number of senior level committees including University Executive Board and the University Council and its Sub-Committees.

The introduction of portal software has enabled the University to reduce the time and cost associated with committee servicing, significantly reduce paper consumption and improve security and access to confidential and commercially sensitive materials.

If you would like to enquire as to whether a Committee could be added to Admincontrol, please contact governance@reading.ac.uk.

Before the Meeting

When and how to prepare for a committee

Preparation for a committee meeting starts at the previous meeting and this will be covered later under agenda setting. If you are taking over a committee, try to talk to the previous Secretary to get an insight into the committee's core business, current issues and how the Chair likes to work. The previous meeting papers will also give some of this information.

Setting a date

The dates of meetings which appear in the University Calendar are prepared by Governance and relayed to the Council in July each year*.

If dates of meetings have not already been set, this will need to be your first job. When canvassing for dates, check that the Chair (or the Chair's Executive Assistant, if they have one) and any vital attendees (including yourself) are available first.

As most people now use Outlook calendars, it is advisable to check availability widely online first using Scheduling Assistant – find out more about Scheduling Assistant [here](#).

If a date is clear after these investigations and all attendees are expecting a meeting to be scheduled then issue a calendar invitation. If an obvious date cannot be found, or you are organising the first meeting of a new group, offer a small range of dates and timeslots to the wider group by email and then send an Outlook invitation once a date and venue is confirmed.

It is preferable to arrange a series of meetings for your committee or working group as it is easier to cancel meetings if not required than to schedule them in busy diaries.

As soon as meeting date is set

- Set up a contact group - As you will be contacting your committee on a regular basis, it is advisable to set up an email contact group in Outlook. Find out how to create a contact group [here](#).

If you are looking after a senior committee you will need to ensure that the Executive Support to the committee member also receives a copy of the papers, so creating a 'cc' group for committees of this type is also a good idea.

- Book a room

Rooms can be booked by sending an email to Central Room Bookings and Timetabling Office (CRBTO) at rooms@reading.ac.uk. You should include the following information:

- Date of meeting
- Duration of meeting
- Number of attendees
- Equipment required (including videoconferencing)
- Name of committee
- Name of Chair
- Preferred location (optional)

*Rooms for all University Calendar meetings are timetabled by CRBTO at the start of the academic year and a list can be found here [Central Room Booking and Timetabling News - University of Reading](#)¹

- Send an Outlook Calendar invitation

Once you have the date and room confirmed, send a calendar invitation to all committee members using your Outlook contact group. Remember to include the date, time and location and to choose the option to 'Show as Busy'.

In general, you should start preparation around a month beforehand as follows:

Three to four weeks before the meeting

- Draft agenda and send to, or meet with, the Chair to agree
- Request papers and agenda items from key members of the Committee
- Chase actions from previous meeting
- If you require the layout of the room to be changed a porter can be booked through the Estates helpdesk. Information regarding the layout and facilities in each centrally bookable room can be found on the [CRBT webpage](#) and the Estates Helpdesk details are [here](#).
- If individuals will be joining the meeting remotely, they can do so via Teams.
- Video conference equipment and support from DTS can be obtained via the DTS Self-Service Portal [TopDesk](#).

Two weeks before the meeting

- Send reminder to contributors about the deadline for papers (which is generally a week and one day before meeting).

One week before the meeting

- Collate papers – check they are coherent and on brand then add agenda item number
- Send agenda and papers via collated PDF via email² (in a very small number of cases hard copy may still be used but this should be discouraged where possible).
- External members should always receive directions to the University and meeting room.
- External members should always receive parking instructions. Liaise with reception@reading.ac.uk for Visitor Parking.

¹ For 2021/22 this is not the case. Please refer to the [Guidance for the Conduct of Meetings in 2021/22](#) issued by the University's Major Recovery Team.

² If you wish to circulate papers using Outlook invitations, please be mindful that calendars might be viewable by other members of staff. It is therefore not advisable to use this as a mechanism for sharing papers that might contain sensitive data e.g. financial, personal information, student and/or staff details.

Less than 1 week before the meeting

- Collate apologies as they are received
- Book parking for external members
- Order catering (including lunch if required)

Catering can be ordered online via Eat online up to two days before meeting, or via eat.bookings@reading.ac.uk. Details of how to order catering can be found on the Hospitality [Delivered Catering](#) webpage.

As a general rule, tea and coffee should be ordered for every meeting. Water should be provided during periods of warm weather and in most cases biscuits should not be ordered unless agreed with the budget holder. Lunch (generally sandwiches) is only provided for meetings which span the 12.30-2pm period or on an *ad-hoc* basis, for instance if members external to the University will be attending.

Meeting attendees are expected to clear up after themselves at the end of a meeting.

How to draft an agenda

All documents relating to committees should be created using the Reading document template to ensure that they are on brand. These should be available automatically on the network when you create a new document or can be found on the Design & Print Studio webpages [here](#). Templates discussed in this guide are available on the [Governance Zone](#).

In creating an agenda, you need to consider items from previous meetings which either need to be updated (matters arising) or considered as a standalone agenda item. It is therefore useful to look at the minutes of the previous meeting as a first step in drafting the agenda.

The following standard items should always be included on the agenda:

- Date/time/location of meeting
- Name and title of Secretary
- Minutes of the last meeting (for all Committees these are in draft until approved by the next meeting)
- Matters arising (not appearing elsewhere on the agenda)

- *Main Business*

- Standing items (such as reports from sub-committees)
- Any other business
- Date(s) of the next meeting(s)

The main business of the meeting forms the middle section of the agenda and it is likely that you will become aware of these agenda items through contact with the Chair and other key colleagues between meetings.

Once you have drafted an agenda you should send to/discuss with the Chair and, where relevant, key contributors (such as the appropriate head of service, such as the Library, or a Project Manager) in order to capture any additional items, or change the order.

It is important to consider the order of the agenda and it is useful to group items according to the action the committee is asked to take. In practice there may be overlap in the action required but as a general rule the following groupings can be used:

For discussion/ consideration	Matters to which the Committee is expected to give particular attention and/or to comment as appropriate to another body. These are often complex items which may have been requested by the committee at a previous meeting or submitted by a member of the committee or office with an associated function. These items need sufficient time to be discussed in detail as the committee may have been asked to give approval to specific recommendations. These are not routine reports from functions, or a 'show and tell' of work undertaken.
For approval/decision	Matters on which the Committee is expected to take action in accordance with its terms of reference and the powers delegated to it. These are relatively straightforward requests for approval of a number of recommendations which may be new items or items that may have been previously discussed by the committee but need final agreement. There is likely to be some overlap between this and the above grouping and the distinction will become clearer when dealing with actual submissions.

For note	Matters of relevance to the Committee where there is likely to be little discussion. Regular/standing items from reporting committees or offices which can be assumed not to require discussion unless specifically indicated in advance to the Chair or Secretary – if approval is required in relation to any items this should be indicated on the cover sheet.
For information:	Matters of relevance to the Committee which are not expected to require discussion.

An example of an agenda is attached as Appendix 1.

At the first meeting of each year, calendared committees will receive the Corporate Risk Register for consideration.

If the committee features items which include personal data or are deemed to be commercially sensitive under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 the agenda may need to be structured to reflect this. For instance, you may have a section of confidential items at the end of the agenda, which only some committee members are allowed to view, and which are discussed when some members have left the meeting.

Further guidance on this is available from Information Management and Policy Services or on their [webpage](#).

How to involve the Chair

The Chair is pivotal to the smooth and effective running of the committee meeting and it is really important to get to know your Chair and how they like to work. When taking over a new committee it is always a good idea to meet with the Chair to understand what their aims for the committee are and to find out what they consider to be the current issues and activities.

You will liaise with the Chair primarily when establishing an agenda and agreeing the minutes and reports which will result from the meeting, as well as assisting during the meeting itself. They may be happy to liaise via email or phone, or prefer to meet in person, particularly when establishing an agenda. For more senior committees such as University Boards, it may be worth scheduling a pre-meeting with the Chair (who may be a member of the University Council), to be held after the papers have been produced, at which each agenda item can be discussed in detail and an approach to the item agreed.

Preparing Papers

Once the agenda is agreed it is your responsibility to gather and circulate the papers for the meeting. In the process of forming the agenda you will have liaised with various people who will have agreed to submit papers and you should give them a deadline of a week and one working day before the meeting to submit these to you.

Matters Arising

You should also have chased up any outstanding actions and, where these do not warrant their own agenda item, updates on these become matters arising. Where there are four or fewer updates these can be included as part of the agenda document; if there are any more than this a separate Matters Arising report or Actions List is preferable and an example of this is attached (Appendix 2). The matters arising report should either include a written update (possibly with supporting paper) or give an indication that an oral update will be given at the meeting. If an oral update is promised and the individual then sends apologies,

remember to ask them for a written statement regarding the action which can be read out during the meeting.

Collating Papers

When you receive a paper you should check it through to make sure that it is clear both in its narrative and in the action it is requesting from the committee. If you feel that the paper is unclear you should either ask the contributor to clarify it or, if more appropriate, ask the Chair to do so.

Lengthy documents should be accompanied by a cover sheet which is a summary of the key points of the item and the action required. Cover sheets should be provided by the contributor. An example of a cover sheet is attached at Appendix 3.

Wherever possible papers should be submitted to you electronically in a format which will allow them to be spellchecked and numbered according to their agenda item. Documents should be numbered in the top right-hand corner on the first page e.g., Item 4. Page numbers are also helpful for ease of reference during the meeting. Ideally contributors should submit papers using the University brand templates found [here](#).

In the unlikely event that hard copy papers are received, these should be scanned to allow them to be circulated electronically. Scanned documents can be edited using Adobe Acrobat 2017 software.

It is recommended that documents held online are stored in a dedicated folder for that committee and one which can be accessed by others in case of absence (in a shared drive for example). Files should be named and dated in such a way that it is clear to a third party what they are, and you should also use a method of version control e.g.:

University Executive Board minutes 01-04-21 (draft v1).doc
University Executive Board minutes 01-04-21 (final).doc

In line with guidance from the Information Management and Policy Services department, the stacked papers should then be stored using the reverse naming convention such as:

20190401 University Executive Board Stacked Papers .pdf
20190401 University Executive Board Minutes (final).pdf

More information on record management and guidance on naming files and folders can be found on the IMPS webpages [here](#).

Blackboard is no longer used to store and communicate committee papers and, in general, we no longer keep hard copies of committee papers as an electronic copy is sufficient.

Missing papers and tabling

At times you will not receive all of the papers required for the meeting by the deadline. It is important to stay in contact with contributors to determine when late papers are likely to be available. If one or more papers are delayed by less than a day, it may be worth delaying the whole circulation until they have been received, however papers delayed by more than a day should be marked as 'to follow' on the agenda and sent out as a second circulation. In such cases it is worth highlighting this to committee members and indicating when the item is likely to be circulated in order to prompt the contributor.

Tabling papers (where papers are circulated at the meeting) should be avoided, wherever possible, as it does not allow members sufficient time to consider the information or proposals being submitted. Late papers received up to half a day before the meeting should generally be circulated (by email, with hard copies available at the meeting) as members may have an opportunity to read them in advance.

When and how to send out papers

Generally, papers should be circulated one week before the meeting. This timescale may be slightly shorter for less formal or more frequent working groups, due to the more dynamic nature of their work.

The University favours electronic circulation of papers via PDF in an email or calendar invitation. Adobe Acrobat 2017 can be used to collate multiple documents into a single PDF.

When circulating papers you should confirm:

- the date, time and location of the meeting
- whether lunch will be provided (where applicable)
- whether there will be any late papers, when they can be expected and how they will be circulated
- any apologies received to date and request that people inform you if they will not be attending
- give a link to the online expenses claim form if members external to the University are attending. The expenses claim form and guidance on how to complete it can be found on the Finance webpages [here](#).

At the meeting

Your primary role at the meeting will be to take the minutes of the meeting. However, there are a number of other ways in which you can ensure the smooth running of the meeting.

Remember to take with you

- Something to take notes with, for example a laptop, device or paper notebook and pen(s)
- Minute book (if appropriate)
- A watch/clock
- Tabled papers (if tabling late papers is required)
- Terms of reference and membership list
- List of apologies
- Responses to matters arising/items from those unable to attend
- Any additional equipment sited in room, such as conference telephone.

Before and during the meeting

- Get there early. Check you can get into the room, that the refreshments have arrived, open windows or adjust blinds as necessary, set up room meeting style if required and check technology if required.
- Distribute tabled papers.
- Always sit next to the Chair.
- Advise the Chair of any apologies, late arrivals/early leavers and any impact this may have on the order of the agenda, note any additional papers and where they come in the running order, confirm whether anyone is attending for the first or last time and whether the room needs to be vacated by a particular time.
- Make a note of attendees or circulate an attendance sheet – many academic staff have photos on the internal directory if you're not sure who's who.
- Keep an eye on the time to ensure that the meeting does not overrun and to ensure that an agenda item is taken by a particular time if a member has to leave.
- If you miss an important point or are unclear about what action the committee has agreed, ask for clarification immediately – this could include confirmation of a decision made, who will take a particular action, when the action should be completed by, to which committee a decision or comment should be reported on to.
- Ensure actions are allocated to individuals in the meeting and a timescale for completion is agreed.
- At the end of the meeting, ask the Chair for any minor points of clarification that were not appropriate to raise during the meeting. It is also worth confirming when you are aiming to have the minutes and

report to the Chair in order to check that they can review the documents in time to meet any onward reporting deadline.

- Once everyone has left, collect any spare papers left behind, close up windows, and switch off lights. Where refreshments were provided, the catering team will return to remove equipment.

As Secretary you can assist the Chair in ensuring that the business of the meeting is accurately understood and recorded. If you are unclear about anything, for instance a particular point, who will be responsible for an action or which onward committee a decision should be reported to, do not be afraid of asking for clarification during the meeting.

How you take minutes during the meeting is very much down to personal preference but you should ensure that you capture the main points of any discussions, as well as decisions and actions and who they will be completed by.

A minute template can be prepared before the meeting once the agenda has been set. If time allows, it is possible to draft sections of the minutes which relate to purely formal business before the meeting to save time.

After the meeting

Timeline for minute and report writing

Following the meeting you will need to write the minutes (or notes if a less formal meeting) and probably produce a report to go to another committee. The urgency of both documents is often determined by the need to report elsewhere and you should ensure that you are aware of onward reporting deadlines and have set aside time to do the work.

You should aim to write the minutes and report within a day or two of the meeting and certainly no longer than one week.

Once you have written the minutes you may wish to ask a colleague to read them through for clarity. For more technical committees, for instance those associated with building or systems projects, it is often wise to ask an 'expert' such as the project manager to check them before they go to the Chair.

When you are happy with the minutes, these should be sent to the Chair to agree. You may wish to send the report at the same time or wait until the minutes have been agreed; this may depend on how likely it is that there will be revisions to the minutes.

Always give the Chair a deadline for returning the minutes and report (ideally no more than a week) and copy in their Executive Support Officer (if they have one) as they can be invaluable in assisting a prompt response.

Once agreed by the Chair the minutes should be saved as a PDF and circulated to the committee as soon as possible electronically. The report should be submitted to the secretary of the onward committee.

Tips for good minute writing

An example of a set of minutes is attached as Appendix 4.

Style

- be as concise as possible but ensure that you convey a sense of discussions held and record correctly the outcome/recommendation/action. The length of minutes will vary depending on the needs of the individual committee.
- it is unnecessary to record 'he said... then she said'. If discussion is lengthy summarise the points by using a phrase like 'The Board discussed the paper at length and the following main points were noted'.
- think about your audience – other members of committee, Freedom of Information considerations?
- write in the past tense and use formal style for minutes

Presentation

- use the University branded report template
- the attendance list should include academic title (where applicable), forename, surname and job/office title. Individuals should be listed first by seniority of role, where known, and then alphabetically
- indicate the Chair and Secretary in the attendance list
- write a different minute for each agenda item
- refer to the committee as a single entity rather than a group of individuals e.g. 'The Committee was...'
- if referring to individual members use their title rather than name, if more than one person with the same title use their School, Department or surname to differentiate. You can also use initials if a less formal style of minutes has been agreed with the Chair – members' initials should be included in the attendance list so it is clear who is being referred to.
- if using acronyms and abbreviations, always state in full at its first usage with the acronym/abbreviation in brackets e.g., first use 'University Executive Board (UEB) agreed...' subsequent uses 'UEB agreed...'
- minute numbering should use the format of calendar year followed by minute number (19/01, 19/02 etc.), and follow on from the previous meeting.
- ensure that the text of a minute is self-contained and does not rely on its heading or another minute to be understood.
- indicate actions in bold and 'align right' so that they can be easily picked out from the body of the text.

Accessibility

- Accessibility is about making something (a website, teaching materials, committee papers) accessible so that it can be used by as many people as possible. It means making our content and design clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it, while supporting those who do.
- The University's Working Group on Improving Inclusivity in Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Disabled Students produced a helpful list of Top Tips which can be found at http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/engaging-everyone/Top_tips_2018.pdf. Section 2 covers preparing accessible documents.
- Word and Adobe have in-built accessibility checkers which can be helpful tools to use.

Useful terms and phrases

- Committees receive and consider papers and reports, which they note/approve or recommend action on.
- The Committee may formally resolve that something be accepted, may report decisions to another body. Useful phrases are:

The Committee received/noted/considered...

The Committee approved/endorsed/recommended...

Member/It was agreed/noted that...

The Board discussed the paper at length and noted in particular the following points...

After some/lengthy/detailed discussion...

The Committee considered the paper on...

There were concerns raised regarding...

The Board approved the report on...

It was suggested/recognised/acknowledged that...

- Do not use emotive words such as feel, hope, think etc.

Recording actions

- actions should be recorded in text and the 'actioner' indicated in bold so that they can be easily picked out from the body of the text. It is recommended that actions are 'right aligned' to ensure they stand out more clearly.
- be clear who actions belong to and any agreed deadlines/timescales – you may need to ask for clarification of this during the meeting.
- consider summarising all action points as a bullet point list at the end of the document for ease of reference.
- actions are notified via minutes (or as an extract if the action owner is not a member of the committee) and chased up before next meeting.
- as Secretary you may well be allocated actions and these should be completed as soon as possible.
- if the committee proposes the establishment of a Sub-group or Working Party, you may be asked to act as Secretary. Your involvement should be agreed by the Chair and your line manager.

Reports

A report is a way of committees communicating with each other and may in itself form the business of a parallel or more senior committee. A report is generally shorter than the minutes as it should only include those items that are of relevance to the reporting committee. Although the minutes can be used as a framework for the report, the resulting document should never simply be a 'copy and paste' of the minutes.

Remember that it may be necessary to expand on certain points in the report in order that the onward committee understands the context but appendices should be kept to a minimum.

Where comment or decision is required by the onward committee this should be clearly articulated in the report. You should also consider whether you should also provide a cover sheet to be submitted with the report and you may wish to discuss this with the secretary of the onward committee that you will be reporting to.

Committees versus Working Parties

In many respects there is little difference between a committee and working party in terms of organisation. In general, a working party is established to look at a specific issue or project and is likely to be required to report within a fixed timeframe. The Secretary will be important in ensuring that this deadline is met. The main differences are:

- Shorter time frames for completion of work
- More actions
- Faster turnaround of minutes
- Shorter time frame for sending out agenda and papers and greater use of email for distribution
- Production of interim and/or final report

It is possible that a less formal minute style might be appropriate for a Working Party, but this should be agreed with the Chair.

It is important that you organise your time effectively to meet the compressed timescale, and tips to assist this are to:

- Schedule dates (series of dates if possible) which fit with final report deadline from the outset
- Start drafting the final report as soon as the Working Party starts to reach decisions. It is likely that the last meeting(s) will include a review of the report so you need to account for this when scheduling meetings to meet the report submission deadline.

Freedom of Information and Data Protection

As a Committee Secretary you are responsible for recording the decisions made and actions taken by the University and, as a public body, the University is obliged to comply with legislation in relation to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DP). All three are pertinent to committee servicing.

The FOI and EIR gives people the right to request information from the University. The EIR are very similar to FOI, but concern environmental information only. Both pieces of legislation aim to promote a culture of transparency and accountability amongst all public sector bodies, including the University, and therefore facilitate better public understanding of how public authorities carry out their duties, why they make the decisions they do, and how they spend public money.

Under the Data Protection Act 2018, the University must ensure that it collects and uses data fairly and for specified purposes only, stores it safely and does not to disclose it to any other person unlawfully. The requirement for the University to comply with this Act, in protecting the rights and privacy of individuals, imposes certain responsibilities on its staff, students and others that they should fully understand.

The FOI, in particular, is relevant to committee servicing as information relating to a particular subject can be requested at any time under FOI. The University must provide all the relevant information relating to the request that it holds unless an exemption can be applied e.g., the information is personal data or disclosure would prejudice the commercial interests of the University or a third party. As well as formal records and documents in any format, including committee agendas, papers and minutes, relevant information can also include informal email exchanges and handwritten notes taken by the secretary. In short any recorded information that the University holds, including materials held on home computers and portable devices, fall within the scope of FOI (and EIR) and could be disclosed to the public on receipt of a request.

Recording of Meetings:

If you would like to record a committee meeting:

- Ahead of the meeting, ask the Chair whether they are content for you to take a recording for your purposes. The following points apply if the Chair has given their agreement, only.
- Ahead of starting the recording of the meeting, attendees must be made aware that recording will take place and for what purposes
- The recording must not be used for any purpose other than that declared to the group
- If the recording is being made for the purposes of assisting with minute taking, once the minutes are written and the recording is no longer needed, the recording must be immediately deleted.
- Recordings are to be held in line with [Information Security Policies](#) and / or [Guidelines for using Microsoft Teams](#) as applicable

Please be aware that all information recorded and held by the University is subject to request and disclosure under Information Access laws – this includes audio and video recordings of meetings. Prior to recording a meeting please consider whether it is essential to do so, and if so, whether audio only would suffice.

A further requirement of FOI and EIR is that the University should produce and maintain a publication scheme. This scheme acts as a guide to the information the University routinely makes available to the public. Its purpose is to help the public understand what the University does and how it does it. The University does not automatically publish the minutes of all meetings at present other than those included in the publication scheme which include Senate, Court and Council.

Information Management and Policy Services (IMPS) has responsibility for ensuring that the University complies with all three pieces of legislation and can assist in responses to information requests.

You must complete the following mandatory online training courses relating to this legislation (if you haven't already done so) as this will help you to assist the University in meeting its legal obligations:

- Data Protection
- Information Security
- Freedom of Information

These are accessible for staff through UoRLearn. If any external members require access to these courses please contact uorlearn@reading.ac.uk.

For further information about FOI and DP, visit the IMPS webpages [here](#).

Summary of top tips

Before

- Get organised and diarise time to complete all aspects of committee work from agenda setting through to minutes and report – it takes longer than you think
- Complete the University's Data Protection and Freedom of Information modules – they don't take long and are invaluable.
- Find out the reporting lines of the committee(s) you're looking after and make sure you are aware of deadlines for onward reports
- Get to know your Chair and how they like to work
- When sending papers electronically, Adobe Acrobat 2017 allows greater manipulation and editing for PDF documents
- The academic staff pages have photos of staff if you're not sure what they look like (or who was at the meeting!)
- Remember to book parking/give directions/send a link to the online expenses form if there are external members

During

- Draw a plan of where everyone is sitting to help you remember who's who and who said what
- Always sit next to the Chair during the meeting
- Take a watch/clock

After

- Always use spell check and set up an 'auto type' for long names, titles or words that you often mistype – but do not rely on these tools
- Get your line manager or a colleague to read your minutes, particularly if you're new to writing them
- Check technical details of minutes with an 'expert' before they are sent to the Chair if necessary

Chairing Committees

The Role of the Chair

- To have a good understanding of the role and responsibilities of the committee;
- To provide leadership and direction;
- To ensure the work of the committee is consistent with the remit and terms of reference of the committee and that issues outside its remit, or that are of interest to other committees or to the wider institution are appropriately referred;
- To facilitate discussion and encourage all members to participate fully;
- To ensure the committee does not take decisions outside its authorised powers;
- To ensure that decisions made by the committee are clear and represent the collective views of the committee or are, in exceptional circumstances when consensus cannot be reached, of the majority view;
- To ensure that the committee is quorate;
- To determine in consultation with the committee secretary the content of meeting agendas, order in which items are taken and the amount of time to be allocated to each item;
- To undertake ad-hoc work as the chair of the committee such as raising and/or discussing issues with Chairs of other Committees, contributing to reports;
- Managing the meeting by keeping discussions aligned to the agenda and keeping the meeting to time, (e.g.10 minutes to the hour);
- Appointing members to the committee if required;
- Some Committees (such as the Senate and Council) have formal Schemes of Delegation which set out specific powers of the Chair or specified officers;
- Representing the committee at other committees;
- To take decisions by Chair's Action
- To take decisions by Chair's Action in any matter which is considered to be urgent, routine or not of sufficient importance to justify the calling of a meeting and to report on items approved by Chair's Action to the next meeting, offering an explanation of the action you have taken;
- To hold extraordinary meetings
- Occasionally, it may be necessary to call an Extraordinary Meeting of the Committee. The reason for holding an extraordinary meeting must be clearly stated when the request for it is made. The agenda should only contain papers directly relevant to the issue(s) or discussion. The extraordinary meeting is not normally asked to approve minutes, deal with matters arising, nor will other matters be discussed.

Being a good Chair

- Work closely and collaboratively with the Committee Secretary on the business of the Committee;
- Be impartial;
- Have good listening and communication skills consistent with the University's values and model of leadership that values listening;
- Listen to the discussion among members and ensure that all members have an equal chance to express their views and opinion;
- Prevent points being repeated or the discussion moving away from the main issue;
- Understand when to end the discussion, or move to a vote;
- Summarise clearly the points made during discussion of an item before moving onto the next;
- The University values equality of opportunity, respect and diversity in acknowledging and respecting a broad range of social, cultural and personal beliefs, and it is expected that everyone demonstrates mutual respect, open-mindedness and transparency in discussions;
- Debate and disagreements during discussions can be expected. All members should be seen as equal and their views and opinions should be treated with respect;
- Challenge any inappropriate attitudes, language and behaviour that does not meet these standards, reminding the Committee of the University's Values and Behaviours. If you experience any challenges or difficulties during a meeting you should escalate the issue to HR and/or the University Secretary;
- All committee members are collectively responsible for the decisions of the committee;
- Be aware of the reporting lines of your committee and where it fits in the broader University committee structure;
- While committees may discuss situations in general, they must not discuss individuals or individual cases, except where it is specifically the business of the committee to do so;
- There is no objection to matters in a paper not indicated as confidential being discussed with anyone in the University before a meeting or when 'reporting back' on such matters. 'Reporting back' should normally be confined to giving the decisions; the discussion which preceded a decision should be mentioned only if it is necessary for the purpose of clarifying the decision. No names, either appearing in the papers, or of members who took part in the discussion, should be mentioned (except in obvious cases such as giving the membership of a Committee);

Before the meeting

- Meet with the Secretary in good time in advance of the meeting to agree and order the agenda, being clear on what items are for discussion, decision, note;
- Important business should be higher up the agenda than routine matters, in order to allow more time for discussion;
- Be aware of reporting / escalation routes and timelines;
- It is essential that you have read and understood all the committee papers in advance and develop a good understanding of the topics being discussed;

- Collate comments and feedback from members who will be absent for the meeting if they have provided this in advance;
- Familiarise yourself with the technology in the meeting room if your meeting is taking place on campus.

At the meeting

- At meetings, consider carefully where you sit in the room. Ensure you can be clearly seen by everyone, and that you can see everyone so that you are aware of which members wish to speak. It is often helpful for the Chair to sit next to the Committee Secretary;
- Introduce yourself and welcome members, especially new members. If it is the first meeting of the committee, or the first meeting of the academic year, it is good practice for all members to introduce themselves;
- At the first meeting of the academic session, the membership and terms of reference should be reviewed to remind everyone of the purpose of the committee, its role and remit;
- Where applicable, the first meeting of the session of calendared committees should also review the Corporate Risk Register and Declarations of Interests;
- At the start of the meeting, review the overall agenda briefly to identify any pressure points, timing issues or key items of business;
- Ensure the minutes of the previous meeting are agreed. Committee members may raise issues concerning the accuracy of the minutes but they cannot object to the minutes if they simply do not like what was agreed. You will need to decide whether you agree that an amendment to the minutes is necessary;
- At the start of each item outline the purpose of the discussion and the type of action needed;
- Pass on comments and feedback from members who are absent, if any;
- Introduce speakers who are attending to speak to particular items;
- Keep the meeting focussed, to the agenda and to time;
- Facilitate effective discussion and decision-making;
- Encourage equal and active participation by all members of the committee;
- Ensure the Committee is quorate when making decisions;
- Do not dominate discussions yourself or allow others to dominate discussions;
- Do not force your own ideas or criticise the values and ideas of others;
- Summarise key points fairly and succinctly to ensure the Committee is clear about what has been discussed and decided, particularly if the discussion has been lengthy;
- Ensure that all members understand any acronyms or initials;
- Ensure all the key points are agreed and minuted, and that actions are assigned appropriately with a proposed time-frame and feedback required;
- Ensure unresolved items or issues raised during the meeting are noted for later attention and be clear as to how they will be followed up e.g. as an agenda item at the next meeting or to be dealt with outside the meeting;

- End the meeting on time – ten minutes early;
- Thank everyone for attending and contributing;
- Be mindful of the course of business of the committee as it progresses through the year, particularly in regard to disclosure of interests.

After the meeting

- Confirm with the Secretary that they have a record of all key discussions, outcomes and actions;
- Check with the Committee Secretary whether any papers need to be referred on to other committees and agree what should be said on the coversheet that should go with each paper;
- Check carefully and in good time the draft minutes sent to you by the Secretary. Make any necessary amendments and return promptly for the Secretary to circulate and chase actions ahead of the next meeting;
- Arrange any follow-up discussions;
- Approve and contribute to any reports (e.g. annual reports) from your committee to its reporting committee;

Membership of Committees

All committees should have an agreed membership and terms of reference. The Committee's membership list should identify the status and period of office of members if appropriate.

Committees normally contain the following categories of membership:

Ex Officio: members of the committee by virtue of the post they hold (other members are nominated or elected).

Member: Individuals who are formal members of the committee, nominated or elected, and have voting rights to take part in decision-making. Members might have a set period of time on the committee

In attendance: Individuals who attend regularly to speak to papers or offer advice when it is required but cannot take part in decision-making.

When vacancies arise on a committee for non-officio members it is important that a transparent approach is used for filling those internal roles, such as expressions of interests and/or elections.

For committee vacancies for which a senior committee is the appointing authority, replacements should be approved by that committee. Vacancies for Lay Members of Council and Council Committees are dealt with by the University Secretary. Vacancies for student members of committees are filled by the Students' Union. Vacancies for lower-level committees can be appointed by the Chair. Committees should be mindful of diversity and inclusion in their making of appointments.

Committees ought to be a practicable size, not too large, which will allow discussion and debate to flourish, in order that consensus can be reached.

The Committee List available on the [Governance Zone](#) sets out membership of the University's calendared committees.

Appendices

The Appendices to this document are now published as individual documents for download on the [Governance Zone](#) with the Good Practice Guide.

Appendix 1	Example of agenda
Appendix 2	Example of Matters Arising report
Appendix 3	Example of cover sheet
Appendix 4	Example of minutes