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# Committee Handbook

## 2025- 2027

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## **Purpose of this Handbook:**

- I. This Handbook is designed to help all staff and students involved in the College's committee work. It aims to provide an overview of committee work, identifies good practice, and details specific guidance for committee Chairs and Officers.
- II. The Handbook provides an overview of how Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation may impact upon committee-related tasks such as preparation of agendas and related papers, minute taking and the identification of individuals in minutes and papers. This is especially important given the wider availability of College documents and minutes in electronic format, including the publication on the College website of the confirmed minutes of many committees.
- III. Throughout the Handbook, the term 'committee' is used to mean boards, committees or sub-committees unless the context clearly shows otherwise.

## **Committee Interrelationships**

Two separate bodies have responsibility for the character, organisation and function of the College. These are: the Board of Governors and the Academic/ Quality Assurance Board:

- I. Board of Governors: The role of the governing body is to develop and approve the mission, vision and strategic plans of the College and to review key performance indicators in order to monitor the overall performance of the institution. (BOG, TORs)
- II. Academic/ Quality Assurance Board: The responsibility of the Academic / Quality Assurance Board is to be the final academic authority of the college and to advise the Governing Body on academic matters. The Academic / Quality Assurance Board has the right to be consulted by the Governing Body before decisions are made affecting the academic direction and character of the College. (AQAB, TORs)

## **Roles and Characteristics of Committee Members:**

### **Chair:**

#### **The main responsibilities of the Chair are to:**

- Understand the purpose and objectives of the committee and play the lead part in planning the committee's business to ensure coverage of the full range of its terms of reference in liaison with the Secretary and, where appropriate, Chairs of related committees and sub-committees
- Promote and support the work of the committee
- Conduct committee meetings so that they are orderly, open and effective, particularly to:

remind committee members of the standing orders and other committee protocols when necessary

keep the business of the committee meeting running smoothly

ensure that business is discharged in a timely fashion

- Make sure, in liaison with the Secretary, that the committee's decisions are reported and acted upon appropriately
- Remain impartial, respect confidentiality and handle sensitive issues with discretion
- Represent the committee as required
- Contribute to the evaluation of the committee's work and preparation of any annual report

#### **To fulfil these responsibilities the Chair should aim to:**

- Attend all meetings and maintain an understanding of committee work and related matters between meetings
- Be familiar with the committee's membership and terms of reference as well as general committee conventions, including standing orders and reporting protocols
- Develop a close and co-operative working relationship with the committee Secretary
- Build good working partnerships with College officers
- Develop the trust of committee members and value their contributions
- Make sure that he or she is well briefed on agenda items before meetings take place
- Manage the business of committee meetings effectively, fairly and impartially, both encouraging participation and limiting debate as necessary

## **The main duties and tasks that need to be undertaken by the Chair are to:**

- Participate in appropriate planning meetings at the start and end of each session, agreeing an annual schedule of business
- Agree, in liaison with the Secretary, an agenda for each meeting, approve agenda items, commission reports, and identify business as appropriate
- Liaise with the Secretary to prepare for each meeting and receive briefings on agenda items
- Read the papers carefully in advance of the meeting, be aware of the issues and check out any queries, inconsistencies or potential controversy
- Start the meeting on time and make introductions as appropriate
- Manage committee discussions so that clear decisions are reached which identify what action needs to be taken, who is responsible, the timescale for this action and the nature of report back to the committee
- Take account of the Secretary's advice but to have the final say on matters of procedure and members' conduct
- Agree draft minutes prepared by the Secretary after each meeting. Chairs should note that in approving the wording of minutes they are not only approving their accuracy but also approving their status as statements which may be made available within or outside the College (e.g. through publication on the internet). The Secretary should normally circulate the unconfirmed minutes to members within two weeks of the meeting.

## **The characteristics of a good Chair are:**

- Good listening and communication skills, including a willingness to listen to ways in which meetings can be improved
- Impartiality, together with a clear focus upon achieving the aims of the meeting
- Ability to summarise discussion fairly and succinctly to ensure that all those present accept and are clear about what has been decided
- Ability to gain consensus and avoid unproductive dispute
- Willingness to exert authority when necessary but in an appropriate manner
- Tenacity in ensuring follow-through

### **Committee Officer/ Secretary:**

#### **The responsibilities of the Committee 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
- To remain impartial, respect confidentiality and handle sensitive issues with discretion
- Ensure (with the Chair) that the terms of reference and membership records of the committee are upheld and regularly reviewed
- Make sure, in liaison with the Chair that the committee's decisions are acted upon appropriately
- Promote the business of the committee including facilitating and coordinating procedures which are the responsibility of the committee

#### **The main duties and tasks that need to be undertaken by the Committee Officer/ Secretary are to:**

- Develop and maintain briefing materials for new members of the committee
- Make arrangements for meetings including timing, venue and hospitality as appropriate
- Draft agendas, papers and reports in consultation with the Chair or other officers
- Review the papers and reports prepared for the committee and refer back as appropriate
- Be familiar with the content of papers for meetings
- Ensure the timely distribution of committee papers to members by electronic means (e.g. email attachments or hyperlinks to a shared drive folder)
- Provide members with a hard copy set of papers where appropriate or where specifically requested by members
- Receive and record any apologies for absence from members



- Attend all meetings and keep an ongoing understanding and awareness of the committee's work and related matters between meetings
- Produce minutes and reports of meetings for consideration by other committees
- Ensure that decisions and actions are followed up in a timely way and reported to the next meeting
- Brief the Chair prior to the meeting on any relevant issues, developments or matters arising from the previous meeting

### **The characteristics of a good Secretary**

- Listens and communicates well
- Excellent written language skills
- Excellent analytical skills
- Understanding of the respective roles of governance and management
- Tenacity to ensure follow-through
- Pro-active and facilitating

### **The general responsibilities of committee members are to:**

- Make a positive and effective contribution to the work of the committee
- Be clear about the functions of the committee
- Keep the committee informed of particular relevant local issues and factors
- Attend all meetings or give apologies to the Secretary if unable to attend
- Respect confidentiality and handle sensitive issues with discretion
- Contribute to the evaluation of the committee's work.

### **The characteristics of a good committee member are that s/he:**

- Demonstrates high ethical and professional standards
- Respects the authority of the Chair
- Shows courtesy and respect to other members
- Participates fully in the meetings
- Demonstrates an understanding of the business of the meeting
- Is prepared to question accepted views and to defend independence of thought
- Does not introduce irrelevant or tangential matters/business
- Accepts corporate responsibility and abides by agreed decisions

## Access to and Confidentiality of Committee Documents

### Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives individuals the right to ask to see any information that the College holds. Consequently, most committee papers and minutes would, unless a specific exemption applies, need to be released if requested. Even where an exemption applies, only the information covered by the exemption can be withheld rather than the whole document. As a result it is not possible to prevent disclosure of an entire set of minutes.

Under the Act, it is not only agenda, papers and minutes which must be released but also handwritten notes, e-mails and draft minutes. It is therefore advisable, as standard practice, to shred all notes, drafts and briefing papers once there is a set of confirmed minutes.

### Data Protection

The Data Protection Act 1998 requires that appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data. Such unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data includes publication and disclosure to those who have no reason or purpose to have access to that information.

### Guiding Principles

All committees and meetings should have a clear **purpose** and involve the right **people**, who are thoroughly **prepared**.

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

The following should be clearly published and accessible on the University website:

- Committee 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.

Scheduled College 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 into membership

## Purpose

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.

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.

## Meetings Protocol

The College Meetings Protocol are as under:

- **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.



## Membership

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 College. 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, the membership is renewable.
- **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 College. An elected member normally serves for a period of two years, the membership is renewable.
- **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.

## Quoracy rules

A quorum is the minimum number of people required to be present at a meeting in order to conduct the business of the meeting.

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.

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.

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.

## **Standing Orders**

### **Introduction**

The Standing Orders described in this Handbook are intended to apply to all College committees and explain the rules of behaviour that apply to all committee members.

While 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 the Board of Governors prior to a resolution.

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.

### **Induction for new Committee Members**

Newly appointed members may be invited by the Secretary to meet the Chair and/or Secretary before their first meeting and should be provided with induction materials.

As a minimum these should include:

- How to access the Committee Handbook
- A list of committee members
- Contact details for the Chair and Secretary
- The current committee work schedule and planned business
- The minutes of the recent past meetings
- Dates and venues of the future committee meetings

The Secretary should check whether new members have any individual requirements and make provision as necessary to enable everyone to participate fully in meetings.

## **Before the Meeting**

## Agendas

The purpose of the agenda is to:

- 
- Provide the Chair with a framework within which to conduct the meeting
- Inform members of the time and place of the meeting in sufficient time for them to be able to prepare adequately for the meeting
- Identify easily the items which need to be discussed or acted upon and those which are for information only
- Identify open and closed business
- Indicate which items have supporting papers

## Preparation for the Meeting

The Secretary is responsible for booking a suitable, accessible meeting room and arranging hospitality if appropriate. He or she should arrive at the meeting in time to make sure that the seating, catering and other arrangements have been made properly. The Secretary should make sure they are familiar with the agenda items and anticipate, where possible, any problems that may arise at the meeting and bring them to the attention of the Chair. A briefing meeting with the Chair prior to the meeting is good practice. This allows the Secretary to remind the Chair of the background to particular items or brief them on developments or matters arising from the previous meeting.

## At the Meeting

The Secretary is responsible for advising on procedural matters and for making sure that the committee acts only within its terms of reference. The Secretary should have a thorough understanding of the terms of reference and ensure that all necessary information is to hand to provide effective advice. Such information might include the standing orders, terms of reference, Academic Regulations or other relevant policies and procedures for reference. A spare copy of the agenda and papers may be required and should be brought to the meeting.

The Secretary should verify that the meeting is, and continues to be, quorate if a quorum is prescribed and, if the appointed Chair is not present, arrange for the Deputy

Chair, where identified, to Chair the meeting. If there is no Deputy Chair identified, the quorate meeting should be asked to nominate a person to Chair the meeting.

The Secretary should record the names of those present, normally by means of an attendance sheet, take notes of proceedings and record committee decisions. If the outcome of a discussion is unclear the Secretary should ask the Chair to clarify before moving on to the next item.

Occasionally the Chair may be absent temporarily during a meeting, e.g. to attend to an urgent business matter. If the meeting needs to continue in the absence of the Chair, another member may be nominated to chair the meeting during the Chair's absence. A note recording who took the chair in these circumstances should appear at the appropriate point in the minutes and a further note recording the Chair's resumption of his/her role added subsequently where applicable.

The Standing Orders require that, unless varied by resolution of the committee, the order of business to be transacted at a committee meeting shall be as set out in the agenda. Where it is appropriate to vary the order of business, e.g. to consider an item before the presenter of that item has to leave the meeting, this can be proposed by the Chair and accommodated, provided members agree.

### **After the Meeting**

The most important and urgent task after the meeting is likely to be the drafting of minutes, although there may be some immediate follow-up action which requires attention before the drafting of the minutes. The purpose of the minutes is to:

- Be a permanent record of the meeting
- Inform members and others of decisions and the reason for them
- Assist in ensuring that action arising is taken
- Provide a formal record of the substantive discussion where this raises matters not already set out in the report being discussed



## Types of Action

To provide consistency across the College, the following actions should be used for agenda items and related minutes:

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

## Committee Self-evaluation

Committees should carry out a self-evaluation exercise every two years in order to judge their effectiveness against their responsibilities and objectives. Committee members should also evaluate their own contributions as part of this exercise with a view to improving their effectiveness. Consideration should be given to the optimal method and timing for eliciting feedback from committee members, e.g. whether to table an evaluation questionnaire at the last scheduled meeting of the year or to circulate one electronically for completion after the last meeting.

The outcomes of this exercise, which may result in recommendations for improvement, should form part of the committee's annual report to its parent committee.