



How to be an Effective Committee Secretary

A Manual designed to help newcomers to get started
with committee servicing and to provide a reference for
established committee secretaries

Contents

How to be an Effective Committee Secretary.....	3
Foreword.....	3
Taking on a Committee: Tasks & Responsibilities.....	4
What is a Committee?.....	5
Terms of Reference.....	5
What is the Role of the Committee Secretary?.....	6
Managing Your Committee Meetings	7
Before the meeting	7
General Preparation	7
Prepare the Agenda.....	8
Prepare Yourself	8
The Chair's Brief.....	9
During the Meeting.....	9
Act as a Prompt.....	9
Take Minutes	10
After the Meeting.....	11
Write the Minutes	11
Recording Committee Decisions	12
Dissemination & Records	13
Disseminate Information from the meeting.....	13
Record Keeping	13
Access to information	14
Computer solutions and the use of language	14
Minute books	14
Handling Confidential Matters and Freedom of Information [FOI].....	14
Appendices.....	16
Appendix A: Annual Tasks for Committee Planning.....	16
Appendix B: Alternates to Members	17
Appendix C: Observers at a Meeting.....	18
Appendix D: Participation of Non-Members in a Meeting	19
Appendix E: Preparing Briefing Papers.....	20
Appendix F: Meeting Rooms.....	22
Appendix G: Sample Annotated Agenda.....	23
Appendix H: Sample minute wordings.....	29
Appendix I: Matters for the Agenda and Writing the Minutes.....	31
Appendix J: Writing Resolutions.....	34
Appendix K: Making Committee Decisions available to the University	37

How to be an Effective Committee Secretary

Foreword

This is a brief look at the role and tasks of the committee secretary.

This manual is issued by the Secretariat and was prepared by staff of the Secretariat from course notes originally written by N J Simpson and G R Dennett.

This manual sets out to do two things. First it provides a quick overview of the role of the committee secretary as it applies in the University of Canberra. Second it provides information found useful by previous and current committee secretaries in the University of Canberra and is offered with the intent of assisting a committee secretary in the ongoing performance of the role.

A document such as this cannot be 'all things to all people' and this document does not seek to be the 'bible' for committee secretaries. It would be presumptuous to do so. There are many excellent published works available and persons with an interest are encouraged to search out relevant materials in libraries and on the Internet.

Some basic knowledge is assumed. Readers will be expected to have a competent grasp of the use of English, both spoken and written. The role and skill of the meeting recorder is to convert spoken ideas into written English. That requires the transformation of seemingly disparate and disjointed notions into cohesive and comprehensible forms of written discussion that teases out often quite complex and inter-woven issues. Committee resolutions must be recorded in such a way that they may be readily understood and interpreted unambiguously, and passed on for implementation.

This overview is essentially 'once over lightly'. The intricacies of the role will emerge over time and through experience. It is then that the reference material contained in the appendices may prove useful.

If you are new to this role don't be daunted by it. Approach the tasks systematically. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Start with the overview and look at the appendices, as you need to. Remember that the contributors to these notes all started out with no prior knowledge about being a committee secretary.

Graeme Dennett
January 2001

Taking on a Committee: Tasks & Responsibilities

Taking on the role of being secretary of a committee is a significant commitment. It is more than just turning up for a meeting and taking some notes. After browsing through this manual you will have some idea of the scope of the role.

When you are asked to become secretary of a committee, or to take minutes for committee meetings, it is helpful to learn as much as possible about the work of the committee before attending your first meeting.

Firstly, obtain a copy of the committee terms of reference. This document will specify the committee's purpose and function. It may also include information on such matters as committee membership, methods of appointment and periods of office, links between the committee and other entities, meeting frequency, quorum and reporting structures.

It is a good idea to have an introductory meeting with the Chair to discuss the committee and expectations of your role as secretary. Read as much as you can beforehand about the committee and its business so that you can ask questions and are aware of issues that may be raised.

Minutes of past meetings will indicate the kinds of matters the committee deals with and show the level of detail of committee deliberations that is recorded. At a minimum, you should read carefully the minutes of the previous meeting. If time allows, reviewing minutes for a full year will provide an overview of the committee's business and work-flow. *Note:* a few University committees prepare an annual report that could be a valuable source of information.

Find out the current membership of on the committee. You will also need to know the committee schedule of meetings for the year, whether and how meeting venues are booked, the names or positions of other members of staff who should receive meeting papers and/or minutes, how papers are distributed etc. For guidelines to annual tasks refer to **Appendix A**.

Other committee records will be available electronically or on Registry files. You will need to arrange with the previous secretary to pass on hard copy records and transfer electronic files to your computer. Ensure that all available records are transferred – it is surprising how often a secretary needs to consult minutes or papers from earlier committee meetings.

Ideally, there should be a “hand over” committee meeting attended by both the outgoing and incoming secretaries. As incoming secretary, you will take minutes but the previous secretary may also take notes and be available after the meeting to advise on drafting the minutes if required. As your knowledge of the committee develops, you may decide to make changes to the way minutes are written, but until you are confident it is sensible to follow past practice.

During committee meetings members often refer to earlier discussions with which a newcomer will be unfamiliar. At the first few meetings, don't be afraid to ask for clarification or explanation of matters you do not understand.

What is a Committee?

The Macquarie Concise Dictionary defines a committee as “a person or a group of persons elected or appointed from a larger body to investigate, report, or act in special cases”. It then goes on: “an *ad hoc* committee is one set up to deal with one subject only (as opposed to omnibus)” and a standing committee is “a committee that may be appointed without a term, to oversee an aspect of the running of an institution”.

In the University of Canberra the term “working party” is used primarily to denote an *ad hoc* committee established for a set task within a specified time frame.

The University of Canberra Committee Information Site lists the various committees within the University of Canberra and most include meeting dates and a list of committee members. Some also contain the Terms of Reference for the committee. *Viewing only* access to the site is available from the the University of Canberra homepage under the ‘Council and Committees’ heading, or at: <https://guard.canberra.edu.au/opus/ctee-public.cfm>

The *restricted* access site that allows updating of committee details by committee secretaries and access to extra information by committee members can be found at: https://guard.canberra.edu.au/opus/real_logon.cfm

Different types of committees at UC include the following:

- *Committees with formal decision-making powers*: These committees are responsible for making final decisions on policy, procedures and practice (eg Council and Academic Board). Meetings need to follow a formal meeting procedure. Usually each item will have a covering paper setting out the issues and recommending possible decisions. Papers need to be forwarded to members well before the meeting. Only under exceptional circumstances is a paper tabled at a meeting. Record keeping must be meticulous.
- *Advisory Committees*: Discussion is likely to be more free-flowing. Sometimes matters are placed on an agenda to be discussed with no background paper.
- *Committees responsible for policy development (eg the subcommittees of Academic Board – Education Committee, Higher Degrees Committee)*: These committees may have very simple agendas comprising just one or two items, but those items may be of such a nature as to require papers to be developed and discussed at more than one meeting. The committee secretary might be expected to play a significant role in the ongoing development of a policy and be the key person in drawing together dimensions and ideas from meetings into cogent reasoned arguments for consideration at the next meeting.

Terms of Reference

A committee's terms of reference define the power and role of the committee. In the case of the University Council the terms of reference are set out in the *University of Canberra Act 1989 (ACT)* and Council is bound to limit what it does to matters permitted by the Act. The Academic Board terms of reference are also defined in the Act. Other committees will have their terms of reference set down by the body that establishes them. In the case of standing committees such as the Finance Committee,

the powers are wide-ranging and continuing. For a working party the terms of reference will usually be narrower and confined to gathering information and providing a report and recommendations to the creating body. For a working party there will usually be a “sunset clause” which indicates when the working party is to terminate.

When a committee is newly established, the Secretary should establish a file with a title such as “Terms of reference and membership of the xxx Committee”. The file should contain the minutes setting out the decision (eg by Council, VCAC, Academic Board, Divisional Education Committee etc) to establish the committee and the composition of the committee. Any changes to the composition of the committee or to its terms of reference should be recorded on this file.

A committee that acts outside of its terms of reference is said to be acting *ultra vires*. This means “going beyond the legal power or authority of an agent, company, tribunal, etc. [Latin: beyond the power]” (Macquarie Concise Dictionary)

A committee secretary needs to be familiar with and to understand the terms of reference. Then if the discussion or a decision relates to issues outside the terms of reference, the secretary can gently bring this to the attention of the Chair or the committee with a statement such as:

“Given that our terms of reference relate to coursework programs, perhaps we should refer the question of admission to research masters courses to the Divisional Higher Degrees Committee”.

Refer to **Appendix B**, **Appendix C** & **Appendix D** for guidelines regarding alternates to members, the role of observers and non-members in meetings.

What is the Role of the Committee Secretary?

- 1 A committee secretary provides service to a University Committee through:
 - ❖ arranging meetings;
 - ❖ preparing agendas;
 - ❖ preparing minutes;
 - ❖ taking action to implement committee decisions; this may include:
 - obtaining information for the next or future meeting;
 - preparing a paper for the next or future meeting;
 - asking some other section of the University to provide advice to the next or future meeting;
 - preparing correspondence dealing with issues addressed in discussion; or
 - promulgating decisions eg. reporting, providing or seeking advice significant correspondence of all kinds
 - ❖ preparing background notes;
 - ❖ providing advice to Chairs, committee members and committee users on policy matters and on matters of process;
 - ❖ maintaining appropriate committee records in an accessible form;
 - ❖ undertaking each of these functions in a timely way; and
 - ❖ briefing and advising Chair [refer to **Appendix E** for details on preparing briefing papers].

- 2 The relationship between secretary and Chair is critical. The Chair needs to be familiar with the business of the committee and the secretary should ensure that the Chair is aware of all matters as soon as they arrive. In a decision-making committee the Chair will frequently handle the task of advising unsuccessful applicants. The secretary's role is to ensure that the Chair has all of the necessary information to hand. The Chair and the secretary need to work together to manage the business of the committee and a committee secretary's role may be seen as managing a Chair's workload, eg "filtering" business, assessing priorities, "batching" non-urgent items for attention, and involving the Chair in the agenda.
- 3 The role of the secretary varies depending on the role and nature of the committee, because the nature of the committee will influence such aspects as:
 - ❖ the formality or informality of papers presented to the meeting;
 - ❖ whether papers presented to the meeting are prepared mainly by the secretary or by other people;
 - ❖ the extent to which the members will rely on the secretary for information about policy, procedures and operational activities;
 - ❖ the type of discussion at the meeting;
 - ❖ the extent to which the secretary may participate in discussion; and
 - ❖ whether papers may be tabled at the meeting.
- 4 The secretary helps to maintain continuity within the committee through the provision of good committee briefing and maintenance of records.

Managing Your Committee Meetings

Before the meeting

General Preparation

General preparation before the meeting may include a variety of 'logistics'. For example:

- ❖ *Scheduling dates and times.* Most committees have an annual schedule of meetings set in October for the next year.
- ❖ *Booking a venue of appropriate size and space.* It is usual to book the venue for all of the scheduled meetings when the meeting times are set. Refer to **Appendix F** for meeting room details at the University of Canberra.
- ❖ *Notifying or reminding committee members.* Asking for papers for the next meeting is a useful reminder technique.
- ❖ *Various aspects of venue preparation including:*
 - seating,
 - ventilation, and
 - provision of morning/afternoon teas, water, pens and paper [all meetings should have water and glasses. Morning or afternoon teas might be provided if the meeting is expected to exceed two hours].
- ❖ *Optimum meeting length.* It is generally considered that short meetings are more productive than long meetings. Experience shows that meetings with well prepared briefing papers and competent Chairs are the most effective.
- ❖ Ensure that *technical and equipment support* required in the meeting is available and in working order. Examples of equipment that may be required include

overhead projectors, conference telephone, or computer support for *PowerPoint* presentations.

These details may seem unimportant, and even irritating, but they set the scene for a well-organised meeting. Make sure these details have been attended to.

Prepare the Agenda

The secretary should always prepare an agenda for a meeting [see **Appendix G** and also **Appendix I**]. An agenda consists of:

- an agenda paper, and often also
- attached papers.

Information set out in the covering agenda paper should include at least:

- the name of the committee;
- the date, time and venue of the meeting;
- minutes of the previous meeting (as the first item);
- matters arising from the minutes not dealt with elsewhere in the agenda (as the second item); and
- other business (as the last item).

It is also useful to number committee meetings, the agenda items and pages of attached papers so that members can indicate in a meeting which page they are referring to.

Prepare Yourself

Be familiar with the terms of reference and committee composition, and have them available at every meeting. To prepare yourself:

Read any papers you haven't prepared yourself...

A committee secretary should never be surprised by anything in the committee papers. Reading and understanding the papers also makes the task of recording much easier.

Take relevant files and information...

Taking background and /or relevant information to the meeting with you for yourself, and other committee members, will save time.

Know the background to each item...

What has happened to date and what previous relevant decisions were. Ideally, this information should be included in the attachment. If not, make sure you are aware of it.

Know as much as possible about precedent and the University, Division or School policy, as appropriate...

Annotate your copy of the agenda to jog your memory about issues you may have to raise or give advice on.

Check routine matters of procedure...

This will ensure that the committee doesn't waste time.

The Chair's Brief

Just as a committee secretary should not be surprised about what is in the papers neither should the Committee Chair. It may be the secretary's job to see that the Chair isn't surprised. Consider preparing a briefing paper [Refer to **Appendix E**], which covers all areas of potential disagreement or confusion on issues to be discussed - similar to your own annotated agenda. Aim to make the briefing paper as self-contained as possible so that, 'at a pinch' the Chair could attend the meeting without requiring further information. This practice is particularly useful for assisting new or uncertain Chairs to get on top of the role. It is useful to e-mail this as an attachment before the meeting to the Chair as well as taking a hard copy to the meeting itself. Refer to **Appendix G** for a sample-annotated agenda prepared for the chair.

During the Meeting

As committee secretary you have responsibility to arrive at the meeting venue first. Ensure the room is appropriately set up and any equipment required for the meeting is working. Make sure the ventilation is working appropriately and if necessary ensure that water and glasses are on the table - if the meeting is expected to exceed one hour, water is necessary. For longer meetings other catering may be necessary [refer to section **Before the Meeting**].

The level of involvement of the committee secretary in the meeting varies considerably. Some have full membership and speaking rights, some are there to provide information or advice on request, while others might consider that they are not even permitted to speak. The secretary's participation in the meeting will be influenced by the role of the committee and factors including:

- the extent to which the members rely on the secretary for information about policy, procedures and operational activities;
- whether papers presented to the meeting are prepared mainly by the secretary or other people;
- the type of discussion at the meeting;
- the formality or informality of the meeting; and
- the Chair's views and preferences about whether and how the secretary should participate.

The tasks of the committee secretary include to:

Act as a Prompt

The secretary can be helpful in the following ways.

- let the Chair know when all members are present and the meeting can start;
- if matters arising from the minutes are not set out in the covering agenda paper, identify and report on them at the meeting;
- let the Chair know when a committee member has motioned to speak and has not been recognised by the Chair;
- ensure that the Chair sticks to the agenda;
- remind committee members of previous decisions or matters of policy;
- correct incorrect facts;

- if the secretary realises that in relation to an approach being favoured by a committee, there are issues related to implementation that the committee should take into account;
- provide policy advice and/or background information (precedent) when requested or where relevant;
- draw attention of Chair to lack of quorum if appropriate for committee;
- advise the meeting of other business which has arisen but for which there are no papers (usually at the end of the meeting);
- at the conclusion of the meeting advise the committee of any matters or items that were not discussed; or
- be aware of and if appropriate draw attention to resource implications of certain decisions if relevant.

***** Don't wait to be asked - take the initiative *****

At the same time, it is worth noting that the secretary's role differs from that of a committee member. Strictly speaking, the secretary should not engage in debate unless the secretary has the same kind of expertise as the committee members. This is a particularly sensitive issue in a university when academic matters are under discussion, and when decisions on these matters should be based on expertise and experience in academic activities (ie. teaching in higher education, research or consultancy). Take your lead from the Chair.

Take Minutes

Obviously if you are a minutes secretary only, this job will be crucial to you. There are two main issues that should be noted about taking minutes:

- *Try to make notes about all the points made by members.* This doesn't mean taking everything down. Such comprehensive minutes are best left to Hansard and court reporters. However, unless the committee operates in a very formal way, it is also a mistake to note down just the decisions. You need to be fully aware of all the issues made in discussion to make sure that you formulate the decision correctly for the minutes. In addition, you or others will probably need to refer to the minutes at some time in the future, and it is important that the reasons for a committee's decision are obvious from the minutes.
- *Clarify each decision BEFORE you move on.* Ask the Chair to clarify the decision or important points of discussion if you don't understand what decision has been reached, or if you think a member doesn't, or if you think that there are different understandings of the decision among the members. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification about what the committee has actually decided, its intent and meaning. It is wise to do so before the committee has moved onto the next item. A good Chair will summarize at the end of each item. A good secretary will prompt the Chair if this is overlooked or if the decisions taken are uncertain. If the matter is not clear to the secretary, members probably have differing understanding of what has been decided.

Other details to keep in mind are to:

- As far as possible, note times of arrival and departure if members are late or early. This may be useful in the future if a question is raised as to who participated in discussion on a particular matter;
- In your notes it is sometimes helpful to write initials of the speaker next to each point raised, but it is not normally appropriate to attribute points to particular speakers in the minutes [refer to section **Write the Minutes**].
- University of Canberra procedures do not generally require the formal procedure of motions being moved and seconded although the Chair may go through the process of asking for a mover or seconder. Nor is it usual to record the results of a vote other than through resolution statement of “*the committee agreed...*”

After the Meeting

Write the Minutes

Prepare the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting and before your memory fades. If in doubt about a point do not be afraid to ask for clarification from others who have been at the meeting.

The amount of detail you will need for the minutes will vary, but some aspects will always be important. These include who was there, what items were discussed, what agreements, resolutions and conclusions were made, who objected (if they wish to be included) and most importantly who agreed to do what. For most committees, it is important also to include the main points made in discussion. This provides the reasons for decision, and will help to prevent this or another committee from reinventing the wheel and having the same discussion time and time again.

There is no short cut to good minutes. You must be prepared to interpret and think out decisive facts and arguments. Be absolutely clear on SPECIFICALLY what actions were agreed. You may find it useful to write the conclusion first and work backwards.

In the minutes the resolutions and actions required of members are recorded and each person must be advised of the actions required of them.

The language and techniques of minute writing will vary but minutes should always fit the following tests:

Complete

Minutes as a whole need to record meeting details including:

- ❖ At the beginning:
 - Name of committee
 - Venue
 - Date
 - Start time
 - Those present
 - Those absent
- ❖ At the end of the minutes:
 - Finish time

The minutes for each item should record the papers which were considered, the points made in discussion (when they are relevant), and relevant endorsements and recommendations. Policies affected and the decision(s) taken should also be included in the minutes. Ensure that late items of business and tabled items are included in the minutes; even if only to note their acceptance for placement on a future agenda.

Concise

The minutes of each item should be written as concisely as possible, providing always that meaning is preserved. Minutes should make sense to the reader whether the person was in attendance or not. Brevity is a blessing but meaning is all-important. Minutes should reflect any nuance in the discussion so as to provide the context of the proceedings without the animosities [refer to **Appendix H** for sample minute wordings].

Correct

Minutes must be accurate. That is their purpose. The minutes are the ‘official record’ of the meeting. If in doubt about a point, discuss the matter with the Chair or major proponents of discussion to clarify your thinking. A point to note is that the hand-written notes taken in the meeting are not the official record of proceedings.

Clear and unemotive

Minute writing requires tact and passive, neutral language. It is a record of proceedings, not an episode of a soap opera. Some of the skill in minute writing is exercised here in recording points raised, the gist of differing opinions and the removal of feelings that may have been expressed during the course of proceedings. The minutes are primarily to record decisions and their bases, not to provide evidence in defamation suits [refer to **Appendix I** for further details on writing minutes].

Minutes of a meeting remain unconfirmed until they are accepted, with or without amendment at the following meeting. You should however disseminate unconfirmed minutes and carry out the required actions. If amendments are made to the minutes, remember to also change the electronic file copy.

Recording Committee Decisions

Decisions made by committees are recorded in the minutes as *resolutions* [refer to **Appendix J**]. The way a resolution is expressed is critical as resolutions encapsulate what the committee decided to do after consideration of an agenda item. A resolution will survive and may continue to be cited as evidence of a policy or administrative decision long after the meeting at which the particular matter was considered has been forgotten.

Some important factors to take into account when writing resolutions are—

- the need to record decisions accurately;
- the need to include all necessary information to enable decisions to be implemented; and
- the need to refer to the authority by which a decision is made if the power to make the decision is based on legislation or on delegated authority.

Dissemination & Records

Disseminate Information from the meeting

Minutes have three main functions, which are to act as:

- a memory refresher for those who were present;
- information for those who were absent; and
- a history of acts and accomplishments.

They provide a bridge between one meeting and the next and ensure continuous action rather than duplicated or counterproductive action.

Shortly after the meeting identify the work which needs to be done in the light of the committee's discussion and decisions, who is responsible for each action item, and the deadline for the action. One way to address this is to issue an extract of the minutes to the person(s) responsible for the next action or actions to be taken to implement a decision. See the sample in the appendices. Another way is to draw up an action sheet. An example is provided in the appendices [refer to **Appendix K** for further information about making decisions available to the University].

Record Keeping

Keep accurate records. The University is obliged to have records of decisions particularly those decisions that commit resources. The corporate memory is only as good as the accuracy and completeness of the records. The University has a centralised registry that will accept and maintain committee papers and minutes. You should use this service, as it will enable you to meet statutory requirements for record keeping which the University is obliged to meet.

To keep accurate records for a committee at UC you must undertake the following:

- Establish official Registry files. This usually comprises a file for each meeting except when very few papers are provided to the committee and an annual file may suffice.
- Ensure that all papers associated with the committee meeting (the covering agenda paper, attached papers distributed to members, late papers, tabled papers and the minutes) are placed on file.
- Ensure that all papers associated with follow-up action are appropriately filed. You can do this on the actual meeting file, or on separate files for particular topics, but you need to be consistent in the system you use. If you put follow-up action on a separate file, then the two files should be cross-referenced (Registry can provide on this service);
- In the case of a committee that handles applications, it is advisable to establish a database recording details of applications. Such a database will enable you to retrieve information quickly.

The Registry can help you through its computerised tracking system and its resubmit service to keep record-keeping up-to-date.

Access to information

It is useful to keep an index of committee decisions. This may include the number and date of the meeting to enable a particular decision to be located quickly. Computer based information retrieval methods can also be used.

Computer solutions and the use of language

Most computer packages use a form of word indexing to keep track of matters. When you write minutes you need to keep in mind the synonymous words and phrases and perhaps to make use of them in the minutes to ensure that you can find all references to the topic later. For example, where 'amalgamation' is discussed, all references may not be found if some of the discussions used the word 'merger' rather than 'amalgamation'.

There is an unofficial thesaurus of words in use in any institution and you need to become aware of those in use in the University of Canberra, and their usage. Be clear to define the terminology you use by being careful about the context. In addition, the first time you use an acronym in a set of minutes, give the title in full followed by the acronym in brackets. For example, a minute might read "The Committee received notification about training course available for university senior managers from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee [AVCC] and asked..."

Minute books

Corporate law requires that minutes of meetings of company directors and general meetings of companies be kept in a minute book. With the exception of the minutes of the University Council, it is not normally required that minutes of committees be held in a separate minute book. However you must ensure that the minutes are kept in the committee records.

Handling Confidential Matters and Freedom of Information [FOI]

Some matters handled by committees are sensitive and confidential. Matters relating to individuals are usually dealt with in this way. Some matters are confidential only until a decision is made. Others remain confidential after the decision is made.

If your committee handles confidential matters as a matter of course, you will need to ensure that new members are alerted to the issues of confidentiality.

If a matter is confidential the papers relating to it need to be marked "confidential" or "in confidence". One convention is to print confidential matters on coloured paper to indicate confidential status. If the matter to be considered is particularly sensitive, consider numbering the copies made and collecting them afterwards for secure disposal. All papers, even papers pertaining to confidential matters must be kept in the committee records. Particularly sensitive papers should be placed on Registry files with suitably restricted access.

If the committee papers or minutes are normally freely available then 'confidential' matters may need to be omitted from the versions made generally available, or the minutes written in such a way as to hide the identity of the person about whom the decision refers.

Committee proceedings (Registry files) containing confidential matters should be marked “confidential” if the matters remain confidential after the decision is made. The central Registry also has mechanisms to restrict access for particularly sensitive matters and these should be used when circumstances warrant them.

However do not seek to use confidentiality of some matters to restrict access to committee proceedings about non-confidential matters. Freedom of information [FOI] legislation gives broad general access to documents used in decision-making and the issue of confidentiality can be quite contentious and documents will not be protected unless stringent tests are met. This is a specialist area and the general rule is “FOI will usually give access”. Contact the FOI Officer, Secretariat for further information on FOI issues.

This document reflects the cumulative experience of many committee secretaries and is the product of not a few training courses. Nevertheless it does not purport to cover all possibilities and questions which might confront a person taking on the committee secretary role. If you have some experience or knowledge insight which you think should be put into this manual do not hesitate to make contact with one of us in the Secretariat. We would be delighted to hear from you and to share your wisdom.

Appendices

Appendix A: Annual Tasks for Committee Planning

Towards the end of each year, perhaps in October the secretary will plan the committee schedule for the year ahead. This is done in consultation with the Chair. The meeting schedule should be prepared early enough for proposed dates to be considered and confirmed by the current committee and included in University and Divisional publications (and the OPUS web site). Your committee's meeting dates may influence dates to be chosen by other committees.

In setting the committee schedule, it may be sufficient to repeat the meeting pattern from the current year. However, arrangements should be reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to meet current needs. Factors to be considered will include meeting frequency, appropriate timing for the first and last meetings of the year, relevant academic deadlines, and the need to coordinate with (and/or not to conflict with) other Divisional or University Committee dates. For example, if decisions of your committee lead to action for another committee, make sure that you allow sufficient time between meeting dates to prepare relevant advice or papers for the other committee.

Other annual planning tasks for the committee secretary include:

- Check members' periods of office and brief the Chair on likely or required changes. The Council policy on terms of appointment as resolved at meeting No. 42 of 8 November 1995 refers. See at: http://wasp.canberra.edu.au:80/secretariat/council/uc_cm_42.html
- And the *Review of University Committee Structure and Mode of Operation* at: <http://wasp.canberra.edu.au:80/secretariat/council/cttee.html>
- Arranging and booking meeting venues.
- Publication of the meeting schedule. It is recommended that the schedule specify closing dates for receipt of papers as well as the dates of meeting to ensure adequate time for preparation and circulation of papers before each meeting. It is also suggested that meetings be numbered, but not in advance as renumbering would be required if a meeting was cancelled during the year.
- Publishing a committee list with contact details for members and the secretary (if membership changes significantly during the year, the list should be updated and reissued).
- Establishment of Registry files for each meeting and other files as appropriate (eg annual Policy and Procedures or Correspondence files).
- For some committees, preparation of an annual work schedule including key periods and dates for major business items (eg timetables for external grants schemes).

Appendix B: Alternates to Members

- 1) Some committees may permit the attendance of another person in place of a member. This is usual if membership on the committee is by virtue of position held. A person acting in a position would usually be expected to attend instead of the substantive member. In circumstances where committee membership is personal rather than by virtue of position held no alternate membership is possible. For example, a professor of the University who is a member of Academic Board by virtue of being a professor cannot send a deputy. But if the professor is attending as a Head of School then the acting Head of School could attend. A committee secretary needs to exercise care and sensitivity in relation to alternates for members. It is preferable to avoid a situation where someone just turns up to a committee saying "Mr X asked me to come in his place", or "Professor Y is away and so I'm taking her place today". An alternate member needs to:
 - 2) be authorised to take the place of a member;
 - 3) have adequate knowledge of the issues under discussion, in order to make a useful contribution;
 - 4) have adequate knowledge of previous discussion and have been briefed by the member, so that they do not waste the committee's time by raising issues that have been dealt with in a previous discussion.
- 5) There are a number of ways of ensuring good practice. Sometimes the terms of reference state how alternates may be identified, if not, then a committee member who wants an alternate to take his/her place should arrange this with the Chair. A Chair can let members know at the beginning of the year what practice he or she would like members to observe in relation to nominating alternates.
- 6) Because the UC culture is relatively informal and relaxed, it is probably preferable for a secretary only to take action if a situation arises either:
 - a) where a member seeks the secretary's advice, in which case the secretary should ask the Chair's advice; or
 - b) where the nomination of alternates gets out of hand and the work of a committee is suffering as a result; this is more likely to happen in the case of a working party than with a formal committee; again the secretary should discuss the matter with the Chair.
- 7) Issues relating to alternates are more likely to arise with a working party because working parties are established unexpectedly, outside the formal committee framework, and usually after the members have made other commitments for teaching, formal committee membership, attendance at conferences and leave. So, it is probably advisable for the secretary of a working party to ask the Convener of a working party to establish some guidelines about alternates at the working party's first meeting.

Appendix C: Observers at a Meeting

- 1) An observer at a meeting should be precisely that: an *observer*. That is, an observer should not participate unless invited to do so by the Chair. This is particularly the case in relation to formally conducted committees such as Council and Academic Board. In practice at UC, Chairs in less formally conducted committees are usually generous and allow observers to participate in a discussion. The Chair of any committee should determine the role of an observer.
- 2) In relation to any committee, an observer should follow any requirements set by the Chair about the confidentiality of the committee's discussions.
- 3) Many UC committees are open to observers (eg Council and Academic Board, except for confidential items). Council policy about its meetings can be found at <http://www.canberra.edu.au/secretariat/council/cnclcode.html>
- 4) If someone asks if they can attend a meeting as an observer, the committee secretary should check with the Chair. In making a decision about observers, the Chair will take the following issues into account:
 - a) Is any of the committee's business confidential? Examples include commercial-in-confidence matters; preliminary consideration by a senior committee of a possible new strategy before comprehensive consultation; consideration of an issue relating to a particular student or member of staff, where an individual's right to privacy needs to be considered.
 - b) If a request to attend as an observer is granted to one person, are the interests of other people compromised because they have not asked to attend as observers? eg if several sections will be involved in the implementation of a decision, and a member of one section asks to attend as an observer, the Chair may decide:
 - i) to consult the other members of the committee;
 - ii) to grant the request because in the Chair's opinion, no harm will be done if only one section observes the meeting;
 - iii) that the other sections should also be invited to send an observer;
 - iv) not to grant the request, because to invite all other sections involved would make the meeting too unwieldy; or
 - v) not to grant the request, because to do so would not be in line with the role of the committee. For example, the committee might be responsible for making a decision on the basis of submissions from all the different sections and there is a need for frank discussion of conflicting views.

Appendix D: Participation of Non-Members in a Meeting

- 1) One of the key issues to be considered in relation to participation of non-members in a meeting is whether the committee can afford the additional time that this participation will take.
- 2) A committee which is responsible for considering applications (eg for grants, study leave; etc) needs to decide, at the beginning of a round of applications, whether to:
 - a) make decisions solely on the basis of written applications; or
 - b) invite all applicants to attend the committee to present their application or answer questions on the application; or
 - c) invite only those applicants from whom the committee wishes to seek additional information.
- 3) Any one of these approaches maybe appropriate, depending on:
 - a) the kinds of application under consideration;
 - b) the experience of the committee members and their judgment about whether discussion will add value;
 - c) the experience of the applicants and such issues as whether the committee is trying to develop expertise in the preparation of applications; and
 - d) the time available to the committee.
- 4) Sometimes a member of the UC community may ask a secretary if they can attend meeting to present their views on a particular issue. Again it is the Chair's decision. The Chair may decide:
 - a) to agree because of the special circumstances;
 - b) not to agree because the person seeking to attend has already made a written submission and the Chair considers nothing is to be gained by hearing the case put orally, or where the role of the committee is always to consider written submissions and to allow one person to participate in this way would be unfair to others; or
 - c) not to agree because of the time available to the committee to deal with all the other issues on the agenda.
- 5) If a non-member is invited to attend a meeting, the secretary should make clear to that person beforehand whether the invitation extends to the whole meeting, or to just one or more specific items on the agenda.

Appendix E: Preparing Briefing Papers

The role of the committee secretary includes that of ensuring that committee business is dealt with in a structured way. This is a responsibility shared with the Committee Chair. But it matters more to the committee secretary who has responsibility for producing meaningful minutes and promulgating decisions. The best way of ensuring structured consideration is to write structured and considered background papers or to provide helpful advice to persons charged with writing such papers. All such papers should commence with a description of **the issue** to be dealt with and finish with **recommendations** for the next step. Such structure aids clear thinking and clear decision-making by the committee. It is also important to include the background and wherever possible recommendations should include information on the date of effect and the timings of who is to do what. Sometimes, with complex issues, such as considered by a committee concerned with policy development, one background paper will not suffice and it might be necessary to prepare a series of papers on different aspects of a significant and complex issue. A committee secretary will need to plan, with the Committee Chair and perhaps colleagues, and breakdown the complex issue into a series of simpler sub-issues, each of which might need analysis and a background paper.

The key to effective decision-making by a committee is clear consideration of the issues surrounding the decision to be made. It is possible to make a good decision without knowing all of the details and circumstances but it is really a matter of chance rather than a considered decision in such circumstances. Decisions ought to be made knowing the full facts or at least in the knowledge that not all of the facts are known. A considered and well constructed briefing paper will make the facts and circumstances known through a clear and concise exposition of the issues, the background to the issues and options with their likely consequences set out together with a recommendation for the best decision or way forward.

The steps in writing a briefing paper may be set out as follows:

Define the issue

If you can write down the issue clearly in a sentence or two then the remaining steps will follow. If the issue cannot be defined in a sentence or two, try and define the issue as a series of sub-issues and deal with each of these separately.

Background

Research and collect all of the relevant background material. Sift through it and seek to identify the salient points. Sometimes it will be necessary to provide a chronology of events or previous decisions or set out policies, rules or other constraints. Try and restrict this section to relevant factual material.

Discussion

In this section the alternatives with their pros and cons can be put and weighed up. In a short paper this section might be combined with *Background*.

Recommendation

This section provides the committee with the wording for a possible decision. By writing it into the paper it is possible to reflect on all of the elements needed in the

decision to be taken. For example, where a specific commencement date is necessary it can be specified in the recommendation. Other constraints can be spelt out here.

Length of paper

A simple issue might be dealt with easily in a paper of just one A4 page. A more complex or contentious issue might take two pages. If the issue is of such complexity as to require a longer paper, the matters should be summarised into one or two pages of just the issue(s) and recommendation(s) with the complete paper included as an attachment.

Appendix F: Meeting Rooms

The following is a list of possible meeting venues within the University of Canberra. Room availability, the bookings contact and set-up of the room are all subject to change.

Location	Room	Capacity and Facilities	Bookings
Council Room	1 D142	25 (40 in rows), OHP, W/B, formal setting	Ms Jan Mattiazzi x5000
Vice-Chancellor's Meeting Room	1 D137	10, formal setting	Ms Jan Mattiazzi x5000
CELTS Meeting Room	1 C29	12	Ms Sharon van Reyk x5290
Building 1 Meeting Rooms:	1 D111 1 D107	10 20	Ms Joy Poidevin x5781
Student Admin. Meeting Room	1 B125	10	Ms Jenni Davill x5045
Education	5 B85	20	x2625
Management	6 B34	24	
Building 9	9C25	?	x2293
Computer Centre Conference Room	10 B29	15	x5504
Building 11 Seminar Rooms	11 B24* 11 B26	30 30	x5077
Building 20 Board Room	20 C1	10	x2923

*Video data projection unit and computer in the room

Appendix G: Sample Annotated Agenda

Additions are shown in grey text.

COUNCIL MEETING NO. 44

To be held in the Council Room on Wednesday 17 April 1996

Commencing at 4.30 p.m.

AGENDA

Apologies: Ms Kay Price has a business engagement in Melbourne.
Mr Wendy Guest will be arriving late.

Confirmation of Agenda

ITEM 1: Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting have been circulated to members and comments received. Some minor changes have been made as a consequence and these are reflected in the minutes in the papers, which are submitted, for confirmation by the meeting as a true record of proceedings.

ITEM 2: * Matters Arising: ➤ Confidentiality of Minutes

In addition to the Minute Book, which holds a signed copy of each set of minutes, there is a Book of Confidential Minutes, which holds those minutes that Council wishes to maintain as confidential. This Confidential Minute Book was established at the time when Council decided to make its proceedings open in 1987. Since then very few Council decisions have been considered to be confidential in an ongoing way and these have been recorded in the Confidential Minute Book

➤ Clarification of Membership of Legislation Committee (Resolution No. C 43/11)

Ms Shrensky was listed as a member of the Legislation Committee on the grounds that her predecessor, Roslyn Hughes, had been a member of the Committee. As Ms Shrensky has indicated that she has no interest in this committee, Council might care to appoint another member in her place.

➤ Policy on Intellectual Property

An explanatory note has been supplied concerning the matters raised in meeting no. 42.

ITEM 3: * Vice-Chancellor's Report

ITEM 4: * Membership of the Committee to Consider Remuneration of the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellors

This Committee was established initially to propose procedures and criteria with which to assess the performance of the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellors. Now that Council is obliged to set the salaries and conditions as well, the terms of reference of the Committee need expanding. The Vice-Chancellor has asked that the Committee's brief also include provision of advice on the remuneration packages of Deans. Membership might also be extended to bring the Committee membership to five, bringing it into line with Council's recent decision on the size of committees. Dr Meredith Edwards has indicated her willingness to serve and it would be appropriate to invite a senior academic staff member of Council to serve perhaps Associate Professor Annice.

Recommendations

That Council -

- a. appoint a replacement for the Deputy Chancellor on the Committee;
- b. consider extending the membership of the Committee by adding one extra member to bring the membership to five (in line with other Council Committees); and
- c. extend the terms of reference of the Committee to provide advice to Council on remuneration packages for the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Deans.

ITEM 5: * Appointment of Professor of International Education

The Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee is supporting the appointment of a professor of international education and the Vice-Chancellor considers this to be an appropriate post for the Faculty to be advertising.

Recommendations

That Council authorise the Vice-Chancellor to –

- a. advertise the position of Professor of International Education to head the School of TESOL and International Education; and
- b. establish a selection panel.

ITEM 6: * Report on University Public Relations and Fundraising

Dr Grant has prepared a brief paper for Council's information in which a timetable for development of a master plan for marketing and public relations is set out. The paper confirms the need for a structured approach to fundraising as an alternative means of income for the University and highlights the steps taken (and to be taken) to prepare a suitable plan.

Recommendation

Council is asked to note this report.

ITEM 7: * Report of the Committee on the Hoare Report

The working party established at the last Council meeting and comprising the Chancellor, Council members Wayne Guest, Euan Mackintosh, Howard Powell, Belle Alderman and Dean of the Faculty of Management, Associate Professor Jim McMaster met before the meeting and...

ITEM 8: * Report of the Working Party on Union Governance

The working party established by Council last August and Chaired by Council member Peter McGhie has presented its report. The working party's recommendations are given in some detail in the report (pages 9 to 15 of the item).

Recommendations

Council is invited to –

- a. accept the report of the working party;
- b. assess the four options set out in the recommendations;
- c. agree in principle to Option 4; and
- d. ask the Vice-Chancellor to promulgate the report.

ITEM 9: * Report of Academic Board

The report of Academic Board meeting no. 96/2 held on 25 March 1996 recommends on five matters.

1. Granting of awards

That Council –

- a. exercise its powers under subrule 7.(2) of the *Conferring of Awards Rules 1995* and authorise the Chancellor to admit to their awards, either in person or *in absentia*, at the next ceremonies for the conferring of awards those persons to whom awards have been granted by the Academic Board under subrule 7.(1); and
- b. exercise its powers under rule 9. of the *Conferring of Awards Rules 1995* and determine that the degree of Bachelor of Applied Science in Environmental Design be awarded posthumously to Matthew Davis Green.

2. Completion of requirements for PhD

That Council note that William Maiden has completed the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a thesis titled *Primary School Teaching Culture: Applying the Delphi and Nominal Group Methodologies as an Aid for Defining Primary School Teacher Work Culture in the ACT*, and that the award would be conferred at the next ceremonies.

3. Membership of Academic Board

That Council reappoint the Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Scholarship (CELTS), Associate Professor Sue Johnston as a member of the Academic Board in terms of subsection 3.(1)(l) of the *Academic Board Statute 1990* for a period of three years to 30 April 1999.

It would be possible for Council to declare the Centre to be an “other body” in terms of section 8 of the *University of Canberra Act 1989*, and for the Director to be a member of Academic Board under section 3(d) of the *Academic Board Statute 1990*.

Section 8 of the Act states “There are to be, within the University, such faculties and other bodies as are determined by the Council.”

Section 20 of the Act defines the constitution of Academic Board including “(d) such heads of the other bodies referred to in section 8 as are designated by the Council for the purposes of this section;” and the *Academic Board Statute 1990* makes provision in section 3 (d) to include “the heads of designated bodies, if any”. Currently the only designated bodies are the Library and the Computer Services Centre.]

4. Chair and Deputy Chair of Academic Board

That Council note that Professor Roman Tomasic is the new Chair of Academic Board, and that Professor Marie Carroll is the new Deputy Chair.

5. Vote of thanks

That Council note a vote of thanks expressed by the Board to the retiring Chair, Professor Ron Traill.

ITEM 10:* Report of the Finance Committee

The report of the Finance Committee meeting held on 3 April 1996 recommends on three matters.

1. 1995 Annual Financial Statements (pages 10/4 to 10/34)

That Council accept the recommendation of the Finance Committee and approve the Financial Statements for 1995 as set out in the papers (pages 10/9 to 10/34) and authorise the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor to sign on behalf of Council the letter to the Auditor-General as shown (pages 10/3 to 10/7).

2. Report of the Finance Committee

That Council receive and note the Finance Committee Report including the financial statements for period 3, 1996 (pages 10/35 to 10/39).

3. Schedule of Delegations

That Council approve the schedule of financial delegations (pages 10/44 to 10/49).

Matters listed as un-starred items in the agenda

That Council receive and note the matters in the papers that are not listed for discussion or decision.

Council members are invited to make comments on the draft annual report (Item 13) of a substantive nature to the Vice-Chancellor and to notify the secretary or Rosemary Richards in the Secretariat of minor corrections.

ITEM 11: Report of the University Promotions Committee

ITEM 12: Report of the Buildings and Site Committee

ITEM 13: Draft Annual Report 1995

ITEM 14: Presentation from Professor Peter Cullen, Director, Cooperative Research Centre in Freshwater Ecology:

The Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology is the product of one of the Commonwealth's major research initiatives and this University, Monash University, the CSIRO, the Murray-Darling Commission, and a number of Victorian and New South Wales government instrumentalities and corporations are the partners in this venture.

Professor Peter Cullen, the Director of the CRC, needs no introduction to Council, having been a professor of this University since 1988 and a former Dean of the Faculty of Applied Science. I invite him to address Council on the work of the CRC.

ITEM 15: Use of the University Seal

ITEM 16: Other Business

Vote of thanks to retiring member

Mr Collin Freeland will retire from Council on 6 May 1996 after serving a four-year term on Council. He has served the University as Chair of the Audit Committee, Chair of the Legislation Committee and Chair of the Student Conduct Appeals Board.

Other members retiring

Other Council members whose terms expire on 6 May are Wendy Guest and Jack Radik. The University has sought their reappointment but no advice has been received as yet from the Minister's Office.

Conferring Ceremonies

Members are invited to attend as many of the conferring ceremonies as they can manage.

* *items starred are those items listed for discussion*

Dinner will be served at the Gallery Restaurant at the conclusion of the meeting.

Appendix H: Sample minute wordings

In response to a question, Professor Smith indicated that...

Members commented that...

In discussion members put forward a range of views - <dot points>

Ms Smith... indicated that she would take the Committees comments and observations back to the Working Party. distributed some materials to Vice Chancellors which had been extracted from the...

Pro-Vice Chancellors... agreed to consult about... were invited to encourage... were reminded of...

Professor Smith... would take this matter further indicated that the Vice Chancellor would take this matter further advised that... indicated a need to... informed the Committee that... offered to... reported that... should be asked to revise his paper in the light of VCAC discussion. suggested that... undertook to ensure that... was invited to provide the Committee with...

Professors Smith and Jones... indicated that they would...

The Committee... accepted the Minutes of Meeting No. 00/17 of 7 November 200 as a true record of proceedings. accepted the need to... accepted the view that... agreed to recommended to VCAC... agreed, however, that is needed to ensure... asked that... commended Professor Jones and Mr. Mack for their work in compiling the report. concluded by advising that... deferred consideration of this report until its next meeting. endorsed the notion... endorsed the recommendation of...that... endorsed the recommendations of this report and asked for the paper to be sent to the Vice Chancellor for

consideration.
endorsed...
expressed concern that...
invited the secretary to advise SOCOG that...
noted comments by members...
noted that both the policy concerning...and...would need
evaluation.
noted that there was some disquiet about the new
procedures being introduced and that the concerns were
mirrored in the matters raised by the Education
Committee.
noted that...
observed that...
raised the issue of...
received a circulation memorandum...
remarked...
resolved that...
resumed the discussion of...
was informed that...

The Committee's
attention...

was drawn to...

The University...

needed to have arrangements in place...

The Vice-Chancellor

asked Professor Jones to provide him with...
confirmed that...
indicated his intention to...
indicated that it was his view that...
invited members to...
spoke about...

Appendix I: Matters for the Agenda and Writing the Minutes

Matters for the Agenda

- 1) Under the heading for each item on the agenda paper a statement may be included indicating the task for the committee (eg “Members are asked to...note/consider the attachment; ...determine the option to be adopted; ...consider/approve the recommendations in the attachment; ...etc”). Alternatively, items on the agenda paper can simply be a list of topics under broad headings such as “For discussion”, “For noting”, etc. It is generally preferable to put any background information into the attachment for the item.
- 2) When preparing an agenda paper, think carefully about how to order the agenda and where to put important and urgent items. ‘Urgent’ items should be dealt with promptly and succinctly in the meeting, whilst ‘important’ items may require more discussion. Schedule items and allocate time accordingly as ‘Urgent’ matters sometimes take up time that should be allocated to ‘important’ matters. Remember that discussion time is often underestimated and items scheduled later in the meeting may be hurriedly discussed or put off. It may be possible to list an expected discussion time span next to each item as a signal to committee members. This is not however normal practice at the University of Canberra. The relationships between items may also dictate the length of time allowed and order of items. Discuss the order of the agenda with the Chair.
- 3) Sometimes a person not a member of the committee is invited to address the committee on a particular matter. Advise that person of the time for their presentation.
- 4) Keep to cut-off dates for receipt of papers and distribute your agenda on time. Acceptance of late papers is likely to become the norm rather than the exception, and additional pressure is placed upon the secretary for preparation, collation, printing and dissemination of the agenda papers.

Writing Minutes

- 1) Minutes must at least convey an accurate record *for those who attended the meeting*. Sometimes a report of a committees meeting needs to be written for a group who did not attend the meeting. Such a report needs to be written differently, and is not covered in this manual. Each secretary will need to decide, in relation to each committee serviced, the extent to which the minutes need to be intelligible to someone who has not attended the meeting. Such circumstances that require consideration may include when a member was not able to attend; when the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Division needs to make a decision on the basis of a Divisional Committee’s discussion; or a future Chair or secretary is trying to trace the history of an issue.
- 2) The minutes are a written record of the meeting and as such the agenda acts as an index to these proceedings. Remember to put items back in order - the minutes should reflect the order of the printed agenda, not the order of discussion (if different). If the order of discussion is changed at the meeting, a statement at the beginning of the minutes should indicate this. The statement should also advise that the items are recorded in the order of the agenda, not the order of discussion. It is acceptable to cross-reference, to ‘See also Item x’ within the minutes, or to refer to previous minutes. It is also helpful to number a list of points, as this

makes it much easier to find them when the minutes are being discussed at a subsequent meeting.

- 3) As a general rule, it is preferable not to record who said what. Most committee proceedings can be recorded anonymously. Rather than writing “Ms X said...” the secretary can use approaches such as the following:
 - “*The Committee noted, agreed, decided....*”
 - “*A number of different views were discussed, including the following:*
 - *grades should always be recorded on transcripts;*
 - *it was not appropriate for a transcript to include a grade awarded by another institution*”
- 4) However, there are some circumstances when the name of a committee participant should be recorded:
 - if the participant asks for his/her views to be recorded and attributed; or
 - if the participant was speaking in their official capacity, or as the representative of a particular group, eg:
 - “*Ms X, Head of the School of Classical Languages, advised that the School would be reducing the number of tutorials offered in Latin.*”
 - “*Mr Y, who as President of the Professional Association was attending the meeting as an observer, advised that the Professional Association would in future be encouraging universities to include professional internships in their courses.*”
- 5) Because committee minutes are frequently read and used by people who did not attend the meeting, it is useful for minutes to convey:
 - a) *Content*. To record the issues covered and the points made so that the reasons for a decision are clear.
 - b) *Process*. To make clear whether the committee considered documents, and if so which documents and any other sources of information (eg oral reports of consultation).
 - c) *Status*. To make clear the status of any point covered in the minutes - was this point a major concern of the committee? Was it made in a brainstorming type of discussion where the Chair was simply trying to identify possible issues or options? Was it a view held by only one member and rejected by all the other members? The status of comments may be written by implication rather than by an explicit statement.
- 6) A set of minutes that does not try to convey content and process and status is not as complete as it could be. For example:
 - a) A list of points made in discussion conveys the *content*, but usually does not make clear whether most of the committee agreed with each point, or whether the discussion was simply exploring the different issues.
 - b) A statement such as “The Committee debated the question of whether there should be two graduation ceremonies” conveys the *process*, but unless the minutes include the points made for and against (ie the content of the debate), the reasons for the decision will not be clear.
 - c) A resolution made the status of the decision clear, but does not convey the reasons for the decision (ie. the content of the discussion) or the process used by the committee to reach the decision (who was consulted, other sources of information, etc).

- 7) Nevertheless, some committees (eg Council) prefer the minutes to include mainly resolutions, with little record of discussion.
- 8) In order to convey content and process and status, a secretary can use devices such as the following:
 - a) “In response to the Chair’s request for views on this issue, member gave the following initial reactions...”
 - b) Heads of School reported the following views formulated by their Schools at a School meeting:”
 - c) “Members provided the following wide range of views:”
 - d) “The Committee noted the view that...”
 - e) “After wide-ranging discussion, the Committee agreed that ...”

Appendix J: Writing Resolutions

Decisions made by committees are recorded in the minutes as *resolutions*. The way a resolution is expressed is critical as resolutions encapsulate what the committee decided to do after consideration of an agenda item. A resolution will survive and may continue to be cited as evidence of a policy or administrative decision long after the meeting at which the particular matter was considered has been forgotten. It is important to keep original notes and record of reasons why grants, etc not given. This information must be recorded, as informal discussion is not sufficient.

Resolutions should:

- 1 *Be clear and distinctive*. Different formatting such as Italics or bold type may be used to distinguish the resolution from the surrounding text.
- 2 *Be able to stand-alone*. The subject matter should be specified in the resolution so that it makes sense as a self-contained statement, eg “In regard to the draft policy and procedures for Show Cause, the committee resolved to...”
- 3 *Use precise language*. It is particularly important to choose the appropriate verbs to describe a committee decision – be aware of the significant distinctions between “The Committee noted/endorsed/approved/resolved...” etc.
- 4 *Be intelligible to someone not present at the meeting or familiar with details of the issue*. It is recommended, for example, that resolutions be expressed in whole sentences.
- 5 *Be a comprehensive record of what the committee decided, especially in regard to action to be taken*. Include details of who will do what, when, how, and if appropriate why; and
- 6 *Be numbered for ease of reference*. The numbering system should incorporate the meeting number and name of the committee, eg UHDC 2001/1/3 to indicate the third resolution passed at the first meeting of the University Higher Degrees Committee in the year 2001.

Depending on the subject matter and the decision, resolutions can vary from the simple to the very complex. An example of a simple resolution is “The Committee approved the following applications...” Complicated resolutions should be divided into numbered points for maximum clarity. If discussion of an agenda item leads to more than one decision on matters that are not closely related, it may be appropriate to express each decision in a separate resolution.

It is common though not universal practice for the minutes to identify who is responsible for implementation of each resolution (eg **Action: Chair**).

Occasionally, when it comes to writing a resolution on a particular matter, the secretary may be unclear about the detail of what was decided. In this case guidance should be sought from the Chair to ensure that the draft minutes presented for confirmation at the next meeting are as accurate and comprehensive as possible. The Chair may find it easier to provide advice if the secretary drafts the resolution according to her/his understanding with areas of uncertainty identified for the Chair’s attention.

Once drafted, a resolution should be reviewed to ensure that all decisions in relation to the agenda item have been incorporated. The link between the resolution and the preceding discussion as recorded in the minutes should be clear. The resolution should be the logical outcome of the discussion, and the record of discussion should be full enough to explain how the resolution was reached.

Resolutions are decisions to do something and thus need to contain a "resolution" type of verb. For example, in accepting the minutes, a suitable wording might be:

"The Committee accepted the minutes of meeting no. <unique identifier> as a true record of proceedings."

Other possible "resolution" words are:

"The Board determined that..."

"The Committee agreed that..."

"The Working Party resolved that..."

"The Committee accepted the report..."

Where a body is recommending action to another body with the latter body having the power to decide, some possibilities are as follows:

"The Board endorsed the working party's submission and recommends to Council that the working party's recommendations be accepted and implemented."

"The Committee recommended that Council determine..."

"The Board recommended that Council exercise its powers under section 7 of the Statute and determine..."

When a committee "receives" something or "receives and notes" something it is not resolving anything by this action. If a resolution is necessary the committee ought to "receive and accept".

It is accepted practice in the University to identify resolutions by using a unique number for each. Some examples are given below.

Resolution No. C 73/1 [refers to the first resolution of meeting no. 73 of Council]
Council accepted the minutes of meeting no. 72 as....

Resolution No. AB 00/3/1 [refers to the first resolution of meeting no. 00/3 of Academic Board]
The Board agreed to...

Resolution No. VCAC 99/4/3 [refers to third resolution of meeting no. 99/4 of Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee]
The Committee resolved that...

Sometimes it is important to include a date for the decision to take effect. For example, where a person is being appointed to a position or when a change is to come into effect. These dates should be include in the resolution. Some sample wordings might be:

"The Committee agreed that, commencing 1 January 2002, allowances for stamp collecting would be increased..."

"Council accepted the recommendation of the selection panel and appointed Joe Bloggs as Professor of Philately with effect from 1 July 2002."

Sometimes a committee will make a resolution dependent on some other circumstance. Some possibilities might be—

"The Committee agreed in principle to the draft procedures but asked the Director to circulate them to each section and to return any comments received to the next meeting of the Committee."

"The Board agreed that the proposal be submitted to the Academic Planning Committee for inclusion in the calendar for 2003 but withheld approval until finance was authorised by the Divisional Executive."

Appendix K: Making Committee Decisions available to the University

This section supplements the section **After the Meeting** and assumes that steps have been taken to notify committee members of actions that they have undertaken to perform.

The method of disseminating a decision will be dependent on who needs to know. Some decisions require formal notification. Possible formal channels for dissemination include—

- the issue of a staff notice,
- the issue of a policy statement or
- inclusion of the matter in a procedure manual.

Frequently a committee decision needs to be made known quite widely, not because the decision itself requires action but because the decision sets the direction for future actions. Decisions such as these might be better handled as 'news' and released through channels such as media releases or broadcast e-mail. The University has a public relations section which handles contact with the media. Matters can be sent as a matter of course through the Editor of "Monitor", the University newspaper, or if it is really big news, the matter might be best referred to the Vice-Chancellor's Office.

For minutes with actions required on members it is frequently sufficient to make use of an action reminder such as in the following example.

Resolution No. <ctt>02/06/14

The Committee agreed to invite nomination of a member of staff from each division to carry out the role of...

Action: Divisional Pro Vice-Chancellors"

Where a person not on the committee is being invited to take some action or needs to know an outcome in order to take subsequent action an extract from the minutes is an effective formal mechanism. An example follows.

"Memorandum to: Pro Vice-Chancellor, Division of <division name>

Extract from the Minutes of <committee> meeting no. 02/06

Resolution No. <ctt>02/06/14

The Committee agreed to invite nomination of a member of staff from each division to carry out the role of...

SECRETARY

<committee>

<date>"