

ROLE OF A COMMITTEE SECRETARY (updated September 2015)

Being a committee Secretary is about much more than just taking minutes. It is an active not a passive role. It involves (amongst other things)

- knowing in detail the remit of the committee and advising the Chair and members of what is possible within the remit – it is your responsibility to make sure that that the committee only deals with items which fall within its remit;
- ensuring the timely and accurate preparation of papers for meetings and offering advice to those writing papers on presentation and what it is appropriate for the committee to be asked to do;
- timely and accurate production of minutes;
- informing appropriate people of the outcome of meetings;
- recording action points, and following these up regularly to ensure that the required action is completed.

MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Details of the membership of all committees and their Terms of Reference are set out in the School's Standing Orders, which can be found at

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/standingorders/>

2. When the committee structure was reviewed in 2007, certain general principles were agreed. These principles form the foundation on which the committee structure is based. The principles are set out in Annex 1 of this document.

3. The role of the majority of the School's committees is strategic in nature. This means that these committees should be dealing with strategic rather than operational issues. Some guidelines have been produced (see Annex 2) to help committees to decide what it is they should be dealing with. At its most basic level, strategic deals with the "where we are going" and operational sorts out the "how we get there".

4. Along with the section of Standing Orders which details the procedures for the conduct of committee meetings (Annex XIV), the Terms of Reference should form the first item on the agenda of the committee's first meeting of each academic session. These describe the business that can be dealt with by the committee. Your committee cannot just decide to alter its Terms of Reference. Changes to Standing Orders are ultimately approved by the Board of Trustees and there is a procedure for making these changes.

5. You need to know who the members of your committee are. Not everyone who attends the committee meetings will necessarily be a member of the committee. A small number of committees have people who are 'in attendance' (this will normally be stated in the Terms of Reference). They are at the meeting to offer advice when this is required, but are not members of the committee.

6. Most committees have a mixture of ex-officio members and nominated members.

7. Ex-officio members are on the committee because of the post that they hold, and will be members as long as they continue in that post. Other members will be nominated, with a variety of groups or individuals responsible for nominations (this is set out in your committee's terms of reference).

8. Unless explicitly stated in the Terms of Reference of a Committee (e.g. a Trades Union representative) the role of committee members is not to represent a particular group or interest at

meetings. Members are on committees as individuals, and are chosen because they have skills, knowledge or interests relating to the areas dealt with by the committee. While members may be from a particular group, and can bring the views of that group to the meeting, once at the meeting, the interests of the School must be the overriding consideration.

9. Given this, it would not normally be possible for another individual to attend a meeting in place of a committee member who was unable to attend. However, if it were known in advance that a committee member would be unable to attend two or more consecutive meetings, then an alternative member could be nominated, where someone with suitable skills or knowledge was available. The process of nomination would be as for the original member.

10. With the exception of student committee members (who are appointed for one year, with the possibility of reappointment for a further year), internal committee members who are not ex-officio are appointed on the expectation that they will serve a minimum of three years, and a maximum of five years on a committee (see Standing Orders Annex XX).

11. Committees may ask a non-member to attend a meeting if they feel that this individual has skills or knowledge which would enable them to make a contribution to a particular item under discussion. It is not expected that this individual would attend every meeting of a Committee.

12. It is important to remember that, whatever the item under discussion, a committee is not empowered to discuss individuals, or individual cases, unless this is explicitly set out in the committee's Terms of Reference. The School has a legal obligation to respect an individual's right to confidentiality and privacy. For further information on this, see 'Freedom of Information and Data Protection: Guidance for Committee Servicing' (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/foi/committees/>).

Overlapping Areas of Interest

13. It is sometimes the case that more than one committee has an interest in a particular area. This is unavoidable, given the nature of the issues dealt with, and needs to be managed.

14. Secretaries of committees with overlapping areas of interest have a responsibility to communicate with each other, and need to produce a map of overlapping work, where it should be dealt with and, if possible, at what point in the session.

15. This is really important, as it ensures that everyone is clear which committee is dealing with particular aspects of shared areas of interest, and the items move appropriately through the committee structure.

PANELS

16. Some committees have Panels attached to them. These Panels are not usually part of the formal committee structure of the School. Their role is normally to advise the committee on particular issues, or to undertake a specific piece of work. Each Panel should have clearly stated Terms of Reference and membership.

17. For those Panels which are not part of the formal committee structure (the committee diagram in the Calendar lists those Panels which are part of the formal structure) the Terms of Reference and membership should, with the exceptions of those listed below, be agreed by the parent committee each session. In these cases the committee is also responsible for asking individuals to become members of the Panel. Panel membership will often be drawn from the membership of the parent committee, although this is not a requirement.

18. The membership of some Panels is set out in Standing Orders. In this case, Terms of Reference and membership can only be altered with the approval of the Board of Trustees, and should therefore be noted by the parent committee.

19. There are some Panels whose membership is determined by School policies/procedures (for example Promotion Panels), and the Terms of Reference and membership of such Panels will be outside the control of the parent committee. These also need to be 'noted' rather than 'approved'.

INDUCTION

20. The Board of Trustees has asked that members who are new to the committee should be given a brief induction into the work of the committee before the first meeting of the session. You should discuss how this is to be done with your committee Chair. The easiest way to do this would be to have a short induction for all committee members (it is always a good idea to remind members of the purpose of the committee, and what their roles and responsibilities are) at the beginning of the first meeting of the year, before any formal business is dealt with.

21. The first item on the agenda of the first meeting of every committee in each year should be the terms of reference and membership of that committee and the Procedure for the Conduct of Committee Meetings (Annex XIV). This document could be used as part of the induction, as everyone present will have this information in front of them. This will save you the need to organise a separate meeting, and will ensure that everyone is aware of the committee's remit.

AGENDAS

22. Liaise with the Chair about the agenda for the meeting. Make sure that you are aware of the Terms of Reference of the committee so that you can advise on what is appropriate, and prevent items being discussed which should not be dealt with by that committee.

Deadlines

23. Contact relevant people to ask for agenda items. You need to agree with the Chair which people should be asked. This would normally be committee members and those in attendance (if your committee has any), plus any School Officers who are not in attendance and whose work is relevant to the remit of the committee. Make sure that you ask in plenty of time to allow you to prepare the papers and send them out in good time before the meeting. See Annex XIV of Standing Orders for further details about timing, as this will depend on whether the committee has lay (external) members.

24. It is your job to ensure that agenda items are carried forward through the committee structure as necessary. Keep a note of items to be dealt with and a running record of where they should go next, and who you need to inform of the outcome. (See example of an Agenda Items sheet attached at Annex 3).

Format of the Agenda

25. The agenda should be headed 'SOAS', then the name of the committee should appear, followed by the date of the meeting, the time at which it will be held, the venue, and the heading 'Agenda'. Agendas should be in 'Ariel' font, as this is easy to read, particularly for those who have a visual impairment, and print size 11 (see the sample agenda at Annex 4).

26. An agenda lists items to be dealt with, the appropriate appendix and tells the committee how the item is to be dealt with. Each agenda is numbered using roman numerals with each agenda starting with I, II, III, and so on.

27. There is a particular language used when compiling agendas:

- **To note:** to acknowledge information given. There is generally no need to discuss the item in question.
- **To receive:** to formally receive the document for 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
- **To approve:** to discuss and reach a decision about something wholly within the committee's remit
- **To recommend:** to discuss an issue and recommend action to another body
- **To endorse:** to support a decision made elsewhere

28. At the first meeting of every session the first item on the agenda should be the committee noting its membership and Terms of Reference as well as the section of Standing Orders which deals with the conduct of committee meetings (Annex XIV).

29. This should be followed by an item asking the committee to approve the minutes of the last meeting (this will be the first item on the agenda of the second and subsequent meetings of the session). The minutes of the previous meeting should never be labelled as an appendix. All that should appear on the agenda beside this item is 'Previously circulated' or 'Attached', whichever is appropriate. At all other regular meetings of the committee the first item should be approval of the minutes of the previous meeting.

30. The next item on the agenda should be 'Action Taken', which allows the committee to receive updates on the action points from the last meeting (see section relating to minutes for information about action points). The Chair should then run through each of the action points, checking what has been done, so that members of the committee are aware of what has happened since the last meeting. It is important, for audit purposes, that we can show that action points have been completed. Having this item on the agenda ensures this information is recorded in the next set of minutes.

31. This should be followed by 'Matters Arising'. This allows updates to be made about any items which were discussed at the last meeting which did not result in action points, and which do not appear anywhere else on the agenda. This should be followed by the substantive items on the agenda.

32. The first sheet of each appendix should be labelled in the top right-hand corner e.g. Appendix A, LTPC 30/10/02 would be the first appendix of the Learning and Teaching Policy Committee meeting on 30 October 2002. The first appendix on the agenda is always Appendix A, the second is Appendix B and so on.

33. If you have a particularly long agenda, and run out of letters of the alphabet, then after Appendix Z, the next one should be Appendix A1, then Appendix B1, C1 etc. If you get to the end of the alphabet again, the Appendices should be labelled A2, B2, C2 etc. At that point you need to look again at your committee's terms of reference, and the frequency of its meetings!

34. If the agenda is a bulky one, with either a large number of appendices, or very long appendices, it would be helpful to number the pages of each appendix, in order to make it easier for committee members to locate the relevant papers. Number the appendix paper using the appendix letter as the prefix if possible. Ideally Appendix A would be numbered A1, A2, A3 and so on, Appendix B would be numbered B1, B2, B3 etc.

35. There may be items which appear on every agenda (standing items) or ones which appear at particular times of the year. Keep a note of these for future reference.

Format of papers for the committee (Appendices)

36. There are guidelines for the production of committee papers, which can be found at

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/policies/file72069.pdf>

37. It is important that committees receive an appropriate level of information and detail, in an easy to follow format, to enable them to complete their work effectively and efficiently. Papers need to be clear about what the committee is being asked to do and why, and key issues should be easy to identify.

38. All papers for the Board of Trustees, and papers for all of the committees which report directly to it, are required to have covering papers. A copy of the cover paper for documents for the Board of Trustees is at Annex 5. Cover papers should be completed by the author of the paper -- it is a good way to check that the paper contains all of the information required by the committee to complete the task it is being asked to undertake.

39. It is important that you read committee papers, and that you are clear about what the committee is being asked to do, and that this falls within the committee's remit. If the paper is not clear, then you need to go back to the paper's owner to discuss it. If you are not sure what the author intends the committee to do, then members of the committee will probably not be sure either.

40. In this situation you should return the document to the person who wrote it, explaining to them why you think changes need to be made.

41. This may not always be possible, particularly if papers have been given to you late, but please remember that you do not have the authority to alter papers without reference to the author. You **must** discuss any changes with them, before they are made.

42. If your committee papers do not have cover sheets, then there must be a sentence or two at the beginning of the paper, explaining what the committee is being asked to do. If this is missing the author needs to be asked to add it. If you are very short of time, you can agree with them what needs to be added, and type it yourself. They must agree with what you are proposing to write.

43. There may well be good reasons for the paper to look as it does. The author's name will be at the bottom of the paper, and it is essential that they are aware of everything that is in it.

Panels

44. If your committee has any Panels reporting to it, you need to know whether the committee is responsible for agreeing the Panel's terms of reference and membership. If so, it would be appropriate to approve the Terms of Reference and decide on the members of the Panel for the following year at the last meeting of each session, so that members can be in place for the start of the next session. If the membership and terms of reference are outside your committee's control (for example, Promotions Panels), then you should note membership and terms of reference at the first meeting of each session.

To follow/tabled papers

45. A committee member may ask that an item be put on the agenda, but that the paper itself be sent out after the agenda has been distributed, but before the meeting, as the paper will not be ready in time to distribute with the agenda. **This is not good practice**, as committee members will have only a limited time to consider the paper. The Chair must give permission for items to be sent out after the agenda has been distributed, and this should be strongly discouraged. If the Chair does give permission, the item should be put on the agenda, with the appropriate appendix label, and the agenda should indicate that the item will be sent out before the meeting, e.g. [Appendix B, to follow]. You will need to remember to send the paper out under separate cover before the meeting.

46. Sometimes people will ask to 'table' papers. This means that the item is put on the agenda, but the paper is not circulated until everyone has arrived at the meeting. Papers should not be tabled unless there are exceptional circumstances, and Standing Orders state that this can only be done with the explicit approval of the Chair. Once again, **this is not good practice**, and the general rule is that items should not be tabled. If an item is to be tabled, give it the appropriate appendix label as if it were part of the agenda and indicate on the agenda that it is to be tabled, e.g. [Appendix F, to be tabled].

47. Make sure that you keep a copy of any tabled papers, and any papers that are sent out after the agenda has been distributed, as if they are part of the open agenda you will need to include them with the papers put onto the School website (see section: Open Agendas, Open Appendices and Open Minutes on the Website)

Speakers

48. The Chair may decide to invite someone from outside the committee to speak to an item on the agenda. You will need to make the arrangements and to agree a time for the person to arrive at the meeting. The person should leave after their item has been discussed, or before this if the committee needs to discuss the matter without them being party to the discussion.

Any other business

49. Standing Orders makes it clear that 'No business will be transacted at a meeting other than that specified in the agenda paper except for any matter of which the Chair has been advised in advance, which s/he considers urgent and which has arisen too late to be specified in the agenda.' Papers should not be introduced 'out of the blue' at a meeting. It is unfair on the committee members to expect them to make decisions based on papers they have not had the opportunity to read in advance.

50. Therefore, School agendas no longer have 'Any Other Business' listed as an agenda item, as this has led to committee members assuming that it was okay to raise any issues at the end of the meeting, whether these had been discussed with the Secretary/Chair or not, and irrespective of how urgent these items were and whether they fell within the committee's remit.

51. This does not mean that issues cannot be raised which do not appear on the agenda, but these issues must be discussed with Secretary/Chair in advance, so that the Chair can decide whether the items are urgent and fall within the remit of the Committee. The Chair can then raise appropriate issues once the rest of the agenda has been dealt with.

52. Major items which require the committee to make a decision should not be raised in this way. As previously mentioned, committee members will not have had an opportunity to consider such items before the meeting, so limiting the effectiveness of any decision. If such an item is so urgent that it cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting, it may be necessary to hold an additional meeting to consider it.

Asterisked items

53. With the agreement of the Chair, items of formal business can be marked with an *. This means that the item will not be discussed at the meeting unless a member of the committee asks the Chair to 'un-asterisk' the item before the meeting. A note is put at the top of the agenda to this effect (see Annex 4). Although the asterisked items are not discussed, they are included in the minutes. Obviously, items which require any input from the committee cannot be listed in this way.

Open and Reserved Agendas

54. Depending on the nature of the items discussed by the committee, you may need to prepare two agendas: an open agenda and a reserved agenda.

55. As few items as possible should be placed on a reserved agenda. If an item is put onto a reserved agenda, it is important that you know why. Reserved items will normally be (as set out in Standing Orders Annex XIV) where matters under discussion are of a sensitive nature for reasons of protocol or commercial interest or because they relate to individual or identifiable staff or students. These provisions have to be interpreted in light of the Freedom of Information Act and related legislation such as the Data Protection Act, which now define the legal framework for rights of access to information held by the School.

56. The School aims to make as much committee information as possible publicly available by publishing the **open** agenda, **open** appendices and **open** minutes of each meeting on the external website within 2 weeks after the following meeting of the committee (see Annex 6 which has been provided by the Information Compliance Manager, and the section which covers putting open agendas, open appendices and open minutes on the website). Doing so will make the work of SOAS' committees more open and transparent, and will help us to meet our obligations under Freedom of Information legislation. Much committee business is routine and/or non-sensitive, so it makes sense to disseminate this information within the School and place this information in the public domain.

57. To achieve the goal of publishing open business, committee Secretaries need to take account of Freedom of Information factors when setting open and reserved agendas. Essentially, this involves:

- Identifying items which match certain categories, and placing them on the reserved agenda. These items should go on the reserved agenda because they would be likely to generate information that would be exempt if they were to be requested under Freedom of Information. The record of the discussion of these items should go in to reserved minutes.
- Placing **all other items** on the open agenda. The record of the discussion of these should appear in the open minutes.

58. Detailed guidance has been produced by the Information Compliance Manager on what types of items should go into open and reserved business: see 'Freedom of Information and Data Protection: Guidance for Committee Servicing' (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/foi/committees/>).

59. **It is important that all committee Secretaries read this guidance.** Failure to draw the correct distinction between open and reserved business could not only lead to access to information being restricted unnecessarily; in some situations, disclosing information incorrectly could be unlawful (e.g. because doing so violates the Data Protection Act), or could lead to legal action against the School by a third party.

Reserved Agendas

60. It is essential that all committee members recognise that items which appear on a reserved agenda should be dealt with in the strictest confidence. It is possible that to reveal such information could in some circumstances be unlawful or lead to legal action.

61. Student members of committees are treated in exactly the same way as other members of your committee and therefore receive all papers.

62. Reserved agendas are set out in exactly the same way as open agendas in terms of layout. The title should be 'Reserved Agenda' rather than 'Agenda', and the numbering on the agenda should be IR, IIR etc to show that these items are on a reserved agenda. As with the open agenda the first item would normally be the reserved minutes of the previous meeting, followed by Action Taken, Matters Arising and then the substantive items on the agenda. The appendices should be labelled to show they are part of the reserved agenda e.g. Appendix AR, LTTC 30/10/02.

Extraordinary Meetings

63. Occasionally, it may be necessary to call an Extraordinary Meeting of the committee. Details of how this can be done are found in Annex XIV of Standing Orders. It is important to note that the purpose of an extraordinary meeting must be clearly stated when the request for it is made. The agenda for the meeting should only contain papers directly relevant to the issue(s) under discussion. The meeting is not asked to approve minutes, deal with matters arising, nor will other matters be discussed.

Distribution of agendas

64. Agendas should be sent out in advance of the meeting to those on the relevant distribution list (see Annex XIV of Standing Orders for details of timing). You must make sure that the distribution list (which may include people who receive the papers for information, but who do not attend the meeting) is updated each time there is a change to the membership of the committee, or to the details of those who receive papers.

65. If for any reason a new person joins the committee, send them a copy of the previous minutes with the first agenda, so that they have some idea of what happened at the meeting before they became a member. Please note that all committee papers must be sent to a named person. If by the first meeting of the session any student members on the committee have not been nominated, papers cannot simply be addressed to the Students' Union office. The Students' Union must nominate individuals to receive papers.

66. Committee papers can be printed double sided, but remember to insert blank sheets where appropriate so that each appendix starts on a new page, rather than on the back of another appendix.

67. Committee members and anyone in attendance should receive all papers. There may be some individuals who do not attend the meeting who get all papers for information. Do not send papers to 'visitors' who have been asked to attend the meeting to speak to an item on the agenda.

68. All committee papers should be sent out in envelopes marked as confidential.

69. It is good practice, at the point at which you send out a hard copies of the papers, to send out an e-mail to all those who receive them, to say that you have just sent the papers out in the internal post. Open and reserved papers can be sent together in the same envelope. There is no need to send reserved items separately.

70. It has been agreed with the Students' Union that papers for students should be sent out as follows.

- a) Faculty and Department Committees: papers should be sent to student pigeon holes or collected from the Faculty Office
- b) for School-wide Committees: papers should be sent to the Students' Union. They should be clearly marked with the name of the student member, and should indicate that they are committee papers.

Colour of paper

71. Each committee has its own colour of paper that should be used for the open agenda, open minutes and open action sheets (more on these later). Appendices are always on white paper. Reserved agendas, reserved minutes and reserved action sheets are always on yellow paper.

MEETINGS

72. In an ideal world, have a meeting with the Chair before the committee meets, to discuss how items are to be handled and identify issues which are likely to generate a lot of discussion.

73. At the meeting, sit next to the Chair. The Chair may wish to speak to you during the meeting, or you may wish to remind the Chair of things they need to do, or of things that the Terms of Reference of the committee will not allow them to do. You may also wish to draw the Chair's attention to a member wishing to speak, if the Chair is not aware of this.

Quoracy

74. Ensure the meeting is quorate. Quoracy is defined in Standing Orders (usually one third of the membership, although the exact number for the Board of Trustees, Audit Committee, Executive Board, Resources & Planning Committee and Academic Board is stated in Annex XIV). You must know which people in the room are members of the committee and which are in attendance (if there are any). Only committee members count towards quoracy. If members leave before the end of the meeting, you need to ensure that the meeting stops at the point at which it is no longer quorate. No formal business can be transacted without a quorum of members present.

Action Taken/Action Sheet

75. It is important that, when dealing with action taken since the last meeting, the Chair runs through all of the items on the action sheet, so that the committee can be updated on what has been achieved. The action sheet should contain a list of all uncompleted action points (a rolling list, not just those action points from the last meeting), and you should only remove action points once the action has been completed.

Adjournment

76. On very rare occasions (perhaps because, before completing the agenda, the committee runs out of time, or is about to become inquorate) the Chair may decide to adjourn the meeting and reconvene it at another time. This is not good practice, as all members may not be able to attend the second part of the meeting, and extending the meeting will delay the passage of items through the committee structure.

77. However, it requires much less paperwork than ending the meeting with part of the agenda not dealt with, and calling another ordinary meeting to deal with the remainder of the agenda. This is because, if the meeting is adjourned and reconvened, there is no need to produce minutes after the first part of the meeting and a new agenda for the second part of the meeting, as (for committee purposes) they are the same meeting. Members should therefore be asked to bring all of their papers to the second part of the meeting, whenever that takes place, and one set of minutes will be written to cover both parts of the meeting.

78. Please note that no changes can be made to the agenda between the two parts of an adjourned meeting and, during the second part of the meeting, the Committee should not revisit items dealt with in the first part.

79. Alternatively, the Chair may decide to end the meeting and call another meeting to deal with the remaining items of the agenda. If this is the case, you will need to produce minutes for the first meeting, and a fresh agenda for the second meeting.

Attendance sheet

80. At every meeting (or if a meeting is adjourned and reconvened, at both parts of the meeting) circulate an attendance sheet on which there is a list of the committee members (and anyone in attendance) with a space for them to sign against their names. Everyone in the room needs to sign this. You will need to update this list every time there are changes to the membership of the committee. Your notes of the meeting and the attendance list must be kept until the minutes are formally approved at the next meeting.

Confirming outcomes

81. If, at the end of discussion about a particular item, you are unsure of the outcome, you must ask the Chair to confirm the outcome before the meeting moves on to the next item. This will help you when writing your minutes, but may also be useful to members of the committee. If you are unsure, then it is likely that other people in the room are unsure as well.

82. Make certain that you know who is responsible for taking any agreed action, and what the deadline is, as you will need this information for the action sheet at the end of the minutes.

MINUTES

83. Care needs to be taken when writing minutes to avoid language which could make it difficult for the School to place the information that is in the open minutes on the website. Guidance on the language to use in minutes with Freedom of Information and Data Protection in mind is provided in 'Freedom of Information and Data Protection: Guidance for Committee Servicing' (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/foi/committees/>), which should be read in conjunction with this document.

84. The minutes of the meeting should be concise, factual and record:

- the issues/topics raised at the meeting
- any decisions made
- salient points which led to a decision
- action to be taken and by whom
- items that were noted
- anything referred to or recommended to another committee
- any decisions that were deferred by the committee, and a brief summary of the reasons why

85. Individuals should be referred to by their job titles rather than their names, wherever possible.

86. The minutes (in Ariel and print size 11) should start with the following heading:

These minutes are for information only. Any corrections to the minutes will be recorded in the minutes of the subsequent meeting of the committee.

87. This makes it clear to anyone who is not familiar with the way that committees work that it is important to look at the next set of minutes to check for any amendments.

88. The name of the School should appear next, followed by the committee name, the date and time of the meeting and the heading 'Minutes'. They should start with a list of those who are members of the committee, with those in attendance (which includes the committee Secretary) listed below. The names of those who were unable to attend should be marked with an asterisk. Under the list should appear the words 'those whose names are marked with an asterisk were unable to attend the meeting'. It is not necessary to list separately those who have sent apologies.

89. If anyone attended the meeting to speak to a particular item, their name should be added under the list of committee members followed by the words 'attended the meeting for minute (number of the minute)'. See Annex 7.

90. In the minutes, the title of an item should be same as on the agenda. The Appendix details need to be referred to, preferably in first line e.g. The committee considered the financial report at Appendix G.

91. The minutes of the first meeting of the session should record that the induction for committee members has taken place. For example, the minute could read as follows:

1. Membership, Terms of Reference and Procedures for the Conduct of Committee Meetings

Following an induction covering the role and responsibilities of XX Committee, members of the Committee were welcomed to the first meeting of the academic year.

The Membership, Terms of Reference and Procedures for the Conduct of Committee Meetings were **noted** [Appendix A].

92. The first part of any minute should give an indication of how the item was dealt with at the meeting e.g. received, considered etc. The next part should highlight the issues and the final part should detail the decision. The decision itself should be highlighted to make it easy to locate for audit purposes e.g. The committee **approved** the suggested amendment.

93. Under the heading 'Action Taken' the minutes will need to record whether each of the action points on the action sheet has been completed. This could be as simple as saying that the committee noted that the agreed action for minutes x, y and z had been taken. If action has not been taken, your minutes need to reflect this, and set a new deadline (or explain why the action is no longer required).

94. Make sure that you use the correct tense for the minutes and are consistent throughout. Minutes are not written in the present tense (in the future they will be an historic record of the meeting, looking back at what happened) but in a form of the past tense. For example, you would write 'it was agreed that the committee would....' rather than 'the committee has agreed it will....'

95. The language used for the minutes ties in very closely with that used in the preparation of the agenda:

- **Noted**: acknowledges that the committee was given a particular piece of information. Also used to summarise significant points that the committee was told about
- **Received**: records the formal receipt of a document or information
- **Considered**: used to indicate that the committee discussed a topic/document
- **Approved/Agreed**: used to show the conclusion of the committee's deliberations on a matter for which it is responsible
- **Recommended**: similar to approved, but used for matters which need to be referred to a higher body for approval
- **Endorsed**: used to show support for a decision made elsewhere.

96. Please note that the Board of Trustees also occasionally 'resolves' to do certain things. However, this is not used by other committees.

97. It is important to remember that minutes are not a transcript of the meeting. There is no need to set out exactly who said what. School committee minutes should not be written in the form of 'X said this, and then Y said that'. Use phrases such as 'the committee was informed that', or 'the question of ABC was raised'.

98. Decisions are made by the committee as a whole, rather than by individuals, so where a view leads to a decision, it is a good idea to avoid language which suggests that the decision was the responsibility of one individual.

99. The first minute of the first meeting of each session is numbered 1. The numbering of minutes then continues throughout the session, so the second meeting may for example start at minute 16,

with the third meeting starting at, say, minute 40. At the start of the next session the minutes begin again from 1 again. The same applies to reserved minutes, which start with 1R, 2R and so on throughout the session, starting with 1R again at the start of the next session.

100. Tabled papers should be marked as tabled in the top right-hand corner where the appendix details are given (e.g. Appendix B, Tabled Paper, LTPC, 30/10/02). Make sure that you retain a copy of any tabled papers as open papers will need to be included on the website with the papers for that meeting. See section : Open agendas, open appendices and open minutes on the website

101. If the meeting was adjourned and reconvened, the minutes should show details of the time/place etc of each part of the meeting, and make clear who attended each part and what was discussed in each part.

102. If no reserved business was dealt with at the meeting then please put a statement at the bottom of the minutes saying 'No reserved business was considered at this meeting'. Similarly, if the meeting dealt solely with reserved business, a note should be added that 'No open business was considered at this meeting'. At a later date this will save someone from searching for minutes which do not exist.

Action Sheets

103. Prepare draft minutes for consideration by the Chair (one set for open business, one for any reserved items). The last page of each set of minutes should be an action sheet which details the action to be taken, by when and by whom. This is sent out as part of the minutes. This should be a list of all outstanding action points, including those from previous meetings (see Annex 8). As mentioned earlier, items should only be removed from this list once you have received confirmation that the action has been completed and the committee has had this confirmation at a meeting. It is your responsibility to try to ensure that all action is completed by the end of the session, and that any outstanding action is carried over to the minutes of the following session, so the items do not get 'lost'.

104. Please note that the committee may only have an open agenda, but if during discussions items are raised which fall into the categories mentioned as confidential under the guidelines relating to Freedom of Information and Data Protection (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/foi/committees/>) then you will need to produce two sets of minutes, one open and one reserved.

Draft minutes and action point e-mails

105. The Chair should be given the draft minutes (including the action sheet) to check and amend. You also need to agree with the Chair at the beginning of the session whether any other member of the committee (e.g. a senior School Officer) needs to be sent the draft minutes for checking as a matter of course. Once the minutes have been drafted, you should send out an e-mail to everyone listed on the action sheet(s), detailing what it is they have to do (e.g. Based on the draft minutes of the x meeting on xx/xx/xx you undertook toas detailed in minute xx).

106. You may find it helpful to keep copies of these emails with the attendance sheet and your notes of the meeting. Most people will email you back when the required action has been completed. You will need to chase those who do not do this, as you need to keep a record of completed action. One way is to keep a separate copy of the action sheet, and to tick off action as it is completed, so that you know what is outstanding.

Distribution of minutes

107. Ideally minutes should be sent out within three working days of the meeting. This is not always possible, and it is acceptable to send them out up to a week after the meeting.

108. A committee member may disagree with the wording of the minutes and if they do so they should raise this with the Chair through you. They may only raise issues concerning the accuracy of the record. They may not object to the minutes if they simply do not like what was agreed.

109. **If your committee meets more than once a term** send out the minutes (open and reserved, if there are any of the latter) as soon as you can. These will then be considered at the next meeting of the committee, and any amendments needed will be reflected in the minutes of that meeting.

110. **If your committee meets once a term**, then send out the draft minutes electronically, once they have been agreed by the Chair, and ask members for any comments. Members should be given two weeks to respond. You can then either confirm to committee members that no changes have been made to the minutes they were originally sent, or send an electronic copy of the revised minutes which include any changes agreed by the Chair (whichever is appropriate), letting them know that these minutes will be presented to the next meeting of the committee for approval.

111. This means that members do not have to wait an entire term to propose any changes to the draft minutes, and hopefully means that they are able to make comments while the meeting is still fresh in their minds.

Correction of Minutes

112. If any amendments are required when the minutes are approved at the next meeting this should be reflected in the next set of minutes.

'The minutes of the meeting of 22 April 2002 were approved, subject to the following amendment:
Minute (number of minute) should read
The committee **agreed** the amendment as detailed in Appendix F subject to there being sufficient funds available.

Informing everyone of outcomes

113. As Secretary, your role is to ensure that any items from your committee that need to go to another committee are passed on with appropriate papers in plenty of time. You will need to produce a cover paper for each item, detailing progress so far.

114. It may be appropriate for you to send a cover sheet along with the original paper that was discussed at your committee. Alternatively, it may be necessary to ask the originator of a paper to amend it in light of comments made at your committee meeting. In this case, once you have the revised paper, you will still need to send it to the Secretary of the receiving committee, making them aware that the amendments suggested by your committee have been incorporated into the document.

115. You will need to contact any individuals who were not at the meeting, but who provided papers for the committee, to inform them of decisions made at the meeting. In some cases this may be all that you need to do, but in other cases you will need to do this in addition to passing papers on to another committee.

116. Do not forget to record somewhere any items which the committee has agreed it will review again later in the session. It is your job to ensure that such items are brought back to the committee at an appropriate time.

117. You also need to agree with the Chair a few lines to be included in the weekly SOAS News Bulletin. This could detail the type of business that was covered at the meeting, and detail any decisions made - it is a very easy way to keep the School informed about what your committee is doing. Please send this to the Communications Manager.

Sub-Committee Reports

118. Committees are quite often required to write termly or annual reports to their 'parent' committee, if they have one. If your committee is required to do this, you would normally produce the first draft of this for the Chair to comment on before it is passed to the relevant parent committee by the deadline set.

Chair's Action

119. There may be an item of business which your committee needs to deal with, which is so urgent that it needs to be dealt with before the next meeting of the committee. If it is decided not to call an additional ordinary meeting to discuss the item, it can be dealt with by Chair's Action. This is when the Chair makes a decision on behalf of the committee. This should only happen when it is absolutely necessary. Once the Chair has made a decision, you will need to pass the paper to the next committee along with an explanation of what has happened. If the item does not need to go any further in the committee structure, you will need to inform those who need to know that the item has been dealt with by Chair's Action, and what the outcome of the process was.

120. This item will also need to appear on the next agenda of your committee, so that the members can be asked to note the action taken by the Chair.

OPEN AGENDAS, OPEN APPENDICES AND OPEN MINUTES ON THE WEBSITE

121. It is important that the open agendas, open appendices and open minutes of committee meetings are made available on the School's website in line with School policy. This will improve communication within the School and transparency in the School's operations.

122. Details of what is expected are set out in Annex 6. In September 2013, the Information Commissioners office updated its guidance on information it would expect universities to publish proactively in order to meet their publication scheme commitments under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

123. To ensure compliance with this Act, it has been agreed that the open agenda, open appendices and open minutes of any committee meeting should be published on the School website after the minutes of that meeting have been approved at the following meeting of the committee. This should be done within two weeks of the approval of the minutes.

124. Once the minutes have been approved at a meeting, you should create a PDF which contains the open agenda, open appendices (including any that were on the agenda as 'to follow' or 'to be tabled') and the open minutes of that meeting, and place these on the appropriate page on the website.

125. It is important to remember that this applies only to open papers, and reserved items should not be placed on the website.

IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE...

126. If you make a mistake (for example leaving an item off an agenda, or not passing on an agenda item to your parent committee in time for its meeting) then the most important thing is to let your committee Chair know what has happened, so that the two of you can decide what action to take. If another committee is involved, then you need to let that committee Chair and Secretary know as well. It is important to keep everyone fully informed of what has happened.

And Finally...

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

Sir Humphrey

An extract from the BBC television series 'Yes Minister'.

Jan Airey,
Secretariat Manager

Principles on which the committee structure is based

1. Committees should be strategic, not operational.

It has been agreed that the role of most committees is to develop School strategies and to monitor their delivery. Committees are not expected to assume responsibility for operational areas which are the responsibility of others (such as the Professional Services Directorates, or the Deans). This enables a group of individuals, with a range of experience, expertise and responsibilities, to contribute towards establishing the direction in which the School is heading, whilst leaving those with particular operational skills and knowledge to determine how we get there.

Where committees have responsibility for dealing with specific operational issues (for example LTQC), this is set out in the Committee's terms of reference.

2. Membership

a) Committees should be as small as practicable

Committees need to be a size which will allow discussion and debate to flourish, in order that consensus can be reached. It is pretty difficult to ensure that this happens when numbers get into double figures, let alone when the committee numbers 30+. Large committees are also wasteful of people's time.

b) Committees contributed to the governance of the School.

The role of committee members is not to represent a particular group or interest. Members are on committees as individuals, bringing their skills and expertise to help with the overall governance of the institution, to the benefit of the School as a whole. While members may be from a particular group, and can bring the views of that group to the meeting, once at the meeting, the interests of the School must be the overriding consideration.

The only exception to this non-representative role is where committees (such as Health & Safety) have, for example, Trade Union representatives on them, and are required to do so.

This view of committee membership is supported both in the School's Standing Orders and in the guidance produced by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC), which the School is required to follow.

c) Given the strategic nature of committees, membership should include those who are responsible for ensuring delivery on strategies at senior level.

Much of what committees do is about devising, proposing and refining strategies for the School, and then monitoring its implementation. Directors of Professional Services on a committee need be able to take an overview of what is achievable, and then (where appropriate) to ensure that the colleagues for whom they are responsible actually deliver. It is not necessary for every operational manager whose area falls within the remit of a committee to be a member of that committee or to attend every single meeting. They may attend for items where they have specific responsibility if the committee feels this would help with its work.

Directors of Professional Services should only be members of those committees at which their areas of responsibility are discussed on a regular basis. Otherwise, they should be invited to attend particular meetings where specific items are discussed.

Some academic committee members will be there because they have been nominated by their Faculty in order to bring certain experience or expertise to meetings. However, depending on the

committee, for the reasons outlined above, it may also be necessary to have senior academic managers as members as well.

That is not to say that committees cannot ask for reports from individuals who are not members (they can, and have always been able to do this), and individuals can be asked to attend parts of meetings to speak to any papers they may have written, or provide advice where this is required. However, they would not be expected to attend every meeting, and should only attend for a specific item.

3) Committees can invite specialists to attend parts of meetings

In the past, the number of people 'in attendance' at some committee meetings outnumbered the members. When the current committee structure was put in place, it was agreed that it was wasteful to have people who were not members attending every meeting of the sub-committees of Academic Board and Resources & Planning Committee, so these committees do not have people 'in attendance'. This should not stop these committees inviting individuals with particular expertise to attend parts of meetings to speak to papers if they can make a valuable contribution, and committees currently do this on a regular basis.

4) Communication

a) The 'owners' of information are best placed to ensure that this information is communicated to those who need it

Committees are not suitable vehicles for the effective communication of information across the School, and it would be wrong to expect them to fulfil this function for which they are clearly not designed. It is the responsibility of the Committee Secretary to ensure that if someone provides a paper for a committee, and is not then at the committee meeting to hear the outcome of any discussion, they are told what has happened.

However, the owner of a policy/procedure etc is by far the best person to know who else in the School needs to be informed about it, and is therefore responsible for making sure that this is done.

b) Committees with Chairs and membership in common

Where more than one committee has an interest in a particular area, the membership of committees is designed to ensure that there is some level of overlapping membership. It is reasonable to expect members who are on both committees to share with one committee the outcome of any discussion at the other committee.

In addition to this, Chairs of committees have been chosen for the same reason. Wherever possible, committees that have areas in common are chaired by the same individual. It is intended that this should ensure the exchange of information between, and continuity across, committees which deal with related business.

Committee Secretaries also have a responsibility to liaise with Chairs and other Committee Secretaries to ensure that papers move through the committee structure in an appropriate way, and that there is clarity in relation to which items are dealt with by each committee.

5) Negotiation

School committees are not a mechanism for negotiating with the senior executives of the School. There are formal mechanisms in place for such negotiations, and committees are not one of them.
JA

Guidelines on Strategic and Operational Issues

The remit of the majority of the School's committees is strategic in nature. This means that these committees should be dealing with strategic rather than operational issues.

The descriptions below give a guide as to the meaning of these terms to help committee to decide what it is that they should be dealing with. At its most basic level, strategic deals with the 'where we are going' and operational sorts out the 'how we get there'.

These terms are concerned with two different levels of organisational management:

Strategic activities are undertaken at the highest level of the organisation's structure. Essentially strategic issues / decisions typically concern:

- The overall mission and values of the organisation (e.g. as expressed in formal policies) – why do we exist? Why do we set the goals we have?
- The organisation's overall objectives and longer term planning - the large scale decisions about what to do and what not to do.
- The relationship of the organisation with the external environment, especially the external large scale stakeholders (e.g. government departments, sister organisations) & competitor organisations
- The allocation of the institutional resources (large scale decisions on funding to projects and departments, staffing, etc.)
- The overall performance of the organisation (effectiveness, efficiency, monitoring of execution to inform next planning round, etc.)

Operational activities / issues occur primarily at the lower levels of the organisation.

They are typically concerned with the smaller scale, day to day decisions and activities.

It could be about:

- the detail of how to achieve the organisation's overall objectives (e.g. processes and procedures);
- how each individual department will be organised and run;
- short term plans (e.g. action plans)
- departmental budgets & other departmental / local resources;
- the day to day management of departments & teams
- the day to day management of the individuals within those teams.

SOAS

POLICY COMMITTEE

9am on Friday 19 May 2006 in room 116

AGENDA

Items marked with an asterisk are formal business, not intended for discussion. If members wish to discuss any issues arising from these items they should inform the Secretary by 9am on Thursday 18 May 2006.

- I Minutes**
To approve: minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2006 [previously circulated]
- II Action Taken**
To receive: updates on action taken
- III Matters Arising**
- IV Learning & Teaching Strategy**
To approve: a proposal relating to submission of coursework from the Head of Registry [Appendix A]
- V QAAC: Programme Specifications**
To consider: a letter from the Chair of QAAC [Appendix B]
- VI Research Student Issues**
To consider: a report from the Pro-Director (Research & Enterprise) [Appendix C]
- VII *Courses**
To note: new, amended and withdrawn courses [Appendix D]
To note: changes to course codes [Appendix E]

TITLE

1-2 line summary of the paper covering action/decision required of the Board of Trustees

e.g

*The Board of Trustees is asked to **note** the following Report or
The Board of Trustees is asked to **approve** the recommendations in the report*

Executive Summary

Paragraph, drawn from main paper if necessary, that summarises the overall paper and any background information

To end with name of member of the Board of Trustees sponsoring the paper – who should be aware of this in advance of the meeting

Recommendations

List of any recommendations within the report

Financial Impact

Summary of the financial impact of any recommendations in the paper

Figures to be checked with Finance prior to the paper being submitted

Risks

Brief summary of any of the risks.

Equality implications

A brief section, with any details in the report, on the equality implications of any decisions for people with any of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act (2010) [i.e. age, civil partnership / marriage, disability, ethnicity, gender including pregnancy & maternity, religion / belief /non-belief, sexual identity, sexual orientation]

(further advice available from the Diversity & Inclusion Manager if required)

The main paper then starts on a new page and typically be no more than 4 pages long with any supporting documentation provided in labelled annexes.

PUBLICATION OF COMMITTEE PAPERS FROM 2014-15

In September 2013, the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) updated its guidance on information it would expect universities to publish proactively in order to meet their publication scheme commitments under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

To ensure compliance with the FOIA, SOAS procedure regarding publication of committee papers will change from the 2014-15 academic year as follows:

Type of committee paper	Previous procedure	Procedure from 2014-15
Open agendas	Publish on internet after 12 months	Publish on internet after the next scheduled meeting (within 2 weeks)
Open agenda papers (appendices and tabled)	Not published	Publish on internet after the next scheduled meeting (within 2 weeks)
Reserved agendas	Not published	Not published
Reserved agenda papers (appendices and tabled)	Not published	Not published
Open minutes	Publish on internet after 12 months	Publish on internet after the next scheduled meeting (within 2 weeks)
Reserved minutes	Not published	Not published

Example: 3 October – Audit Committee meeting
 7 November – Audit Committee meeting
 7-21 November – Publish 3 October Open Audit Committee agenda, appendices and minutes on SOAS website.

SOAS is not expected to publish:

- any information which would be exempt under the FOIA or the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) – such information should fall under the reserved category of papers or can be redacted from open papers (contact the Information Compliance Manager for advice on how to redact documents correctly);
- any personal information which it would be unfair to disclose or would otherwise breach the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA);
- committee papers of meetings from more than three years ago;
- information that it would be impractical or resource-intensive to publish; or
- lower-level internal meetings which may be of less general interest to the public.

Committee Secretaries are responsible for ensuring publication of the previous meeting’s open papers within two weeks after the next meeting.

Guidance on FOI and DPA considerations and determining open and reserved committee papers can be found at <http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/foi/committees/>.

These minutes are for information only. Any corrections to the minutes will be recorded in the minutes of the subsequent meeting of the committee.

SOAS

Policy Committee

10.00 a.m. on Friday, 18 October 2013

Minutes

Members: Professor P Webley (Chair)
Professor R Black
Professor A Blythe*
Dr A Joy
Dr T Miller
Professor N Rao
Prof G Singh
Ms E Wright*

In attendance: Mrs J Airey
Dr C Ince attended for minute 14 only.

* Those indicated with an asterisk were unable to attend the meeting

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2013 were **approved** as a true record.

13. Action Taken

The Committee **noted** that all action points that were due for completion had been completed.

14. Research Strategy

The Committee considered the paper from the Pro-Director (Research & enterprise) at Appendix A.....

SOAS

**POLICY COMMITTEE
Action Points**

Minute	Item	Action	Deadline	By
40	Registration Statistics	Consider implications for recruitment	16/6/08	Deans
53	Research grant income	Obtain information about comparable departments	16/6/08	Research office
116(i)	AHRC	Complete bid form	14/7/08	IB
149	Committee Schedule	Prepare schedule	12/6/08	JA
155 / 206	Erasmus	List agreements	9/6/08	MH
		Consider format of annual report	9/6/08	JA
234(i)	Language provision	Report back on progress	8/12/08	MH
240	ASNs	Arrange meeting with HEFCE regional representative	16/6/08	PW
241	MoU	Inform Directorate	30/6/08	JA
242	Skills agenda	Feed into planning process	3/11/08	Deans