

# Minute Writing for University Committees

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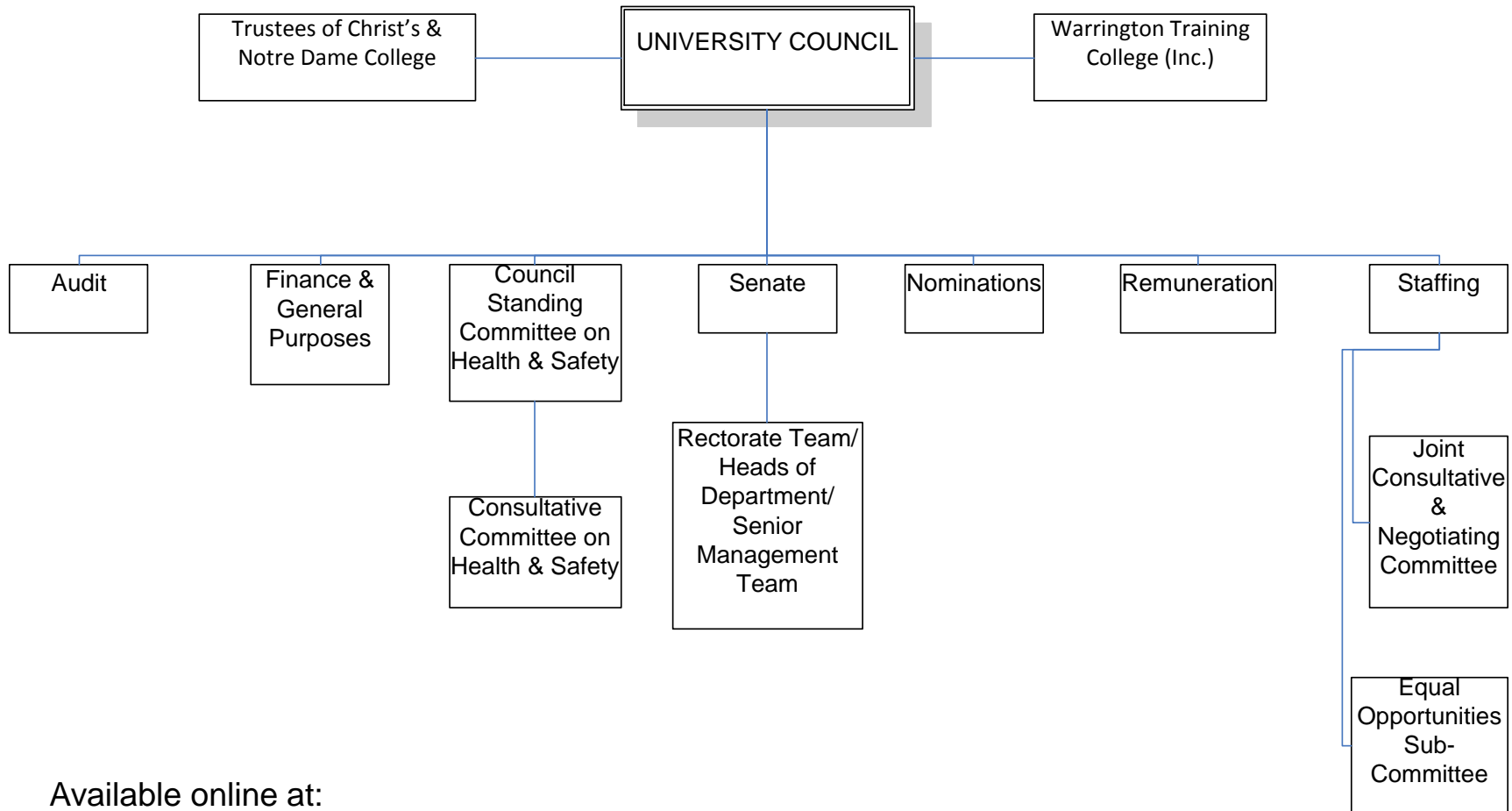
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# Aims of Session

- Provide guidance on how to write effective minutes
- Understand the role of different committees within the University
- Recognise how minutes of meetings link to decision making within the University
- Consider how minutes form part of quality assurance and audit procedures

# LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

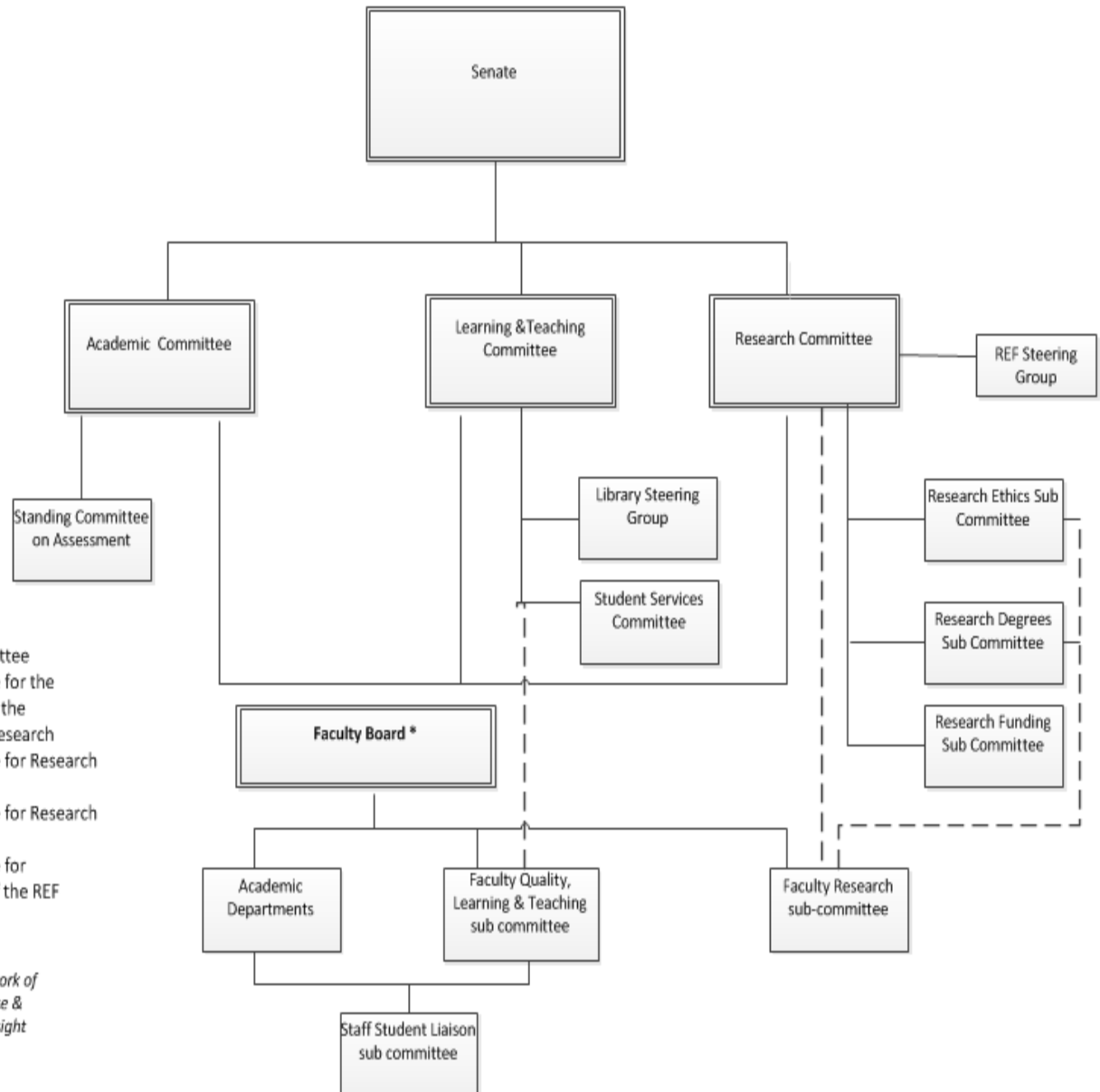
UNIVERSITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES 2011/12



Available online at:

<http://www.hope.ac.uk/secretarys-office/committeesecretariat.html>

# LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES OF SENATE



## Academic Committee

- Outline approval or scrutiny of Academic standing for progression to validation
- Responsible for University-wide Quality Assurance

## Learning & Teaching Committee

- Responsible for Learning & Teaching Quality Enhancement
- Responsible for oversight of the Student Experience

## Research Committee

- Responsible for the direction of the University research
- Responsible for Research Ethics
- Responsible for Research Degrees
- Responsible for oversight of the REF

*\* including Network of Hope Experience & Academic Oversight Committee*

# Management Meetings

Monday morning management meetings:

- Rectorate Team
- Heads of Department
- Senior Management Team

# University Committee Schedule

It is important to be aware of the place of your committee in the reporting structure and to ensure that meetings take place in a timely fashion to allow issues and minutes to be forwarded to the higher committee.

*For example:*

Research Ethics Sub-Committee reports to Research Committee, therefore meetings should be held two weeks before the Research Committee meeting to allow time for the minutes to be produced and circulated with the agenda the week before.

The Schedule is published on the University Secretary's Office website:

<http://www.hope.ac.uk/secretarys-office/committeeschedule.html>

To include your meeting in the schedule, please contact the Secretary's Office.

# Role of the Secretary

The Secretary has an important role in managing the work of the committee, the more proactive you are the easier it will be for you to write the minutes.

- **Relationship with the Chair** – a good working relationship between the Chair and the Secretary will help both the Chair to run the meeting effectively and the Secretary to write the minutes.
- **Agenda Meeting** – To discuss the draft agenda. Secretary involvement at this stage allows you to be more involved in the work plan of the committee.
- **Chair's Notes** – serves as a guide to how the meeting should run and provides a starting point for the minutes.
- **Pre-Meeting** – To brief both the Chair and the Secretary on practical items e.g. running order; speakers for particular items, or any recent developments since the agenda was set, such as a request for a new item to be tabled.
- **During the meeting** – Taking notes of discussion; assisting the Chair in keeping the meeting on track; dealing with papers; noting contributions.
- **After the meeting** – drafting the minutes, submitting them for Chair's approval, ensuring actions are followed up by appropriate person and circulating minutes to a higher committee as well as committee members.

# Sample Agenda

[Agenda for meeting of Academic Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013]



# Chair's Notes

An annotated version of the agenda, helps guide the Chair through the meeting and is an aide to writing the minutes.

Chair's Notes would include:

- Details of any Apologies
- Speakers for each item and timings
- Potential outcomes for items under discussion – this might be referral to another committee for approval; endorsement of a previous decision or an action point for members of the committee

Chair's Notes can provide the basis for your minutes and mean you don't have to handwrite factual details during the meeting.

# Sample Chair's Notes

Chair's Notes for meeting of Academic  
Committee, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013]

# Materials for the Meeting

- Agenda
- Papers – consider how these are circulated
- Issues – security/ cost/ environmental/ accessibility
- Attendance list
- Terms of Reference

# At the meeting

- General housekeeping – room set up, catering, AV arrangements, spare papers, tabled items.
- Quoracy – are there enough members/ appropriate expertise to make decisions?
- Assisting the Chair – keep the meeting on track; consider timing of items; invited speakers.
- First few items are usually:
  - Apologies
  - Minutes of the Last Meeting
  - Matters Arising
- Record general thrust of discussion, decisions taken and actions identified.
- Dealing with Any Other Business (AOB)

# Notetaking

- No hard and fast rules – whatever is preferable for you.
- Shorthand (or your own version)
- Handwritten or using Tablet/ laptops?
- Narrative record or Bullet points
- Verbatim – usually only used in legal contexts e.g. appeal hearings
- Recording meetings – consider data protection issues

# Terminology (1)

Papers are:

- Received
- Noted
- Considered

Proposals can be:

- Supported
- Referred for further work
- Rejected

# Terminology (2)

Members can

- Comment
- Report
- Inform
- Acknowledge
- Discuss
- Request
- Explain
- Agree

# More Terminology

- **Agreed to recommend** – used if the final decision is taken by a higher committee.
- **Endorsed** – used if the decision has been taken elsewhere e.g. at Rectorate Team.
- **Approved** – used only when the committee is authorised to make the final decision (check Terms of Reference if unsure).



# Clarity

- Date of meeting (including year)
- Names of attendees or names referred to during discussion – ask for confirmation if unsure.
- Recording names – maintain consistency e.g. title & surname, or initials, or role
- Names of groups, dates or acronyms used – ask for clarity if unsure.
- Note any actions, the person responsible and deadline
- If unsure, ask the Chair to sum up points at the end of the item

# Format of minutes

Format will depend on the formality of the meeting.

Formal university meetings tend to follow the same format (see example shown on next slide)

In general, the minutes should record:

- Date of the meeting
- Those present
- Those attending by invitation
- The minute taker
- Apologies
- Approval of the last minutes
- Any matters arising
- Agenda items
- Any Other Business / Chair's Business
- Date of next meeting

# Sample Layout of Committee Minutes

[Minutes for the meeting of Academic Committee, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013]

Further guidance and examples available online:

- <http://www.hope.ac.uk/secretarys-office/notesforcommittees.html>
- <http://www.hope.ac.uk/committees/>

# Writing the Minutes

- Slides 21-29 adapted from session at AUA Conference 2009

[With kind permission from Lisa Baker, University of Lincoln]

# The Golden Rules

1. Write in the perfect (past) tense
2. Background should be in the pluperfect tense
3. Discussion should be minuted in the passive voice
4. Generally, don't refer to individual contributors by name
5. Make sure that what you've written makes sense and cannot be too easily misinterpreted.

# The Perfect (Past) Tense

- Minutes are a record of the meeting
- By the time you write up your minutes, the meeting has already happened
- It's in the past.....
- Therefore, you should write your minutes in the past tense

# For example

(Chair): “this year’s graduation ceremonies will be in July”

*Becomes*

“The Chair confirmed that the graduation ceremonies would be held in July 2012”

(Chair): “Does anyone have any questions about this document?”

*Becomes*

“The Chair invited members to raise any queries about the document.”

# The Pluperfect Tense

- A way of talking about things that have already happened before the meeting
- For example, this might be a decision from a previous meeting or an event that took place last year
- Therefore, it's one step further back in time



# For example

(Chair): “The programme proposal we discussed at the last meeting has been approved by Senate”

*Becomes*

“The Chair confirmed that the programme proposal had been approved.”

(Professor X): “The sub-group met last week ”

*Becomes*

“Professor X reported that the sub-group had met the previous week.”

# The Passive Voice

- The passive voice gives an impartial and objective flavour to your writing
- It eliminates the need to identify the speaker by name
- Used when the focus is on the action. It is not important or not known, however, who or what is performing the action
- Sometimes a statement in passive is more polite than active voice e.g. “A mistake was made” rather than “You have made a mistake”

# Active vs passive

“Brian and John send their apologies.”

Becomes

“Apologies were received from....”

“The sub group will meet next week.”

Becomes

“It was agreed that the sub group would meet during the following week.”

# Do my minutes make sense?

## A basic checklist:

- Use short sentences and paragraphs to break up long sections of text
- Agreed actions should be clear
- Discussion should be concise, and only important matters of fact noted
- Pay attention to spelling, punctuation and sentence structure
- And the final test is....

# The final test

- Will my minutes make sense to someone new to, or outside, the University reading them in five years' time?

# Approval of Minutes

- Once minutes are drafted they should be sent to the Chair for approval.
- Then forwarded as soon as possible to the next committee in the reporting structure e.g. Faculty Board.
- Also distributed to the committee members either straight away or prior to the next meeting.
- Circulate action points as soon as possible and send a copy of the appropriate minute to those who attended by invitation.
- Minutes are then confirmed at the next meeting. Corrections made following agreement by members.
- Publication – consider confidentiality; data protection issues
- Consider protocol for keeping records of meetings and deleting draft minutes/ notes

# Who else might ask to see minutes ?

- **Internal and external auditors**
- **Quality inspections or audits by external bodies e.g. QAA Higher Education Review; Ofsted**
- **Freedom of Information (Fol requests)** – The Freedom of Information Act 2000 allows members of the public to request access to information held by public bodies (this includes universities).
- There are a number of exemptions (detailed guidance at [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)), but generally you should assume that minutes are potentially disclosable and err on the side of prudence when you are writing them!
- **Student Complaints and Appeals** - Investigations may require disclosure of notes or minutes of any relevant meetings to a third party eg. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

# Sample Fol Request

**From:** Freelance Education Journalist

**Date:** 24 July 2013 10:40

**Subject:** FOI re first class degrees

- 1 Please provide **any minutes of meetings**, reports, memos, correspondence and /or research over the last three years from the university's academic standards committee (or equivalent) and any body / committee with responsibility for student assessment/regulations governing degree awards which mention the award of undergraduate first class honours degrees.
2. Please provide details of any changes to or reviews of undergraduate assessment regulations which have been made at the university over the last 10 years and provide **any minutes of meetings**, reports, memos, correspondence and/or research which relate to those changes/reviews.

Thanks



# Sample OIA request

Date: Monday, 5 August 2013  
Subject: Complaint by: Student X  
To: "[donelag@hope.ac.uk](mailto:donelag@hope.ac.uk)"

Dear Mr Donelan

I write further to our e-mail dated 30 July 2013. I enclose a copy of Student X's Complaint Form and accompanying documentation for your information.

I have now completed an initial consideration of this complaint. It appears that the complaint is eligible for review by the OIA. Please now provide the University's representations in respect of the complaint.

Please provide all relevant information in respect of the matters complained about. It is essential to provide copies of the documentation considered by the University at the final stage of its internal procedures **and any notes or record of those proceedings.**

It is not necessary to provide further copies of documentation already provided by the student.

## Documents:

- **Minutes of all meetings at which Student X's case was considered, to include the meeting of the Exam Board at which the decision to terminate Student X studies was taken.**
- All internal memos, notes and records of consideration referred to, made or considered by the University during its consideration of Student X case at all stages of the internal procedure and during its consideration to terminate studies.

# Any other questions or concerns?

Guidance and examples are available on:

<http://www.hope.ac.uk/committees/>

<http://www.hope.ac.uk/secretarys-office/notesforcommittees.html>

More guidance is available to Association of University Administrators (AUA) members via the Good Practice Guides and Professional Development Programme:

[www.aua.ac.uk](http://www.aua.ac.uk)