Managing meetings for Executive Officers

a good practice guide
# Table of contents

Why have meetings? .................................................................................................................. 2
- Terms of reference .................................................................................................................. 2
- Formal meetings ..................................................................................................................... 2
- Less formal meetings ............................................................................................................... 2

The role of the chair .................................................................................................................. 2

The role of the executive officer .............................................................................................. 3

The meeting cycle .................................................................................................................... 3
- Before the meeting .................................................................................................................. 3
- During the meeting .................................................................................................................. 4
- After the meeting .................................................................................................................... 4

Maintaining records .................................................................................................................. 4

Meeting notes .......................................................................................................................... 4
- Are there rules for taking notes? ............................................................................................ 5
- Skills involved in taking notes ............................................................................................... 5
- What goes into the notes? ....................................................................................................... 5
- A structure for meeting notes ............................................................................................... 6
- Distributing the notes ............................................................................................................ 6
- Confidentiality issues ............................................................................................................ 6

Useful resources ....................................................................................................................... 7
- Weblinks ................................................................................................................................. 7
- Text references ....................................................................................................................... 7

Meeting document examples .................................................................................................. 8
- Example 1 – meeting agenda ................................................................................................. 8
- Example 2 – meeting agenda ................................................................................................. 9
- Example 3 – meeting notes .................................................................................................... 11
- Example 4 – action sheet ....................................................................................................... 13
- Example 5 – action sheet ....................................................................................................... 14
Why have meetings?

Meetings are used to conduct the business of a working group or unit in a collaborative setting. Those who attend a meeting as participants or members of a committee receive information and participate in the process of making collective decisions.

Terms of reference

Most committees or groups will have designated terms of reference under which they operate. Terms of reference describe the purpose of the committee or group, its membership and its responsibilities and limitations. It is important that all members of the committee or group understand the terms of reference, membership and reporting structures.

Formal meetings

The University conducts meetings that fulfill statutory or legal requirements such as Council and its sub-committees and Divisional Boards. Minutes of such meetings are written in a formal style with conventions.

Under the University’s style manual, the Guidelines for documents recommend Council minutes as a benchmark for styles and conventions. You will notice the conventions of using formal titles of attendees, the process of starring items at the beginning of the meeting and the method of recording formal resolutions.

Less formal meetings

Although less formal meetings of committees or groups are significant, they do not have the same measure of accountability as those that are formal and therefore do not require formal minutes.

For less formal meetings, a record can be written as minutes or notes and in this guide, the term, ‘notes’ will be used because the emphasis is on these less formal meetings. These notes should still follow the structure of the agenda however they do not need to contain as much detail and should focus on decisions made and actions to be undertaken before the next meeting.

The role of the chair

The chair is responsible for the process of the meeting, ensuring that the meeting runs smoothly and inviting members to contribute to the discussion. The chair also works closely with the executive officer on the organisation of the agenda and content of the notes.

The chair undertakes the following tasks:

- oversees the preparation of the agenda in consultation with the executive officer
- opens the meeting
- welcomes and introduces members and guests
- keeps individuals focused on the topics being discussed
- makes sure that members are aware of decisions that are made
- keep track of the time
- closes the meeting.
The role of the executive officer

The executive officer works closely with the chair and focuses on the content of the meeting as well as the administration and communication surrounding the meeting.

The executive officer undertakes the following tasks:

- communicates with members outside meetings as required
- calls for agenda items prior to the meeting, allowing sufficient time for responses
- prepares and writes the agenda with the chair
- distributes the agenda and papers prior to the meeting, allowing adequate reading time
- organises catering and any equipment or other items required
- takes notes at the meeting
- finalises the notes in consultation with the chair
- circulates the notes and actions after the meeting
- keeps a complete record of all meetings and documentation
- contacts members, if required, to attend to out-of-session matters.

In order to perform well, it is important for an executive officer to:

- communicate effectively in interpersonal interactions and in writing
- listen attentively and record decisions accurately
- write precisely, succinctly and with attention to detail
- make appropriate judgments about items to include in agendas and action lists
- organise and prioritise agenda items and actions resulting from the meeting
- meet deadlines
- understand, and adhere to the need for confidentiality.

The meeting cycle

The meeting cycle can be simplified into three stages, with certain tasks required at each stage:

1. Before for the meeting
2. During the meeting
3. After the meeting.

Before the meeting

In this stage the executive officer:

- reviews the agenda, minutes and actions of the previous meeting for information and context
- drafts an agenda, to be finalised in consultation with the chair
- calls for additional agenda items from members
- collects and compiles any documents/papers to be distributed
- circulates the agenda with relevant papers to members
- organises the venue and any refreshments or equipment required (e.g. laptop, data projector, web access for presentations)
- confirms requirements with any presenters or external parties who may be attending
- prepares extra copies of the agenda and papers as spares
- prepares any papers for tabling.
The meeting cycle continued

The agenda may be circulated in hard copy, via email or via a SharePoint site. This is usually done a week before the meeting to allow members time to read any papers.

‘Papers for tabling’ refers to the receipt of late papers or correspondence after distribution of the agenda and papers. These documents are distributed at the meeting following their approval by the chair.

During the meeting

In this stage the executive officer:

- arrives early to check the venue and equipment and any arrangements for hospitality
- brings additional copies of agendas and papers
- brings copies of any papers for tabling, for each member
- sits close to the chair to ensure effective communication about the business of the meeting
- accepts and organises documents for tabling
- records the meeting notes.

After the meeting

In this stage the executive officer:

- writes up the notes as soon as possible to ensure accuracy
- sends the notes to the chair for confirmation, as appropriate
- circulates the notes to all members and attendees as soon as possible
- contacts relevant members about actions if they did not attend the meeting
- follows up on action items close to the date of completion
- prepares any relevant correspondence for the chair prior to the next meeting
- starts preparing the agenda for the next meeting, using the notes and action sheet (if used) as a guide.

Some chairs are happy for the notes to go out without their approval and to make amendments as necessary. This is more efficient, but depends on the sensitivity of the matters discussed and the experience of the executive officer.

Maintaining records

The executive officer maintains the ongoing and complete formal documentation of the business of the committee or group. It is the responsibility of the executive officer to keep a copy of the final version of the agenda with papers and the notes in an accessible file that can be provided to the next executive officer, if required.

It is important that the executive officer and chair agree on the arrangements for maintaining these meeting records, either via electronic and/or hard copy archives.

If the committee or group has a SharePoint site, then the executive officer can maintain committee records via the site. See https://teamsites.unisa.edu.au/default.aspx for further information.

It is also useful for the executive officer to maintain an index of items discussed, which can be easily done by inserting headings from the notes into a spreadsheet and sorting by topic. This enables the executive officer to quickly find notes or papers on particular issues from past meetings.
Meeting notes

The notes are a permanent record of the meeting and provide evidence of decisions made and verification of the committee’s activities for audit purposes. The notes also confirm who is responsible for actions to be undertaken before the next meeting, provide a reference for people who did not attend the meeting and set the business for the next meeting.

Are there rules for taking notes?

There is no one correct method of taking notes of less formal meetings. While different groups will have different protocols for recording meetings, it is the preferred practice within the University to write brief and relevant notes of meetings other than for statutory committees. It is important for the executive officer to discuss with the chair before the first meeting, the preferred way of recording the discussion and the required level of formality.

Areas to ask the chair for advice about include:

- whether to use academic titles of members in the notes
- what acronyms can be used and which should be spelled out in the notes
- whether it is appropriate for the executive officer, as note-taker to offer opinions in the meeting.

Refer to UniSA Editorial Style Manual for guidelines on written communication. The Guidelines for documents recommends Council minutes as a benchmark for styles and conventions.

Many executive officers also make use of technology, by taking a laptop or portable device to the meeting and typing notes directly into a word document or template during the meeting.

Skills involved in taking notes

An executive officer needs to:

- listen actively
- think critically in order to decide what needs to be recorded
- write accurately and concisely in simple language.

The Organisational Development team offers several programs to further develop these skills.

What goes into the notes?

Firstly, the notes should contain the when, where and who of the meeting:

- details of the date and time of the meeting
- where the meeting was held
- names of those attending and apologies.

Depending on the formality of the meeting you may also need to include:

- late arrivals and early departures of members
- names of alternate members or proxies
- names of any other people in attendance to make a contribution
- people who came to watch the proceedings – often named as observers.

Secondly, when capturing the meeting discussion, the executive officer should take notes of significant points in the discussion and record the facts. The notes should focus on three main types of information:

1. key points or issues - a summary of the discussion
2. decisions made by the meeting
3. action items and who is responsible for them.
At times, the chair may direct the executive officer to record a particular point, comment or idea and the executive officer may also be asked to note down an item or issue for discussion at the next meeting.

To save time during the meeting; draw up a simple map of the seating arrangements or have a list of committee members that you can tick off and use the initials of people in your draft notes and then include their full name in the final version of the notes.

**A structure for meeting notes**

The notes summarise the main points of the discussion in keeping with the numbering of the agenda items, even if the discussion strays from this order.

A simple three-part structure can be used for recording discussion on an agenda item:

1. Introduce the subject by writing a statement such as:
   
   The chair referred members to the matter of….
   
   or
   
   Prof Black spoke to the tabled paper ….

2. Summarise the main points of the subject by writing a statement such as:
   
   The key points were as follows:… or the following questions were raised: …

3. Record the decision of the meeting with a statement such as:
   
   It was agreed that;… or The Committee noted the Report

The notes should then indicate if an action was determined, who is responsible for the action and in what timeframe.

A separate action sheet is one way of recording all the actions from the meeting. Alternatively, use a visual indicator in the notes to show what the actions are, such as using bold type. A summary of actions can also be included at the end of the notes.

**Distributing the notes**

Once completed, the executive officer distributes the meeting notes to each member of the committee, including those for whom apologies were recorded. The chair will determine whether anyone else should receive a copy of the notes.

Like the agenda, the meeting notes may be circulated in hard copy, via email or via a SharePoint site and as executive officer, it is important to confirm with the chair the preferred method of distribution. It is also important to check whether there are Unit or Division conventions about on-line access of notes for staff.

If the committee or group has a SharePoint site, meeting notes can be distributed via the site. See https://teamsites.unisa.edu.au/default.aspx for further information.

**Confidentiality issues**

The executive officer and chair need to discuss and agree how to address matters of confidentiality that arise in meetings and how these should be recorded.
Useful resources

Weblinks

Business Writing: Tips for Writing Minutes
www.businesswritingblog.com/business_writing/2006/01/tips_for_writin.html

Meeting Wizard: Effective Meetings
www.meetingwizard.org/meetings/taking-minutes.cfm

Resource centre:
www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/committee_members/index.asp

Text references


Leigh, J & Seely, J (2003) Organising and Participating in Meetings, One Step Ahead, OUP
University of South Australia

Meeting 1/04 of the Library Public Events Committee

9.30 am 23 January 2012

Committee Room, Library

AGENDA

1 OPENING
   1.1 Apologies

   1.2 Notes of the previous meeting 23 December 2011

2 BUSINESS ARISING

   2.1 Proposal for additional public events in semester 2, 2012

       Members to discuss the amended proposal for additional public events in semester 2, 2012
       (For decision)

3 FUND-RAISING 2012 (Subject for discussion)

       Special presentation about a cooperative venture by Ms D Smith, Project Officer, Adelaide
       City Council
       (For discussion)

4 MEMBERSHIP (Subject for discussion)

       Proposal to extend the Committee membership to include students
       (For decision)

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6 FUTURE MEETING DATE/S

7 CLOSE OF THE MEETING
University Council Meeting

The next meeting of the University Council will be held
from **12.00 noon (light lunch) for 12.30 pm to 2.30 pm on Thursday 12 May 2011**
in the Council Room, Level 5,
Hawke Building, City West Campus

**AGENDA C4/11**

**Present:**

**Apologies:** Dr Wendy Craik AM, Professor Rick Sarre

**In attendance:**

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<tr>
<th>ITEM 1</th>
<th>WELCOME</th>
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<tr>
<th>ITEM 2</th>
<th>PRESENTATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Presentation by Professor Peter Høj, Vice Chancellor and President on “Indigenous Employment, Education and Research at UniSA”</td>
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(Refer also to Item 5.1)

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<tr>
<th>ITEM 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Confirmation of Minutes of 14 April 2011</td>
<td>C-4/11-01 1</td>
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<td>3.2 Action Sheet</td>
<td>C-4/11-02 9</td>
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<td>3.3 Additions to the Agenda</td>
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<td>3.4 Starring of Agenda Items</td>
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<td>3.5 Unstarred items approved, endorsed or adopted as recommended</td>
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<td>3.6 Questions on Notice</td>
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<td>3.7 Notice of Conflict of Interest</td>
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<td>3.8 Feedback from Council Members</td>
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<td>4.1 Conferral of Awards</td>
<td>C-4/11-03 11</td>
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4.2 Correction of Award Conferrals C-4/11-04 13

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<th>REPORTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>★ 5.1</td>
<td>Report on Indigenous Employment, Education and Research at UniSA C-4/11-05 15</td>
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<td>★ 5.2</td>
<td>Vice Chancellor’s Report C-4/11-06 25</td>
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<td>★ 5.3</td>
<td>Academic Board Report C-4/11-07 41</td>
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<td>★ 5.4</td>
<td>Audit and Risk Management Committee Report C-4/11-08 53</td>
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<tr>
<td>★ 6.1</td>
<td>Finance Committee Report C-4/11-09 125</td>
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<td><strong>WEDNESDAY 15 June 2011 at 12.00 noon (light lunch) for 12.30 pm to 2.30 pm</strong> to be held in the Council Room, Level 5, City West Campus</td>
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University of South Australia

Meeting 1/04 of the Library Public Events Committee

9.30 am 23 January 2012

Committee Room, Library

RECORD OF THE MEETING

1 OPENING

1.1 Present: Dr A Smith (chair), Prof X Brown

   Apologies: Mr C White

   Alternate: Dr C Green (for Prof H Gray)

   In attendance: A/Prof B Black (for item 5)

   Executive officer: Ms S Jones

1.2 Notes of the previous meeting 23 December 2011

   The notes were accepted as an accurate record.

2 BUSINESS ARISING

Proposal for additional public events in semester 2, 2012

The chair referred members to the matter of increasing the number of events in semester 2, 2012. Key points raised included the potential financial benefits and opportunity to develop new community links. The meeting approved the proposal to increase the number of public events in the Library in semester 2 2012.

3 FUND-RAISING 2012

The chair introduced Ms D Smith, Project Officer, from the Adelaide City Council who made a special presentation about the cooperative venture previously agreed to be held in October 2012.

Members noted the tabled paper. The Committee agreed to continue the discussion of the venture at the next meeting.

4 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Prof Black addressed the proposal to extend the Committee membership to include students, and members agreed to it in principle. The following questions were raised:

- What would be the effect of additional members on the gender balance?
- Would the period of tenure for students be the same as for other members?
- Would students be nominated in time to represent the University at the Adelaide City Council Fair in March?
The Committee noted that the two nominations for students would include one male and one female. It was also noted that the period of tenure would be the same as for other members. It was agreed that more information was required about the timing of the nominations of students.

The Committee agreed to the proposal pending the executive officer obtaining information about the process of nominating students.

Action: Executive officer to contact the Student Union to clarify the process of nominating students to the Library Public Events Committee

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS
No items were raised for discussion.

6 FUTURE MEETING DATE/S
The chair confirmed the next meeting on 23 February 2012.

7 CLOSE OF THE MEETING
The chair closed the meeting at 11.00 am.
### University of South Australia

**Meeting 1/04 of the Library Public Events Committee**

9.30 am 23 January 2012

**ACTION SHEET**

<table>
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<th>Person responsible</th>
<th>Date for completion</th>
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<tr>
<td>4. Membership of the Committee</td>
<td>Ask Student Union to clarify process for student nominations</td>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
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**Reminders & items for information**

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**Actions**

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