

Guidelines: Committee and secretariat

Purpose

These guidelines provide a framework for good governance practices and secretariat support in the creation and management of committees and other bodies at the University.

Guideline

1. Governance and decision making at the Australian National University (ANU), in common with other Australian universities, is characterised by a strong emphasis on collegial advice and input. This occurs primarily through the work of committees which address policy or management issues defined by the terms of reference (or charter) of each committee.
2. The principal elements of our committee structure are:
 - * the governing body of the University, the University Council;
 - * seven committees of Council;
 - * the Academic Board and its specialist committees;
 - * senior executive committees advisory to the Vice-Chancellor;
 - * other University policy and management committees;
 - * an executive committee, an advisory body and other committees (e.g. education, research) in each ANU College; and
 - * service division committees.

Committee procedures

3. Unless otherwise specified in an establishing document, ANU practice is that committee procedures can be determined by the Chair taking into account the views of members. In many cases, written committee procedures will not be necessary and issues can be dealt with by the Chair and meeting as they arise. However, committees with a continuing life will benefit from procedures which deal with the following:
 - * periodicity of meetings and arrangements for calling special meetings;
 - * who chairs if Chair is unable to attend;
 - * ANU practise is for a quorum to be more than half of the committee membership;

- * admission of persons who are not committee members to meetings. Sensible practise allows for the admission of persons to assist the committee or to observe committee proceedings, with due regard to confidentiality;
- * arrangements for alternates for members; and
- * arrangements for the co-option of members.

Duties of the committee Chair

4. The role of the Chair is pivotal in ensuring that the committee operates efficiently and effectively. Chairs should ensure:

- * they are clear about the terms of reference (or charter) of the committee and its place in University governance or management;
- * with the advice of the members, appropriate meeting procedures are devised;
- * agenda items are consistent with the committee's terms of reference (or charter), authority and reporting lines;
- * agenda items are supported by clear and relevant background or explanatory documents;
- * discussion is facilitated, and where necessary moderated;
- * discussion is focused on the agenda item under discussion;
- * by way of summarising the discussion of an item, that the outcome of the discussion is clear to members and the secretary;
- * the membership of the committee represents a range of skill sets relevant to the work of the committee; and
- * the membership reflects as far as practicable the diversity of the campus community.

Duties of committee members

5. There are four categories of membership of committees:

- * ex officio, that is, the person is a member by virtue of his or her office being written into the membership of the committee;
- * elected by a constituency;
- * appointed by an officer of the University or a committee; and
- * co-opted by the Chair or committee to assist the committee.

6. Members contribute to the work of the committee by contributing in the following ways:

- * understanding the purposes, authority and reporting lines of the committee set out in its terms of reference (or charter);
- * taking the time to read agenda papers and attend meetings;
- * balancing their role as an advocate or representative of their constituency or area with the need to respect the larger purposes of the committee;
- * accepting from time to time individual tasks on behalf of the committee, such as drafting a discussion paper;
- * providing feedback to their constituency or area on the work of the committee as appropriate;
- * advising the committee secretary of absences from meetings or alternates; and
- * declaring any conflict of interest.

Duties of committee secretaries

7. The overarching role of an ANU committee secretary is to assist the Chair in ensuring that his or her committee functions effectively and efficiently. To this end a committee secretary should discuss with the Chair his or her expectations and requirements of a committee secretary. At an early meeting with the Chair of the committee, the question of committee procedures should also be discussed.

8. A committee secretary should be familiar with the terms of reference (or charter) of the committee and its place in area or University governance or management, be able to prepare concise and clear agenda and minutes and assist if required with the preparation of discussion papers and background documents.

9. Templates for agenda and minutes are available at the [ANU Identity Hub](#).

Pre-meeting tasks & agenda preparation

10. Give notice to members of the date, time and place of the next meeting, call for agenda items, advise the closing date for agenda items and return address for apologies.

11. Ensure meeting room is booked and that it has appropriate AV/IT facilities.

12. Check that carry-over items, reports on progress or outcomes from previous meetings will be available on time.

13. Monitor progress of preparation of discussion papers for the agenda.

14. Prepare the agenda after discussing the content of the agenda with Chair of the committee.

15. Familiarise yourself with the substance of agenda items and with University policies relevant to items on the agenda, particularly if the committee is a decision making committee, e.g. a staff [selection committee](#).

16. Circulate agenda and papers sufficiently in advance of the meeting so that members have time to read the papers.

Meeting & minutes

17. Arrive in time to set up the meeting room.

18. Check quorum and report apologies to the committee.

19. Record key items of discussion to provide a record of the flow of discussion and the key reason(s) for a decision being taken.

20. If a committee decision is not clear, ask the Chair to clarify the decision with the committee, preferably before dealing with the next item.

21. Offer information and advice to the Chair, or with the permission of the Chair, to the meeting.

Post-meeting tasks

22. Prepare the draft minutes for consideration by the Chair. ANU practice is to limit the content of minutes to recording background, the key points made during discussion, and then the formal resolution and/or action item. We do not normally attribute comments to individuals unless the committee agrees to such action or procedures allow, though practise is to record a dissenting view, vote or abstention if a member so wishes.

23. Prepare an action sheet and circulate it promptly.

24. If it is committee procedure to circulate the minutes of meetings prior to the agenda for the next meeting, this should be done as soon as practicable after approval by the Chair.

House-keeping

25. Maintain a diary of office terms and timelines for appointing or reappointing members.

26. Devise an appropriate induction process for new members of the committee.

27. Establish the scope of record keeping for your committee by consulting staff of University Records if necessary.

28. Ensure meeting dates are set and notified to members in good time.

Self-evaluation and reviews of committees

29. In line with good governance practice, Chairs are responsible for initiating periodic self-evaluation reviews of committee performance. These reviews provide an opportunity for members to reflect on the appropriateness of their terms of reference (or charter) and the effectiveness of their work as a committee. Questions that might be explored include the following.

- * Has there been adequate access to material, information and persons?
- * Has there been useful feedback to the committee from persons or bodies receiving its advice?
- * Has the committee been informed of internal and external developments relevant to their deliberations?
- * Have members had ample opportunities to contribute to the work of the committee?

30. As with members, Chairs have the right to provide appropriate feedback to their area on the work of the committee, and the obligation to declare any conflict of interest. A Chair of a continuing committee normally would be assisted by a committee secretary, subject to resources available in the area.

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