Records Management Guidance:
University Committee Records

1. Importance of Committee Records

Committee records provide evidence of the deliberations, decisions, goals, objectives and actions of a committee. They are often needed for future work and demonstrate accountability. In addition, the records of some committees have permanent historical value. They therefore need to be managed carefully.


The Data Protection Act (DPA) and Freedom of Information Act (FOI) apply to all types of committee records. This includes notes taken during meetings, draft agendas and minutes amended by hand, as well as any follow-up emails by any committee member. Therefore, it is important to ensure that all notes and drafts relating to committee work are securely destroyed once no longer needed.

3. Official and Unofficial Committee Records

3.1 Management

Official committee records are usually managed by the committee secretary, and should be retained in line with the University Retention Schedule. A detailed guide to committee servicing is being drafted by the Committee Services Unit.

3.2 Official Committee records should normally include the following:

- Terms of reference, constitution and membership
- Agendas
- Approved minutes
- A copy of reports and supporting documentation included with the agenda along with a copy of any papers tabled at the meeting
- Any associated correspondence where important information is shared or decisions are made that are not recorded in the other record types

3.3 Reserved and Unreserved Business

Most business of University committees will be unreserved but occasionally there will be a need to have a separate agenda and possibly a smaller group of people present (for example, student representatives or members of the public may not be admitted to this part of the meeting) to discuss reserved business such as confidential or commercially sensitive matters. Unreserved and reserved business often equates to agenda items being open or closed under FOI.

3.4 Open and Closed Items

FOI has a direct impact on the process of committee business and the maintenance of committee records. The University should aim to make the committee agenda and associated papers freely available for anyone who wants to see them. Key committees will be listed on the University’s publication scheme.

To achieve the maximum level of openness, at the same time as protecting the University’s confidential and reserved business, items should be classified as ‘open’ or ‘closed’ in terms of their FOI status. If an item is closed it should be noted on the agenda and in the minute, stating which FOI exemption it falls under, and if possible the expiry date. Note that this does not mean that an FOI request can be automatically refused. Such requests
should always be passed on to Legal Services. Also remember that the exemptions which mean an item is “closed” will fall away over time.

3.5 **General points for the composition of official committee records**

- Remember that all contributions, whether written or spoken, are recorded and will be circulated afterwards.
- Reduce or avoid the use of acronyms, as they can cause readers difficulty even within an institution. Since the introduction of FOI, minutes are now potentially accessible to anyone, and use of acronyms may lead to further requests for ‘translation’.
- Reduce or avoid the use of personal names. One of the functions of a committee is to share responsibility. Comments should only be assigned to an individual where there is a good reason for doing so. For example, if they are speaking in a formal or representative capacity, or if a member clearly disagrees with a decision and asks for their disagreement to be recorded.
- Refer to people by their job title rather than their name where possible. This is best practice under the Data Protection Act. It also gives those unfamiliar with the committee some context as to which capacity the contributors are speaking in. Committee members should be aware that their names may be published online.

3.6 **Retention of official committee records**

- **Avoid duplication and destroy records which are no longer needed.** As soon as the final versions have been approved, all draft agendas, minutes, papers and any notes taken throughout the meeting are no longer needed and should be destroyed. Be aware that any draft committee records which have not been destroyed would have to be released in the event of an FOI request.
- Correspondence to do with the dates of meetings, room bookings, apologies etc. should also be destroyed in line with the Retention Schedule.
- Committee records should be retained and disposed of in line with the University’s Retention Schedule. It is the type of committee and the content of its records which determines how long the records should be kept.
- **Master versions** should be stored in **electronic format** with appropriate access and security arrangements. In order to ensure the integrity of master records, access should be limited to those directly concerned with the business of the committees. Guidance on storage, naming conventions and version control is available here.

3.7 **Public Availability**

The publication scheme for minutes should make it clear when they will be made available via the web/intranet – typically this may be ‘one month after approval’, i.e. within one month of the next meeting, at which the minutes of this meeting will be approved.

3.8 **Unofficial committee records**

These are held by individual committee members, and should be retained only as needed for reference, in line with the University Retention Schedule. Notes taken by committee members may be helpful if the secretary needs to clarify the individual contributions to the discussion when compiling or checking the minutes. Notes are also useful reminders of individual actions to be taken, as it may be a few weeks before the minutes are approved and circulated. Committee members and attendees should destroy all unofficial records after use. For example, committee members should destroy their meeting notes as soon as they have completed their actions. Only the official committee records need be retained.

4. **Further Information**

Please follow the links below for further information on the following topics:

- [Guidance for Committee Servicing](#)
- [Legal Services Guidance on DPA and FOI](#)
- [The University Publication Scheme](#)
- [Records Management: storage and confidential disposal services](#)

If you have any other queries relating to University Committee Records, please contact Records Management and/ or the Committee Services Unit as appropriate.