

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Guidelines for Governance and Management Committees during COVID-19

Introduction

These guidelines have been developed to ensure the effective ongoing governance and management of the University during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. These guidelines should be adopted by all the following bodies:

- University Council and its sub-structure
- University Senate and its sub-structure
- Executive Board and its sub-structure

This document is intended as guidance on exercising governance and management functions, rather than as technical guidance for online platforms. It will be reviewed and updated regularly based on continuing need, participant feedback and emerging best practice.

Moving to holding all meetings remotely is a further challenge for both staff and members who are already rapidly adapting to other new ways of working. It could also be particularly challenging where meetings have a large number of participants. Please remember that this is a learning curve for everyone and that this guidance aims to make the transition as smooth as possible.

Please follow the guidance below and be patient with each other. Please also give yourself plenty of practice with relevant technology if it is unfamiliar to you.

Leadership Continuity Planning

All members of the University Senior Leadership Team (SLT) have identified two lines of resilience, in the event that they, or their deputy, are unable to perform their role whilst these guidelines are in force. These details are held corporately by the Planning Office and SLT members are required to inform the Planning Office if, at any point they are unable to work.

Governance Continuity Planning

All Committee Chairs have identified a Vice-Chair for their committee, group or board as notified to the Governance team. Committee Secretaries have also identified a Deputy Secretary as notified to the Governance team.

Committee Secretaries should, at all times, work from and save documents to appropriate shared digital spaces (normally the designated X drive location), in order that other staff in the support team can access documents.

Any additional meetings or changes in meeting dates should also be notified to the Governance Office ASAP to ensure the University Almanac remains updated.

It is recognised that staff are working remotely and may face different challenges in supporting their committee. Additional advice may be sought from the Governance Office on any aspect of governance activity during this time but please be aware that a response may not be immediate.

Key Principles for Business Handling

The following principles will continue to apply to business handling at this time:

- Whilst a meeting is often the most effective and efficient way to take decisions, it is not the only method. In this period Chairs and Secretaries should carefully consider whether a correspondence meeting (see attached guidance) may be more appropriate;
- Virtual meetings will be held using MS Teams by default*, or suitable alternative where not practicable, recognising that some external members may need to join by phone – IT Services will be able to advise on the most suitable options;
- Meetings should normally be a maximum of 90 minutes in length to ensure clear focus on urgent business for decision and to observe healthy working practices;
- Meeting frequency may need to be increased to reflect the fact that meetings will normally be shorter, and that there is likely to be a need for more rapid decision-making in the organisation;
- Committee quorum remains the same – if meetings are inquorate, minuted discussion can still take place but any items for decision must be circulated for approval; correspondence meetings will need responses from an appropriate number of members to be deemed quorate;
- Agendas should be triaged and appropriately structured to enable focus on matters for decision and/or consideration;
- The need for full written papers should be carefully considered against the nature of the business and its urgency;
- Deadlines for paper submission and prior circulation should be flexible but reasonable to allow members an appropriate amount of time to consider the business prior to the meeting;
- Papers will only be circulated electronically (via X drive or SharePoint) as staff do not have access to printing facilities whilst working remotely;
- Tabled items and items of Any Other Business should not be accepted unless there is a clear case for urgency, which must be approved by the Chair prior to the meeting;
- Key Points reports are acceptable rather than full minutes (examples available from the Governance Office), with the emphasis on clear recording of actions (with owners);
- Meetings must not be recorded.

Meetings Guidance

The Governance Office has produced detailed guidance on correspondence and virtual meetings (attached) for Chairs, Secretaries and all members/participants during this period. This guidance should be circulated or signposted to all concerned in advance of the next cycle of committee meetings.

This document can also be accessed on the [Committee Servicing website](https://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/covid19-meetings-guidance) at <https://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/covid19-meetings-guidance>

*Whilst Teams is technically secure and data is processed and stored on servers in the European Economic Area (EEA) only, it has only been approved for Public, Unrestricted and Restricted data sharing and discussions, not Highly Restricted. This is because there are potential risks around the way it is used. Some research contracts might exclude this specifically. If you have an operational need to discuss Highly Restricted information then IT Services recommends that you put together a document that specifies your processes and the exact nature of the information you will be discussing, then contact Information Assurance (IAS) ias@le.ac.uk who can review your specific use case with you.

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER
Meeting Guidance during COVID-19

Contents

- 1) Correspondence Meetings
- 2) Virtual Meetings – Guidance for Chairs
- 3) Virtual Meetings – Guidance for All Members/Participants
- 4) Virtual Meetings – Guidance for Secretaries
- 5) Further Support

1) Correspondence Meetings

Whilst a meeting is often the most effective and efficient way to take decisions, it is not the only method. All digital solutions will rely on users having strong broadband or telephone reception. This may not be the case for everybody and may prevent some users from participating fully or at all in some cases.

Chairs and Secretaries should therefore carefully consider whether holding a correspondence meeting (circulation of items by email) may be more appropriate.

- Agendas and meeting business or ‘for information’ items/presentations can be confirmed/published/circulated in the usual way (via SharePoint or email);
- Give clear instructions on what members should do and ask all members to acknowledge receipt of this communication;
- Items being considered by correspondence should be circulated to external members’ University email addresses only (for reasons of information security);
- Members can reply by email to confirm their approval or give their comments – via ‘Reply All’ to ensure that all members can see all responses, and to ensure that the Secretary can compile an accurate record of the correspondence meeting;
- Approvals should be monitored on a spreadsheet or similar for auditing purposes, and relevant numbers should be recorded in the event of a vote;
- Allow sufficient time for everyone to participate and be clear on the date and time by which members must submit their comments/responses;
- Encourage members to engage even if not expressing a view e.g. responding that they have read the paper(s), but have no particular comment(s) to make;
- After the meeting, Secretaries should confirm the decision/outcome with the Chair, then email the Committee to ensure that all members are aware of the confirmed decision/outcome and how the item of business progressed;
- If it was not possible to identify a clear consensus view – then the Chair or Secretary should inform the Committee that this was the case and explain what the next course of action will be e.g. discussion at the next meeting or re-drafting;
- Ensure that comments are collated and summarised in the minutes or key points report, which should be produced in the usual way and within the usual timeframe.

2) Virtual Meetings – Guidance for Chairs

Before the meeting

- Agendas may need to be set and approved more quickly than normal depending on the urgency of the business or the urgency of the need to hold a meeting
- Triage the agenda to ensure focus on items of urgent business and/or those where decisions are required
- Agree the most appropriate format for meeting notes – we suggest that during this time a report of key points and actions only should suffice
- Consider whether a short comfort break will be required during any meetings which will need to be longer than an hour
- Make sure you are familiar with your Chair briefing and go through anything which is unclear with your Secretary
- Hold a test session with your Secretary if you are unsure about how things might work

During the meeting

- Ensure that all participants introduce themselves when joining the meeting and ask all participants to identify themselves each time they begin to speak
- Ensure that you are able to see the Chat window and Raise Hand functions to keep track of questions and comments from participants
- Take time at the beginning of the meeting to :
 - o establish who is present (e.g. roll call) and whether the meeting is quorate
 - o check that members are comfortable with the technology, can hear/see appropriately
 - o check that members understand the purpose of the meeting (e.g. if it is to make one key decision) and are ready to proceed with the agenda
 - o advise if any agenda items will be taken out of order or will require further participants to join the meeting
 - o remind members of meeting etiquette (provided in your briefing and outlined for all participants below) – in particular using the Chat function to indicate questions and comments
- Use your Secretary to support you in the meeting e.g. keeping track of who would like to speak via Chat/Raise Hand, timings, focusing on items for decision or any other practical elements
- Follow the agenda and stick to meeting timings as far as possible – especially if some participants are joining for specific items
- Ensure presenters are succinct and that comments only refer to the item under discussion (even more important than usual)
- Provide regular checks so that all members know where they are and check whether there are any other comments before moving to the next item
- Encourage engagement from all participants – it may help to ask members to contribute in turn to ensure nobody is missed and everyone has a chance to contribute; address someone clearly by name if you wish to invite them to respond
- Make sure there are sufficient pauses after comments or questions – most systems have a slight delay on communication

Ending the meeting

- Provide a meeting recap
- Confirm that everyone is in agreement with next steps, responsibilities, and deadlines.

After the meeting

- Offer constructive feedback to your Secretary on areas for continuous improvement

3) Virtual Meetings – Guidance for All Members/Participants

Before the meeting

- External members should access University email accounts regularly to ensure they are receiving all updates and invitations; MS Teams meetings should also be joined via these accounts where possible
- Prepare for the meeting in the usual way by going through papers (which will only be available electronically) – make sure you will be able to follow the papers and watch the video screen at the same time, and that devices won't run out of battery mid-meeting
- To participate in a meeting, you need a microphone and speakers/earphones or a headset – use headphones with a microphone if you have them as these will make the meeting easier to manage with less background noise
- Aim to have tested your equipment and audio/video settings and joined the online meeting in good time – at least 5 minutes before it is scheduled to start
- If the connection quality is poor try to free up bandwidth by e.g. turning off wifi on other devices being used in the house/office, using an audio-only connection or switching to a wired connection if possible
- If using video remember to turn on your camera and microphone; position your camera so that you can be seen properly and not silhouetted against a bright light
- Please use the 'blur background' function (on MS Teams) and bear in mind that striped clothing and large jewellery can interfere with the picture quality; be professionally presented
- Mute your microphone until you are speaking; also mute other devices and close/mute any applications that might distract you or others in the meeting e.g. beeps from emails arriving
- If you are using a University computer disconnect from the VPN before joining an MS Teams meeting

Joining the meeting via MS Teams

- Join the meeting in a quiet space - background noise will accumulate across all of the devices and disrupt the meeting
- To join the meeting, simply select the meeting link in the Outlook calendar invitation. If you have the MS Teams app on your computer/device, select this option for the best quality. If you don't, either download MS Teams onto your device or select 'join on the web instead'.
- Connect your headset/earphones (if applicable)
- Test your settings (5+ minutes before the meeting is due to start)
- **Enable video** and check your camera angle
- Click on the three dots in the middle of the screen and select 'show device settings'
- **Check your speaker volume**
- **Check your microphone** (select the little symbol to unmute, speak to test, and re-mute)
- Mute your microphone (until you need to talk)
- Select 'join' - you have now joined the meeting

Presenting and screen sharing

- Screen sharing will be limited to those delivering a presentation only, and this will only be if it is absolutely unavoidable given the impact on the visual elements of the meeting
- If you need to share your screen during the meeting you will be notified in advance; please ensure you have practised how to do this before the meeting

- If you are presenting, please provide your materials to the Secretary in advance of the meeting if possible, refer to which slide you are on when presenting and keep to your allotted timeslot

During the meeting

- The meeting will not start until the Chair is in attendance and the meeting is quorate (if necessary)
- Consider muting your microphone when you are not speaking (but remember to turn it on when you are)
- Use the Chat or Raise Hand functions to indicate that you have a comment (the Chair and Secretary will monitor this) – if you're missed out, politely interject before the Chair moves on from the item or use the Chat function to alert the Secretary
- Identify yourself each time you speak (especially if you do not have a video connection) to assist with discussion and minuting
- Speak slowly and clearly, be concise and succinct; try not to interrupt and speak over others (but this is often difficult)
- Wait to be asked to speak by the Chair, or wait patiently for your turn to speak in an 'any comments/questions' situation

After the meeting

- Remember to 'leave' the online meeting!
- Be prepared to share any notes you prepared in advance, or take in the meeting, with the Secretary if requested (to support production of the minutes)
- Give feedback to the Chair and/or Secretary after the meeting on anything that has worked particularly well, or anything that is causing problems, to help with continuous improvement

4) Virtual Meetings – Guidance for Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries

Before the meeting

Supporting the Chair

- Ensure you are familiar with **all** the guidance in this document, not just this section.
- Committee Secretaries are also reminded of [existing committee servicing guidance available](#)
- Signpost this guidance document to Chairs/members/participants, and encourage them to follow it
- Agendas may need to be set and approved more quickly than normal depending on the urgency of the business or the urgency of the need to hold a meeting
- Support your Chair in triaging the agenda to ensure focus on items of urgent business and/or those where decisions are required
- Agree the most appropriate format for meeting notes with your Chair – we suggest that during this time a report of key points and actions only should suffice
- Consider having both the Secretary and Deputy Secretary join the remote meeting in order to ensure that full minutes are taken, that the Chair is supported and also for backup if there are any connection issues
- Chair briefings should include the following, as well as the usual information:
 - o approximate timings for items
 - o reminders to adjust chairing style for the remote meeting (e.g. inviting members to comment in turn)
 - o key meeting etiquette pointers for the Chair to outline to members at the beginning of the meeting (see section above)
- Plan to go through the briefing with your Chair prior to the start of the meeting - remind the Chair to use guidance set out for them above and set the tone for others at the outset of the meeting

Facilitating the meeting

- Set up your meeting as an MS Teams meeting which you 'own'/'host' and ensure you are familiar with how everything works in advance
- Consider holding a 'dry run' practice session with colleagues
- Hold a test session with your Chair if they require support or they/you are unsure about how things might work
- Offer practice sessions to other members if necessary (especially any external members)
- Ensure that the meeting link is only available to those it should be available to
- Secretaries/Deputies should join the meeting early to ensure that everything is appropriately set up and functioning as expected

During the meeting

Supporting the Chair

- Remind the Chair to take time at the beginning of the meeting to establish who is present, if the meeting is quorate etc (see Chair guidance above)
- Be prepared to support the Chair more proactively than you might otherwise e.g. keeping track of who would like to speak, timings, focusing on items for decision or any other practical elements

- Support the Chair in following the agenda and sticking to timings as far as possible – especially if some participants are joining for specific items
- Don't be afraid to ask participants to repeat themselves if you don't catch something

Facilitating the meeting

- Monitor the chat function for any questions or issues raised, interject to the Chair as appropriate
- Monitor participants leaving or joining partway through and/or anyone waiting in the 'lobby' to join the meeting (e.g. an item presenter)
- Monitor timings for items, and interject to the Chair as appropriate
- If your own connection is or becomes poor, flag this to a colleague or the Chair as soon as possible so alternative arrangements can be established (if possible)

After the meeting

- Remember that meeting decisions and actions may need to be circulated more speedily than usual if the business being discussed is of an urgent nature
- Produce minutes and action summary documents as usual, and within the usual timeframes
- Be ready to receive feedback on what did and didn't work well in the meeting, and act upon it
- Give feedback to the Governance Office on how things are going, and/or ask for support if needed

5) Further Support

Chairs or members/participants should contact their Secretary or Deputy Secretary directly with any initial questions.

Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries can contact the Governance Office for support via governance@leicester.ac.uk – please remember the Governance Office is also working flexibly in challenging circumstances.

For more information on using MS Teams to hold meetings, please see [internal MS Teams meeting guidance available](#) or [external MS Teams guidance available from Microsoft](#)

If you require technical support, please contact IT directly on 0116 252 2253 or ithelp@le.ac.uk

Governance Office

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