A. **Purpose and introduction**

1. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the preparation and presentation of University reports. This guidance is intended for authors preparing reports intended for submission to University committees (including Senate, Council and their sub committees), as well as those for consideration by senior University officers.

2. The guidance takes a best practice approach to report writing and encourages the use of a standard style and format – layout, font, numbering conventions, use of headings etc.

3. It is accepted that the standard style and format described in these guidelines will not necessarily be suitable in every detail for every type of report. For example, some of the standard headings may not be applicable or relevant to certain subjects, and if followed too rigidly, in such cases they may impair the flow of the report. Authors will need to adopt a commonsense approach in deciding whether to adapt or omit certain aspects of the recommended style and format in order to achieve ‘best fit’ with their specific report. If in doubt, authors are invited to seek further guidance from the Governance Office.

B. **Definition**

5. For the purpose of this guidance, the term “report” refers to systematic, organised documents which are prepared for consideration by a University committee or senior University officers, and are designed to address a specific subject, problem or proposal. Such reports commonly include the following features:

   a. A description of a sequence of events or facts.
   b. An evaluation of the significance of these events or facts.
   c. A discussion of whether these events or facts require actions or decisions to be taken.
   d. An assessment of the consequences of taking, or not taking, such actions or decisions.
   e. Conclusions.
   f. Recommendations.

C. **The importance of layout and style**

6. Basic aspects of a report’s layout and style can have a significant impact not just on its general ‘readability’, but also its ultimate value and effectiveness. A report’s recipients will need to understand clearly its purpose and significance. The layout and style provided in this guidance will allow recipients to recognise clearly a report’s topic, recommendations, key issues and risks/opportunities. Poor layout and report style run the risk of valuable time may be wasted as a

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1 For this reasons, committee secretaries are not expected to try to enforce compliance with all aspects of this guidance, or to refuse to accept any report which varies from the standard style and format. The only exception to this is that reports of more than four sides of A4 in length (excluding appendices) must be accompanied by a one-side cover sheet, as explained in paragraph 15.
consequence of a decision being deferred whilst a report is taken away to be rewritten and clarified.

7. The single most common problem with many reports is that information is not presented in a concise manner. As well as keeping conciseness in mind, report authors should avoid the following pitfalls:

   a. The purpose of the report has not been explained clearly. Why is it being presented, and what is it trying to achieve?

   b. The report has not said what the recipients are supposed to do with it. Do they simply have to note its contents, or are they expected to approve a recommendation contained in the report? For this reason, the report’s recommendation should be set out unequivocally at the beginning of the report.

   c. The full implications of a report’s recommendations have not been expressed clearly. What do they actually commit the University to do? Will any additional expenditure (or savings) be involved? If so when, and how much? What is the opportunity cost? Do the proposals carry any risks, or any implications for different equality groups?

   d. Any previous discussions associated with the report have not been disclosed. Has an earlier version of the report, or at least the same topic, already been discussed by another committee or considered by another senior University officer? If so, what was the outcome?

   e. The draft report has not been proof-read properly, and irritating mistakes have appeared in the final version.

8. This guidance specifies the house style for University reports, to help eliminate these common problems, improve consistency and achieve a minimum standard.

D. Basic features of the house style

9. The University’s house style for reports has the following basic features:

   a. Margins. 2.0 cm for top and bottom and 2.5 cm for left and right sides.

   b. Font. Calibri. Font size for the report title and committee name (if the report is submitted to a University committee) is 14 and, in bold, with the rest of the report in font size 11. Section headings should be in bold, not underlined.

   c. Paragraphs. All paragraphs should be numbered sequentially. If a paragraph requires sub-sections, avoid bullet points and instead use a., b., c. etc. for the first level and i., ii., iii. etc. for the second level.

   d. Spacing. Lines and paragraphs should be spaced at 12 pt, to open out the text and make it easier to read.

E. Basic features of an effective report

10. To be effective, a report must contain the relevant facts, analysis and evidence which support its final conclusions and recommendations. Report authors should bear in mind the following:

   a. The report’s recipient must be given the information that they need in order to be able to do what it is being asked to do.
b. Information that is not required for the main body of the report, but which may help the committee to further understand, it is best placed in an appendix (see section H for further guidance on the use of appendices).

c. The report should be broken down into logical sections, each with its own section heading, arranged in the order used in this guidance.

d. Report authors should use short, simple words with short sentences organised into short paragraphs. Plain English guidelines recommend that the most effective sentences contain on average 15-20 words. Individual paragraphs should normally not exceed 10 lines.

e. Charts and diagrams should only be included if they are necessary for the recipients to understand the report or make a key contribution to enforcing a particular point. Where charts and diagrams are used, these should be titled clearly and referenced in the report.

f. In the interests of economy, the University expects that all reports and their appendices will be produced in a format which is suitable for printing in black and white. Colour should not be used unless it is essential.

g. Many committee members and senior officers will not have time to read long reports, so include vital information only and use the minimum amount of space. A cover sheet is required for all reports of more than four sides in length, excluding appendices.

h. Before its first use, an acronym should spell out the words in full, followed by the acronym in brackets. The acronym can then be used for later references in the report – e.g. University Leadership Team (ULT) at first mention, thereafter ULT.

i. Report authors should stick to plain English and avoid jargon or gobbledegook.

F. Use of headings

11. The italicized headings in section I below are the standard headings for use in reports. They represent the University’s standard structure and they are arranged in the order in which they should appear.

12. It is possible that some of these standard headings may not be applicable in all reports. This may occur, for example, where the content and purpose of the report is so straightforward that it requires only a simple, very short report. Authors will need to judge the relevance of the headings carefully in each case. Where necessary, it is best to omit any redundant heading(s) rather than enter them as ‘not applicable’.

13. Equally, authors may use additional headings of their own if this adds to their report’s clarity and effectiveness.

14. A template for a standard report structure is given in the Appendix.

G. Report cover sheets

15. All reports of more than four sides of A4 in length (excluding appendices) must be accompanied by a one-side cover sheet. The purpose of the cover sheet is to enable the reader of a longer report to see quickly what the main report is about, what the committee is required to do with it, and whether there are any important timing issues attached to any decisions required of the committee.

16. A template for the one-side cover sheet is given in the Appendix.
H. Appendices

17. Authors may need to convey significant background information or lengthy documents in support of their report. Appendices should be titled clearly (Appendix A, Appendix B and so on) and must be referenced in the main report if used. Appendices should not be used to convey significant, new information, but can provide more in depth material/background information in support of the report.

I. Standard headings for committee reports

18. The standard headings to be used in committee reports are shown in italics and explained in the sections below.

Purpose of this report

19. This section should provide a concise statement of what the report is setting out to achieve.

Recommendation(s)

20. This is the most important section of any report, which should state clearly the recommendation(s) which the recipient is being asked to consider. Recipients should never be left to ‘guess’ what to do with the report. In most cases, unless they are is simply being asked to note the report, this will usually involve a recommendation for a certain course of action to be taken by or on behalf of the University. It should always state clearly what the recipients are being asked to do, for example:

   a. is it to comment on something in the report?
   b. is it to approve a recommendation in the report?
   c. is it to recommend something in the report for approval by a higher body?
   d. is it simply to note the report?

20. If more than one decision or action is required these should be listed out separately so that the recipients fully understands what is involved.

Background

21. This section should provide a short and succinct summary of where the report has arisen from. It should also confirm whether any of the matters addressed in the report have been the subject of previous discussions or decisions within the University, including whether the report (or a version thereof) has been considered by a University committee or senior officer.

Key issues

22. This section forms the core of the report and its purpose is to explain in more detail the key issues that the recipients are being asked to consider. It should set out the evidence and arguments for and against any proposed action(s) that the recipients are being asked to take. It should also explain any relationship between the subject of the report and the University’s strategic objectives or external policy/regulatory drivers. Sub-headings may be useful in this section.

Resource implications

23. This section should summarise the resource implications that flow from any recommendations that the recipients are being asked to approve. It is important that all projected costs or savings
are stated explicitly and that financial risks are being explored. It must be made clear whether the required resource is already accounted for and available (fully or only in part) in the relevant financial plan, and whether an additional allocation will be required.

**Risk factors**

24. This section should indicate whether any matters addressed in the report carry a significantly increased level of risk for the University – and if so, the steps that will be taken to mitigate the risk - or if they will help to reduce a risk identified on a previous occasion. Report authors may wish to consider risks related to the following areas and address how they have been addressed and which colleagues have been consulted therein:

   a. Legal.
   b. Students. Where a report’s recommendation is likely to have a significant impact on the student body, authors should state clearly how students have been consulted in the decision-making process.
   c. Public relations.

**Human Resources, including Equality implications**

25. This section should indicate whether due regard has been taken of any potential human resources-related, including equal opportunity, implications arising from matters addressed in the report. Some proposals, particularly those relating to policies, procedures, or delivery of services may require an equality impact assessment to be carried out. This section should include brief details of the outcome of such an assessment, and confirm whether any mitigating actions will need to be taken as a result. Further guidance on this area is available from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team.

**Social impact and sustainability**

26. This section should indicate whether due regard has been taken of any potential social impact and/or sustainability implications arising from matters addressed in the report. This section should include brief details of the outcome of such an assessment, and confirm whether any mitigating actions will need to be taken as a result.

**Timing implications**

27. There may have been an important reason why it was necessary for the report to be presented to this particular meeting. In addition, there may be specific timing implications attached to proposals in the report, such as where a failure to make a decision could result in a critical deadline being missed or an important opportunity being lost. Any such factors and their consequences should be drawn to the committee’s attention in this section.

**Conclusions and next steps**

28. This section should briefly recap the key issues explored in the report and, where appropriate, the conclusions and recommendations that arise from it. Recommendations should be described in a way that is clear and unambiguous, and they should also indicate to the committee where responsibility for implementing the recommendations will be located and what the next steps will be if the recommendations are approved.

29. And finally, all reports should end with the author’s first and last name (no personal titles to be used) and date.
UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

STANDARD TEMPLATE FOR REPORTS TO COMMITTEES

This template shows the standard layout that should be used for the preparation of reports for submission to University committees, Senate and Council.

The template is in two parts:

**Part A** is the template for the layout of the one-side cover sheet that must accompany all committee reports that are more than four sides of A4 in length (excluding appendices).

**Part B** is the template for the layout of the committee report itself.

Any queries regarding the use of these templates should be addressed to Neil Cox (nac1) or Vicky Harrison (vjh10) in the Governance Office.
UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

NAME OF COMMITTEE

Date of meeting

Title of Report

Purpose of attached report:

Summarise what the report is about and identify the key issue(s) arising from it.

1.

2.

3.

Decisions or actions required of the committee:

Explain what specific decisions or actions are required of the Committee arising from the report.

1.

2.

3.

Timing implications:

Identify any key deadlines arising from the report, and why it was necessary for it be considered at this meeting. If appropriate, explain why it is important for the Committee to make a decision at this meeting, and what will happen if a decision is deferred.

1.

2.

3.

Name of author (no personal titles to be used)
Job title/position of author
Date of completion of paper
E-mail and telephone contact details
PART B
TEMPLATE FOR MAIN REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

NAME OF COMMITTEE

Date of meeting

Title of report

The headings below are the standard section headings which should be used, as appropriate, in reports to University committees, Senate and Council. They are arranged in the order in which they should appear in the report, with general reminders as to what each section should contain. For more detailed advice please refer to the main document “Guidance for Writing Reports”.

Not all of the standard headings will be relevant to every type of report. In such cases it is best to omit the redundant heading(s), rather than enter them as ‘not applicable’.

Authors may use additional headings of their own choosing if this adds to the clarity and effectiveness of the report.

Purpose of this report

1. Provide a concise statement of what the report is setting out to achieve.

Recommendations

2. Clearly set out the recommendations and proposed actions arising from the conclusions reached by the report

Background

3. Briefly explain the background to the report and why it has been written.

Key issues

4. Explain in more detail the key issues raised by the report, and outline the evidence for and against any proposed actions.

Resource implications

5. Summarise any resource implications (costs or savings) that flow from recommendations in the report.

Risk factors

6. Identify any risks to the University that flow from the matters addressed in the report, and explain how these risks can be mitigated.

Equality implications

7. Confirm whether due regard has been taken of any equal opportunity issues arising from matters addressed in the report. Will any mitigating actions be required as a result?

Social impact and sustainability
8. Confirm whether due regard has been taken of any social impact and sustainability issues arising from matters addressed in the report. Will any mitigating actions be required as a result?

Timing implications

9. Explain why it was necessary for the report to be considered at this meeting. If the committee is being asked to decide something at the meeting, explain what will happen if the decision is deferred.

Conclusions

10. Provide a brief recap of the key issues explored in the report and the conclusions that arise from it.

Report Author: [Input first and last name and position/job title – no personal titles to be used, eg Mr/Ms/Professor/Sir]

Date of report: [Input date]