

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR COUNCIL COMMITTEES

Background

Council is responsible for the effective discharge of its legislated and common law duties as the governing body of the University of south Australia. In meeting its responsibilities, it is necessary for to carry out many of its functions through subcommittees. Council must ensure that the subcommittees operate effectively in pursuit of well communicated and understood goals, strengthening the effective operation of the Council itself. The following best practice guidelines have been established by Council to assist in the process of establishing and monitoring an effective subcommittee operation.

Overarching principles

Governance processes of the University will be enhanced by promoting thorough University, stakeholder, and community understanding of Council and subcommittee roles and operations. The effectiveness and accountability of subcommittees in performing their functions will be enhanced through the adoption of adequate planning and review cycles, business-like management of operations and regular reporting.

Formal Charter

Each subcommittee should have a formal charter. The charter is a 2-3 page document that contains the following information:

- Overall role and responsibility – In 2 or 3 sentences this is in effect a statement of strategic intent for the subcommittee
- Terms of Reference – Clearly stating the responsibilities and expectations of the Board for the subcommittee
- Membership – A list of all members, including details of University staff required to be In Attendance
- Meetings – Minimum requirements for the number of frequency of meetings should be specified
- Accountability – The charter should include reporting requirements for the subcommittee. This should specify the frequency of required reporting.
- Committee support – Where possible, a specific officer should be identified as providing executive officer support to the Chair of the subcommittee.

It is imperative that the formal charters are widely communicated and understood throughout the University. The charters for all of the subcommittees that underpin the University's governance structure must be easily accessible. It is the responsibility of the Council Executive Officer, to ensure that up to date Charter information for each subcommittee of council is in place on the University intranet.

Terms of Reference (ToR)

Terms of Reference should:

- Clearly distinguish between issues on which they are empowered to take decisions, and issues that must be remitted to Council
- Be reviewed regularly for continuing relevance.

Membership

The charter should identify the Chair, or specify the selection processes for the Chair. Generally, the Chair of a Council subcommittee should be an external member of Council.

Where elected or appointed positions are involved, standard terms of membership should be established. This should be implemented to ensure some continuity of membership where desirable.

Subcommittee members must be committed to the goals and business of the subcommittee, and consistent failure to attend must be addressed by the Chair. Annual reviews of subcommittee performance should include reviews of attendance.

Members must be fully briefed in the role of ToR of the subcommittee to assist their effective participation. Each subcommittee must consider the nature and extent of induction required for new members. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that appropriate induction of members takes place.

Good Practice Guidelines for Subcommittee Operations

Planning and review

Committees should set annual goals for its operations where appropriate. These should be referenced to its ToR and reported to Council. The planning should be informed by self review. Annual review reports should be submitted to Council that address each term of reference and how it was met by the subcommittee in the review period, as well as reporting on the attendance record of members.

Operational planning

Each subcommittee should have a forward work plan that identifies the expected flow of business and reports for the upcoming year. This will assist in the achievement of both the planned goals and the regular business of the subcommittee. It should also enable the Chair and Executive Officer to ensure that there is a spread of work for the subcommittee over the year and a spread of planned work across the relevant subcommittee ToRs.

Effective management

Some elements of good committee management practice are:

- Papers contain clear recommendations for consideration
- Papers follow standard Council conventions
- Electronic communications are used where appropriate
- Papers are issued with sufficient time for appropriate consideration and consultation
- Appropriate records management and archiving guidelines are followed
- An action sheet is prepared following each committee meeting
- Committee procedures suit the business of the subcommittee, and are not burdened by an excess of formality
- Draft minutes are produced promptly after the meeting
- Draft minutes are subjected to a content check by the Chair
- Draft minutes are subjected an editing check for accuracy