



University Recordkeeping Manual

Part Eight

MAKING RECORDS OF MEETINGS

Part 8 - Guidelines for making records of meetings at the University of Sydney

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Part 8 - Guidelines for making records of meetings at the University of Sydney

1. Preamble

Committees fulfil a vital role in the conduct of University business. The records generated by the many committees are amongst the most important in the University. They set policy, endorse procedure, guarantee rights and define responsibilities. The NSW State Records Act requires that the University maintain full and accurate records. These guidelines will ensure that the University's committee records are of the highest quality.

1.1 University committees

Committees in the University of Sydney range across a broad spectrum of types of decision making and deliberative bodies, including:

- Senate
- Academic Board
- Faculty/College Boards
- Boards of Studies
- Standing Committees of any of the above
- Sub-committees, working parties, ad hoc or other committees of any of the above
- Committees of the administration or management
- Foundation/Centre/Institute boards or other bodies
- Forums/general staff meetings

The nature, style, format and content of the records of these various types of bodies will vary in accordance with their terms of reference, formality, authority, and membership.

2. Records of University committees

The diversity of University committees notwithstanding, key records that support and facilitate the conduct of their business may be identified. These are:

- agendas
- agenda papers
- minutes
- reports
- decisions pages

The above records of meetings must be made and kept in accordance with these Guidelines and with the University policy on making and keeping records (see Part 1 of the Recordkeeping Manual).

3. Recordkeeping issues

All agendas, minutes and papers created by or for any committee in the University are covered by the NSW *State Records Act 1998* (the Act). They must be managed in accordance with the University's Recordkeeping Policy¹ and the Act.

Specifically, the *Standard on Full and Accurate Records* issued under section 13 of the Act requires the University to ensure that records should be made, maintained and managed systematically. This *Standard* also requires that recordkeeping should be managed through an identifiable records management program.

In the University, compliance with the *Standard* with regard to committee meetings will be achieved by ensuring the original records created by all formally established committees are captured into the recordkeeping systems maintained by Archives and Records Management Services. The minutes and agenda papers of Senate and the Academic Board, and their subsidiary committees, are transferred directly to the University Archives. The minutes and agenda papers of other committees should be captured on a file maintained by Records Management Services (RMS). (See Part 2 of the Recordkeeping Manual).

It should be noted that the systems operated by RMS limit access to files where necessary.

RMS has the capability to manage electronic as well as hardcopy records. Contact should be made with RMS regarding the establishment of appropriate committee files:

E-mail: rms@rms.usyd.edu.au

Phone 9351 2213

Fax: (02) 9351 4173

4. The Agenda

4.1 Format

The agenda for a meeting may be informal or formal in style and format. It might be in a format as simple as a memorandum or it might be in a more structured format, such as the format in place for Academic Board agendas (see <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/ab/docs/docs.html> for an example of this format).

¹ <http://www.usyd.edu.au/arms/rms/policy.htm>

4.2 Content

The agenda, in any style or format, normally contains certain basic information which is designed to facilitate the body's deliberations by letting members (and others) know what is to be discussed, and recording:

- time, date and place of meeting;
- contact person for inquiries / apologies;
- the purpose (business) of the meeting;
- a record of persons to whom the agenda has been distributed (members/others).

In addition, and for all bodies which meet either on a regular basis or at least more than once, the minutes/notes/record of the previous meeting must be included with the agenda.

Normally, the agenda will include as Appendices any relevant information to assist the body in its deliberations, such as reference material, reports and proposals, and it may include recommendations for consideration.

In a pared down form, a 'typical' formal agenda will look something like the outline shown at **Appendix 1**. A body's terms of reference, relationships with other bodies and past practices will drive, in the main, the content of 'typical' agenda items of business, 4 and 5. Supporting documents should be included with the agenda and adding page references/electronic links to reference documents, facilitates members' navigation of the agenda, as does identifying each page of a reference document with a meeting-specific header.

4.3 Other issues

Agendas are prepared and issued by the Secretary of a committee, or, for a less formal group, a person identified by the Chair or by group consensus.

The content of an agenda must be confirmed in advance with the Chair.

Agendas should normally be issued one week in advance of the relevant meeting.

Agendas may contain 'starred' and 'unstarred' items. Starred items are for discussion at the meeting; unstarred items are noted, adopted, approved, etc., in accordance with the relevant recommendation, without discussion.

In committees where the practice of starring is in place, additional agenda items may be starred at the meeting by members.

The practice of starring items is normally required only for large agendas where business may not be completed in a reasonable period of time if every item were to be discussed.

5. Agenda papers

5.1 Keeping versions of papers

Documents may be presented to a committee to assist it in making a determination or agreeing/approving a proposal. Documents may be reference material, reports, submissions, proposals, etc. Typically, a report, proposal, or submission will have been through various drafts and versions before it reaches a committee for consideration, and it may continue to be in a state of change until it is approved or adopted.

The originator or 'owner' of any such document is responsible for ensuring that successive drafts are kept to provide adequate evidence of the process of the document's development. Once the document has reached the final approval stage, the committee secretary or equivalent must ensure the final approved document is annotated as such and kept as the 'final' record. Each version should be clearly identified and dated so that its place in the process is apparent.

5.2 Other issues

In some cases, and subject to the agreement of the Chair, agenda papers may be issued slightly after the agenda, in which case the agenda should show that the paper is 'to follow'.

Only in URGENT cases may late papers be tabled at a meeting, and only with the concurrence of the Chair.

The purpose of an agenda paper is to facilitate the making of a decision by a group of people. Accordingly, it needs to contain relevant information on which a decision may be based. The paper should:

- introduce the issue;
- provide the background and history;
- outline the main options; and
- propose a resolution.

6. Minutes

6.1 Minutes as record

Any decision taken by a committee must be adequately documented. Minutes or notes of a meeting, together with any related paper(s) circulated with the agenda, normally constitute adequate documentation.

6.2 Content

Minutes are a clear and concise record of a meeting. The items in the minutes match the items in the related agenda. Papers are not normally attached to minutes for circulation, unless they were tabled at the meeting. In this case the papers may not relate to an item on the agenda and not all members might have a copy. For the record, such tabled papers should be

attached to the minutes and the appropriate item in the minutes should refer to them.

Minutes provide a record of a committee's deliberations and enable the committee to keep track of its business. They allow any other authorised person track the committee's business and provide a key element in the accountability process.

Because minutes of meetings form part of a series (of minutes), a clear picture of a committee's deliberations can be shown over a period of time.

6.3 Key elements

The minute on any item that has been discussed at a meeting must contain:

- background information to set the scene, e.g. The Committee considered a proposal prepared by a working party and circulated with the agenda.
- key issues raised.
- conclusions reached.
- a resolution that details: what is agreed; what happens or must be done next; who is responsible; and any key date or deadline.

Note that where an item has not been discussed, the minute should duplicate the agenda item.

Minutes of a meeting must include an item of text on every agenda heading, and the text on each item should:

- flow logically, be expressed simply and clearly, be accurate and contain no spelling, grammatical or typographical errors;
- conclude with a clearly stated decision, in the form of a resolution, where a decision has been reached;
- be a stand-alone item which can be read and understood by anyone at any time, not just the Secretary or committee members.

6.4 The role of the Chair and the committee

The Chair of the committee should be consulted by the Secretary about any items that are not clear to the Secretary or which are sensitive and need to be worded carefully.

While the Chair is expected to authorise the circulation of the draft minutes, responsibility for endorsing the minutes as an accurate record of a meeting rests with the committee itself. The committee also has the opportunity to comment on the accuracy of the minutes, and, subject to a consensus being reached, to amend the minutes.

6.5 Amending minutes

Where a committee agrees at a meeting to amend the minutes of the previous meeting, the committee Secretary must record the amendment in the minutes of the meeting at hand, and also must mark the change(s) on the original

minutes of the previous meeting, signing and dating the changes for the record

6.6 Signing minutes

When a committee has agreed its position on the minutes of the previous meeting, they must be signed immediately by the Chair. That signed copy, printed on archival quality paper², must be held for the record.

Where the committee maintains its records electronically, either distributing electronic documents by e-mail or via a web site, a copy of the minutes must be supplied to Records Management Services for capture into the University's central recordkeeping system. To ensure the integrity and authenticity of the electronic records they should be converted to PDF and/or digitally signed.

6.7 Other issues

Minutes are prepared and issued by the Secretary of a committee, or equivalent.

The content of minutes must be confirmed with the Chair before they are issued.

Unless there is an alternative procedure in place to advise members and others of items, for information or action (see 'Decisions pages', below), the minutes should be issued within one week of the relevant meeting.

7. Reports from Committees

7.1 Purpose and content

Reports have a different purpose to minutes. Report items spell out clearly a committee's views and recommendation on a matter. Some items may need to include more background information because the receiving body will not be as *au fait* with the issue as the reporting committee.

A report item might be a synthesis of several minutes on a particular item recorded over a period of time from a succession of meetings. Report items are often supported by an accompanying paper. A report may have several Appendices.

Other items in a report may briefly describe the 'Proceedings' of the committee. These may be considerably briefer than the matching minute item when they relate to matters still under consideration by the committee. These brief reports on Proceedings are designed to keep the host body informed of the committee's progress.

² Advice regarding suitable papers should be sought from the University Archives on ext. 12684.

7.2 Other issues

Reports are prepared by the Secretary of a committee and must be approved by the Chair prior to being referred for inclusion in the agenda for the 'host' committee's meeting.

8. Decisions pages

A 'decisions page' is an extract from the minutes which is referred to those persons who need to be aware of or take action on a decision taken by a committee. In this University, decisions pages are distributed shortly after meetings of Senate and the Academic Board and well in advance of the distribution of the minutes themselves, which are circulated with the agenda for the next meeting.

An example of an Academic Board decisions page is shown at **Appendix 2**. Decisions pages record part of the business of a committee and must be kept. Decision documents in different formats (memoranda, e-mail etc.) should also be kept on the relevant file.

A TYPICAL AGENDA

KEY ELEMENTS

Name of committee

Secretary / Contact details

Date / Time / Location of meeting

1. Apologies (if appropriate)
2. Minutes of previous meeting
3. Business arising from the minutes (not dealt with elsewhere)
4. Other items of business
5. General business (or any other business)
6. Next meeting

Distribution



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Decisions of the Academic Board meeting of 15 November 2000

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File 023/0007/00001

The attached report had been circulated, and the Board resolved as follows:

14. General Business



14.1 Semester and vacation dates, 2001-2006

The Alternative Chair spoke briefly to the report and outlined the various factors reflected in the drafting of the proposed semester and vacation dates.

Resolution 317/00

That the Academic Board approve:
Summer Session dates for the years 2001-2002, as set out in the report presented; and
semester and vacation dates for the years 2003-2006, as set out in the report presented.

Erica Ring
Academic Board Officer
22 November 2000

AGENDA ITEM 14. General Business

14.1 Semester and vacation dates, 2001-2006

The Board is asked to approve the proposed semester and vacation dates for the years 2003 to 2006 inclusive as set out below. The schedule has been prepared in consultation with the Enrolment Working Party of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (VCAC) and the Director of the Planning Support Office.

The 2001 and 2002 dates, that were previously approved by the Board, are also set out below. The Board is asked to approved the Summer Session dates that have been added to these dates.

The proposed schedule for 2003 to 2006 has taken account of the following factors:

The schedule reflects the resolution of the Academic Board, at its meeting in February 2000, that the Board work towards establishing an academic year comprising two semesters, each consisting of 13 weeks, followed by a one-week student study period and two weeks for formally scheduled examinations.

The extra two weeks provided by the reduction of the traditional 14-week teaching periods to 13 weeks have been utilised as follows:

First Semester commences one week later than has been the tradition. (In accordance with the recommendation of the AVCC, First Semester has traditionally commenced on the Monday nearest to 1 March. The schedule has been prepared with First Semester commencing on the Monday one week later than the Monday nearest to 1 March.) This allows an extra week for Summer School activities.

Second Semester ends one week earlier, which enables earlier processing of honours results and scholarships ranking.

The period of formal examinations has been reduced to two weeks from 2003. There are strong indications that the Academic Board's new examination policy, combined with a reduction in the number of units of study and changing assessment practice, will allow this reduction. If an extension of the allocated two weeks is required, this will be authorized by the Registrar in consultation with the Chair of the Academic Board.

The traditional three-week break has been retained between the commencement of the AVCC Common Week at the end of First Semester and the commencement of Second Semester.

(5) While Easter and AVCC Common Week dates have been confirmed for 2003-6, some public holiday dates beyond 2002 have not yet been proclaimed and estimates have been used (indicated by a "?").

	2001	2002
Summer Session		
Summer School lectures begin	Tuesday 2 January	Wed 2 January
Summer School ends	Friday 23 February	Friday 1 March
First Semester		
Lectures begin	Monday 26 February	Monday 4 March
AVCC Common Week/ non-teaching Easter period	Friday 13 April to Friday 20 April incl	Friday 29 March to Friday 5 April incl
Study Vacation	Monday 11 June to Friday 15 June incl	Monday 17 June to Friday 21 June incl
Examination period (2 weeks)	Monday 18 June to Saturday 30 June incl	Monday 24 June to Saturday 6 July incl
Semester ends	Saturday 30 June	Saturday 6 July
AVCC Common Week/ non-teaching period	Monday 2 July to Friday 6 July incl	Monday 8 July to Friday 11 July incl
Second Semester		
Lectures begin	Monday 23 July	Monday 29 July
AVCC Common Week/ non-teaching period	Monday 24 September to Friday 29 September incl	Monday 30 September to Friday 4 October incl
Study Vacation	Monday 5 November to Friday 9 November incl	Monday 11 November to Friday 15 November incl
Examination period (3 weeks)*	Monday 12 November to Saturday 1 December incl	Monday 18 November to Saturday 7 December incl
Semester ends	Saturday 1 December	Saturday 7 December

* The examination period has been reduced from three to two weeks since the publication of these dates.
