



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

SENATE COMMITTEES' MEMBERS' GUIDANCE

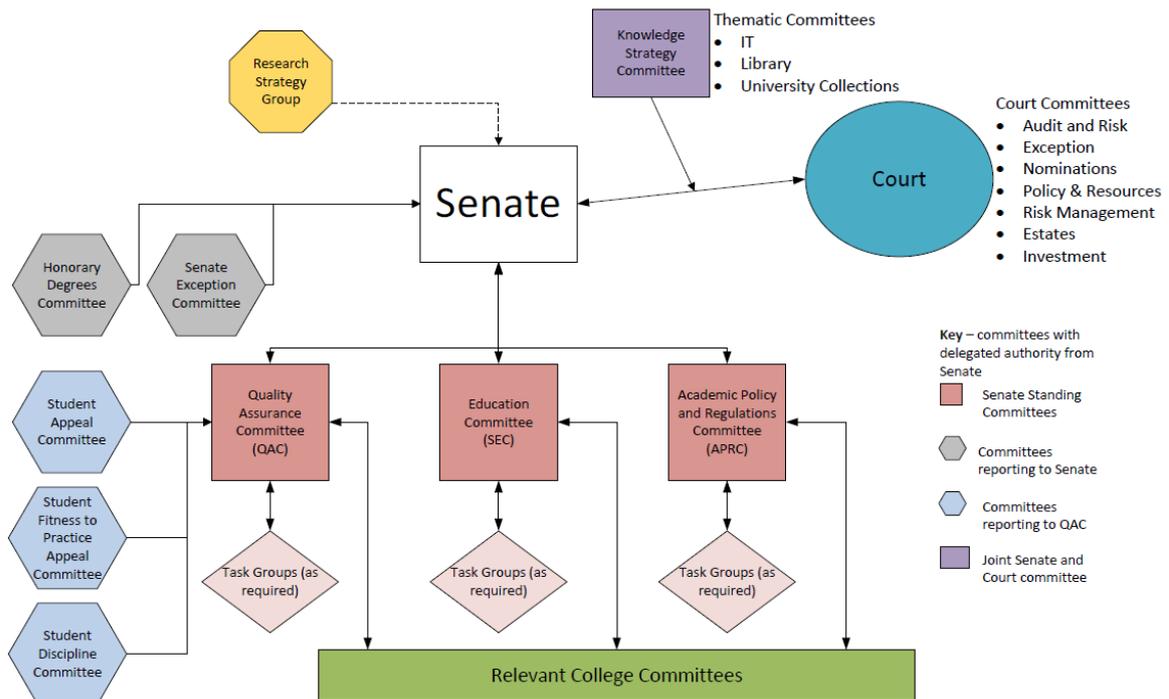
December 2022

Academic Services

INTRODUCTION

This guidance has been developed for members of the Senatus Academicus (Senate) Standing Committees. As members of the University's senior academic governance committees, you play a very important role in supporting and enhancing the academic work of the University, and ultimately the student experience.

Committee Structure



TYPES OF MEMBER

The membership of each committee is detailed in its terms of reference (*see below*). There are different types of committee member:

Ex officio member: a member of a committee by virtue of their position.

For example, the College Deans of Quality (or equivalent) are ex officio members of Quality Assurance Committee; Edinburgh University Students' Association Vice-President Education is an ex officio member of Education Committee.

Member with specific responsibilities: a member appointed to a committee because they have responsibility for a particular, relevant area.

For example, the Colleges shall each nominate two senior members of staff within the College with responsibility for learning and teaching.

Co-opted member: a member selected because of their expertise in a particular area. Co-opted members do not usually represent a specific constituency, and normally serve for a fixed term.

For example, up to two additional members may be co-opted onto the committee by the convener depending on the expertise required (members will normally serve a three year term).

Senate Representative: each standing committee includes on its membership three elected, academic members of Senate (where possible one from each College).

External member: a member appointed from out with the University. (At present, Quality Assurance Committee has an external member). These members bring relevant skills and experience to the committee along with an external viewpoint.

For example, the Committee shall appoint an external member from the Scottish Higher Education system with experience in quality assurance matters to join the membership of Quality Assurance Committee.

In attendance: the convener may invite individuals for specific meetings or agenda items. Individuals who are “in attendance” at a committee meeting are not members of the committee.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS’ ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All Members

All members of the committee are expected to:

- be clear about the functions of the committee as prescribed in its terms of reference.
- uphold the "seven principles of public life" - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership:
www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/GaSP/Governance/CourtMembersCode.pdf
- be collegial and constructive in approach.
- attend all meetings and participate fully in the work of the committee and its task groups.
- take collective and individual ownership for the issues under the committee’s remit and for the discussion and resolution of these issues. (In taking ownership of the work of the committee, members must ensure that they are empowered to take decisions on behalf of academic and managerial colleagues.)
- be committed to communicating the work of the committee to the wider University community.
- assess the impact of proposed new or revised policies and practices on the ‘protected characteristic groups’ set out in the Equality Act 2010: www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/impact-assessment

Convener

The convener must ensure the effective conduct of the committee (within the terms of reference). They should ensure that business is being progressed and facilitate meaningful discussion and sound decision-making.

Convener’s Action

There are occasions on which non-contentious decisions that cannot wait until the next meeting of the committee are required. These can be dealt with through ‘Convener’s Action’ and reported at the next meeting of the committee. If urgent consideration of more contentious matters is required

between meetings, the convener will consult committee members before making a decision (where it is practicable to do so).

Committee Member

The role of the committee member is to contribute effectively to the business and outcomes of the committee, and to represent their constituency. Full participation by all members is paramount to the success of the committee.

In general, those who are representing a particular constituency are College, Students' Association or Senate representatives. As representative members, they are a conduit between the committee and their constituency. Two-way communication is extremely important in supporting the work of the committee: it will ensure that the views of staff and students across the University are taken into account and that important developments are disseminated.

Although other committee members may not necessarily represent a particular constituency, all members have a responsibility to disseminate issues appropriately and to bring relevant matters to the attention of the committee.

(Appendix 1 provides additional guidance on consulting stakeholders on learning, teaching and student experience matters.)

Students' Association Representative

The student voice is greatly valued by the University. All Senate committee memberships therefore include student representation through the Students' Association. Students' Association representatives are a link between the committee and the student body and should therefore report back on and discuss committee business in relevant student forums.

Students' Association representatives may be asked by the convener to provide information on the student opinion in relation to a particular issue. If it is not possible to do this at the meeting, representatives should follow this up outside of the meeting by consulting further and reporting back.

Committee Administrator

The role of the committee administrator is to support the effective operation of the committee (in accordance with the terms of reference). This involves liaising with and guiding the convener and committee members, creating and maintaining committee records and communicating outcomes.

NEW MEMBERS' INDUCTION

New committee members will be invited to meet the convener and committee administrator shortly before their first meeting. They may wish to use this opportunity to find out what will be expected of them as a committee member; about the background and recent work of the committee; and about the priorities and strategic direction of the committee. Academic Services staff will be available to provide ongoing advice and guidance on the academic governance framework if required.

Students' Association representatives receive meeting training from the Students' Association during their induction.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of reference describe the purpose and structure of a committee. Typically they contain the purpose and role; the remit; operation; composition; and responsibilities of committee members. The powers and responsibilities of the committee as recorded in the terms of reference are delegated from Senate. It is therefore vital that Senate committees operate within their remit and operational arrangements.

Terms of reference for all Senate committees are available on the Academic Services website: www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees

PREPARATION OF COMMITTEE DOCUMENTATION

Agendas

These are prepared by the committee administrator, in consultation with the convener. In advance of each meeting, the committee administrator will ask members if they have items they would like to add to the agenda.

Papers

These can be prepared by committee members or by any member of the University community with an issue they would like the committee to discuss. Paper authors are required to:

- submit papers to the committee administrator at least **10 days in advance of the relevant meeting**. (Committee secretaries circulate papers 7 days before the meeting and the additional 3 days are required to check and compile papers.)
- use the template at [Committees | The University of Edinburgh](#) to ensure that the paper produced is concise, clear about the action that needs to be taken by the committee and includes an analysis of resource implications, including implications for staff workloads.

Minutes

These are prepared by the committee administrator and include a clear record of action to be taken following the meeting.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMITTEE DOCUMENTATION

Committee documentation is circulated electronically by the committee administrator, usually by uploading it to the Academic Services' website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees>, 7 days before the meeting. This is in line with sector best practice and ensures transparency of committee business.

Open papers are papers that can be accessed by all and are published on the Academic Services' website. The default position is that papers are open.

Closed papers (confidential papers to which Freedom of Information or Data Protection exemptions apply). Closed papers are only used when it is essential to do so. The author must provide a clear rationale for closing the paper. All closed papers are emailed separately to committee members. Senate members who are not on the relevant committee may also request access to these papers. In some cases, it may be necessary for Academic Services to redact them (eg. to remove personal information for Data Protection reasons) before circulation to Senate members. Where redaction is necessary, Senate members are provided with a reason for the redaction and a summary of the redacted information to allow consideration of any matters relevant to Senate's oversight role.

Reserved business is business which, for reasons of confidentiality, is not discussed by the whole committee. Reserved business papers are emailed separately to those members of the committee who are entitled to receive them. When these papers are discussed at the committee meeting, those who are not entitled to be part of the discussion are asked to leave the meeting.

Oral reports given at meetings must be summarised in detail, either in the minutes or via a supplementary paper following the meeting. The summary must include enough detail to allow readers to understand and engage with the matter discussed during the meeting. As such, it is generally more efficient and transparent for authors to provide papers if they wish to update the committee on substantive issues, and only to use oral reports for less substantive issues.

Further guidance on Freedom of Information, Data Protection and records management is available at www.ed.ac.uk/records-management

(Please note that Committee Members' notes could be subject to a Freedom of Information request. It is therefore good practice for members to dispose of any notes once actions are complete and to dispose of any papers after the meeting.)

COMMUNICATION OF DECISIONS

As stated above, committee members have a responsibility to communicate decisions to the constituency they represent. Academic Services uses the 'Senate Committees' Newsletter' to communicate developments to stakeholders. The most recent Senate Committees' Newsletter is available at www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/newsletter

At the end of each academic session, Academic Services publishes a list of all significant changes to regulations, policies and codes, and brings them to attention of staff: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/new-policies. Academic Services is happy to assist with communicating and implementing Senate committee decisions, for example by holding briefing meetings for relevant stakeholders, or introducing items at School or College committee meetings.

The equality impact of any significant changes to regulations, policies and codes must be assessed: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/monitoring-statistics/impact-assessment>

TASK GROUPS

The work of the Senate committees is supported by limited-life task groups. All task groups have a 'parent' Senate committee through which they formally report. The 'parent' Senate committee assigns each task group a specific body of work which is outlined in a remit and membership document. Task group members need not necessarily be committee members. Since tasks groups are limited-life, members are expected to contribute effectively to support the work of the group, which will likely be fast-paced. All task group reports must include a communication and implementation plan.

(Further guidance on planning Senate committee task groups is available as Appendix 2.)

USEFUL CONTACTS

Academic Services has ultimate responsibility for the operation of the academic governance framework which includes the committee arrangements. Further information about each committee can be found on its webpage:

Education Committee

Committee Administrator: Philippa Ward

Email: Philippa.Ward@ed.ac.uk

Website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/education>

Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

Committee Administrator: Olivia Hayes

Email: Olivia.Hayes@ed.ac.uk

Website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/academic-policy-regulations>

Quality Assurance Committee

Committee Administrator: Sinead Docherty

Email: Sinead.Docherty@ed.ac.uk

Website: www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/quality-assurance

In the absence of any of the above named individuals, please direct your query to: academicservices@ed.ac.uk

ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTING WITH STAKEHOLDERS ON LEARNING, TEACHING AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE MATTERS

1. Senate and the Senate Committees can adopt the following approach when consulting Schools, Colleges, students and other stakeholders about changes to strategy, policy or procedure on learning, teaching and student experience matters. Central Management Group approved these principles and standard practices at its meeting on 1 March 2017.

Key principles

- Senate and the Senate Committees should make their decisions on the basis of a proper understanding of the views of relevant stakeholders, while recognising that, given the diversity of the University's academic community, effective consultation processes will not always lead to consensus.
- The nature of consultation activities should be proportionate to the scale of change that is being proposed and the likelihood of it proving contentious.
- Given the scale and diversity of the University, consultation arrangements will always rely predominantly on individuals with leadership or representational roles in Colleges and Schools representing the views of their constituencies and having authority to make decisions on their behalf on task groups and committees.
- All task groups on issues with direct implications for the student experience should include Student Association representatives.
- When consulting on issues which have an impact on staff, Senate Committees and task groups should recognise the University's commitment to working in partnership with its trade unions and its obligations to consult and negotiate as appropriate.
- Once a consultation process has concluded and a decision made, it is important to provide feedback to those stakeholders who have engaged with the consultation processes.

Approaches to consultation

2. The attached Annex sets out a table with a range of possible approaches that Senate or a Senate Committee could take to consultation on a particular issue. In general, the more significant or contentious the proposal development, the more of the elements further down the table the consultation processes would need to involve. The Annex is indicative, and a degree of judgement will be required regarding the approaches to consultation required for each development. It is unlikely that any consultation process, however significant and contentious the development, would require all the approaches set out in the Annex.

Practical issues regarding the operation of consultation processes

3. Consultation processes – and particularly those lower down the table in the Annex – can be very onerous, both for the staff leading and supporting them, and for the stakeholders engaging with them. For some issues, it is not clear how contentious the proposals may be (and therefore how deep the consultation is required to be) until after the event. This uncertainty could lead colleagues to over-engineer consultation processes in order to avoid the risk of being accused of inadequate consultation. Were this to happen, the number of different developments that the Senate Committees could take forward would be unnecessarily constrained. As such, it is important to make a balanced judgement regarding the level of consultation.

4. The Senior College Academic Administrators, in consultation with their Deans, will take responsibility for selecting their Colleges' representatives on task groups.

Issues with a staffing dimension

5. Given the University's increased interest in issues such as developing robust evidence on the quality of teaching, and recognising student education as a key element in our staff recruitment, promotion and annual review processes, it is likely that some of the issues that Senate and its Committees address in the coming years will involve close interaction between academic and employment policy. When determining appropriate approaches to consultation on these issues, it will be important to establish at the outset whether advice and guidance is required from People Committee and what input and sign-off is required from Central Management Group and/or other relevant Court Committees with responsibility for employment policy matters.

6. When consulting on issues with a staffing dimension, in addition to general stakeholder consultation it is also important to recognise the University's commitment to working in partnership with its trade unions and its obligations to consult and negotiate as appropriate before decisions are taken by the University which have an impact on staff.

7. When developing stakeholder consultation plans, University HR Services should be consulted on the appropriate way to ensure early sharing of information and meaningful consultation, and where appropriate, negotiation take place with the recognised trade unions.

Annex – possible approaches for consultation on learning, teaching and student experience matters

Nature of proposed change	Example	Typical approaches to consultation	Comments
<p>Modest change / unlikely to be contentious</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>More significant but unlikely to be particularly contentious</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p>Modest change to existing academic policy or regulation</p>	<p>Discussion and decision at relevant Senate Committee</p>	<p>Relies on representatives of stakeholders having sufficient knowledge of the views of their constituencies to be able to represent them effectively.</p>
		<p>Establish task group with representatives of relevant stakeholders</p>	<p>Allows for a broader range of relevant perspectives, including those of stakeholders who are not represented on the relevant Senate Committee.</p>
	<p>Development of a new policy that appears unlikely to require significant changes to Schools' practices, or development of policy required to address external regulatory requirements</p>	<p>Consult relevant networks of staff (eg Senior Tutors network, Directors of Learning and Teaching network)</p>	<p>Will provide broad impression of Schools' views on the issue, but will not highlight the extent of variation of views between different and may not take account of the views of some Schools (eg since not all colleagues attend network meetings).</p>
		<p>Invite Colleges, Student Association and other stakeholders (eg support services) to consult with their constituencies and provide written submissions</p>	<p>Provides the relevant Senate Committee or task group more robust evidence regarding stakeholders' views. However, College-level submissions may not always allow them to understand fully the variation of views between different Schools.</p>
		<p>Invite relevant office-holders in Schools to consult with their constituencies and to provide their own written School submissions</p>	<p>Provides the relevant Senate Committee or task group with an understanding of the views of individual Schools, and provides assurance that all Schools are aware of and have discussed the proposed change. The relevant office-holders in the Schools would typically be academic leaders such as Director of Quality</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Relatively significant with the potential to be contentious</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Development of a new policy that is likely to require extensive changes to many Schools' practices, or which may raise significant issues of principle.</p>		<p>or Director of Learning and Teaching, but may in some circumstances be Directors of Professional Services.</p>
		<p>Project leader (eg relevant Convener of Senate Committee or Task Group) to offer to attend all Colleges' relevant Committees, and relevant Student Association meetings, to present and seek views on the issue</p>	<p>Provides valuable opportunity to raise awareness, gauge views, and dispel any myths about the proposed development.</p>
		<p>Invite Heads of Colleges and Heads of Schools to consult with their constituencies and to provide their own written submissions</p>	<p>Heads of Colleges and Schools will provide particularly valuable perspectives on proposed developments that are particularly contentious or that raise significant issues regarding management and resources.</p>
		<p>Project leader (eg relevant Convener of Senate Committee or Task Group) to offer to attend all Schools' relevant Committees to present and seek views on the issue</p>	<p>Provides valuable opportunity to reach large number of staff to raise awareness of and dispel any myths about the proposed development, and to gauge views.</p>
		<p>Focus groups of staff and / or students</p>	<p>Allows the Committee / task group to hear directly from staff and students who are not in management or representational roles, eg particular categories of staff or students with a particularly relevant perspective on the issue (eg disabled students when developing policy regarding accessibility).</p>
		<p>Sample-based surveys of samples of relevant categories of staff and / or students</p>	<p>Similar benefits to focus groups, but with the potential to produce more robust evidence.</p>

 Very major institutional change	Proposals for significant changes to the University's academic year, or curriculum structures		
		Create project webpages with information about the proposals and how stakeholders can express their views on them	Makes the consultation process more transparent. Likely to be more relevant where the proposals are of potential interest to a large number of stakeholders and involve complex documentation.
		Open meetings for staff and / or students	Provides a high profile opportunity for all staff and / or students to express their views on the issue, giving a high degree of transparency to the consultation process. Typical approaches would be to hold one meeting per College.
		Surveys of all staff and students	Very transparent approach that will allow all staff and students to express their views.

GUIDANCE FOR PLANNING SENATE COMMITTEE TASK GROUPS

1. Initial scoping

College input should be sought at the initial stage of planning in relation to remit, membership, scope and timescale for delivery to ensure that any similar College activity or College-specific issues are taken into account.

2. Membership

The commissioning committee may give an initial steer on membership. However, there is likely to be some work for the administrator to do in discussion with the Senate committee convener, the convener of the task group, College Office and Edinburgh University Students' Association staff. This can take some time, so start early.

Equality and diversity considerations, in line with the University's Equality and Diversity Strategy, should be taken into account when planning task group membership.

All task groups must have student membership. This is an expectation of the QAA and SFC. So that the Students' Association can allocate its resources, it is best to ask for a nomination from among the sabbaticals for task group membership. Ideally, this should be done as a single request to the Students' Association annually following confirmation of the following year's task groups in June.

College Office staff should also be asked via a single, annual request to nominate task group members from their College.

As draft membership emerges, consult with Academic Services colleagues before inviting members so that individuals don't receive several invitations. Invited members should be clear about their role e.g. representing a specific area, with responsibility for consulting with it.

2. Remit document

2.1 Outline remit

State reasons/drivers for establishing the task group and how it has been commissioned e.g. a committee of Senate, in response to X national initiative etc.

High level statement of what the task group aims to achieve.

2.2 Activity

Bullet points covering activity towards fulfilling the remit, e.g. 'internal information-gathering', 'horizon-scanning', 'sub-groups to investigate issues X,Y,Z', "desktop research".

Activity must include undertaking an **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)** and **Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA)** of the task group's recommendations, highlighting issues raised by the impact assessments, and providing information about the steps taken to address them. The task group

should take account of equality and privacy issues during its discussions, and should not leave EIAs and PIAs as actions to be undertaken by Academic Services once the task group has concluded.

2.3 Deliverables

What outputs the task group aims to deliver. Some of these may emerge as the task group's work progresses, but there should be some intention of a tangible output from the start.

Any deliverables must take account of the relevant chapter of the UK Quality Code and must explicitly reference it. E.g. a task group on 'Student Engagement in Quality Processes' might produce a policy for the operation of staff-student liaison committees. Work on drafting the policy will include checking against the precepts of the relevant Quality Code chapter, and the final policy will state 'this policy complies with the precepts of the UK Quality Code Chapter B5'.

There may be other legislative requirements which need to be addressed according to the scope of the task group.

Deliverables must include an implementation plan proposing responsibility for approval and delivery of each of the task group's recommendations [see below].

2.4 Timescales

Timescale in which the task group will operate, including dates of interim (if any) and final report to relevant Senate Committee. Any significant timescale implications of the implementation plan to be mentioned here.

If implementation will require some task group members to form an implementation or advisory group beyond the end of the task group's work, this should be stated here. This is particularly the case if the task group recommends follow-on work packages.

3. Committee approval of membership, remit, scope, deliverables and timescale

This information should be approved by the Committee at its first meeting in Semester 1, or (for task groups initiated mid-session) at the first available meeting.

4. Implementation Plan

An implementation plan must form part of the task group's final report. This ensures that the task group's expertise informs how the recommendations are taken forward. The task group is well placed to advise on risks and barriers to successful implementation and how they can be overcome.

Recommendation	Recommendation breakdown ie. steps required for delivery	Communication strategy	Transfer of recommendations to University policy/guidance

Recommendations should be broken down into the steps needed to deliver them. An apparently simple one-line recommendation can conceal a large amount of work to ensure delivery, possibly involving setting up an implementation group to deliver complex work packages, and it is vital that this is planned for at the outset and is feasible within available resource. College input is vital here, either through core task group membership or consultation as part of task group activity.

A strategy for communicating the task group's recommendations to Schools, Colleges and support services should be devised. College input in particular should be sought here: Colleges will advise in particular on issues of timing of requests for action by Schools. In order to streamline communication from the Senate Committees about onward work required to implement recommendations, it is intended that Academic Services will coordinate communication across all task groups.

A plan for the transfer of task group recommendations into University policy or guidance should be developed: task group recommendations can lead to the development of new policy and / or the revision of existing material. There may also be a knock-on impact on other policies and guidance, which may or may not have been signalled in the task group's report. This section should state what action is required e.g. new policy, amendment of existing policy, and who it is proposed will undertake this work.

5. Final report

Identify whether the final report should be sent to any other Senate committees in addition to the task group's 'home' committee. Not all task group members will be members of Senate committees, so task group members should be notified when the final task group report is sent to the Senate committee.

6. Post-implementation Review

All Senate committees will carry out post-implementation reviews at appropriate points to determine the success or potential barriers to full implementation. The reviews will be actioned by Academic Services.