

Meeting Guidance for Chairs

Purpose

This guidance supports Meeting and Committee Chairs in leading respectful, inclusive, and productive meetings which are aligned with the Dignity at Work and Study policy, as well as the University's governance requirements.

Core Chair Principles

The purpose of the Chair is to ensure that a meeting or Committee achieves its objectives. Chairs are responsible for providing guidance to participants, ensuring that discussions lead to decisions being made. This will include agreeing to achievable actions and clarifying the outcomes that the group is working towards. In the process of doing this, the Chair is responsible for creating an inclusive and respectful environment for all members. This will encourage full participation as well as maintaining the professionalism of participants.

To be effective, Chairs need to display the following behaviours:

- Being fair, neutral, and objective
- Staying focused on the outcomes, not just the discussion
- Listening actively and using clear and simple language to summarise discussions
- Modelling the behaviour you expect, such as respect and professionalism

To help with effective meetings Chairs should avoid the following behaviours:

- Allowing meetings to drift without clear outcomes
- Letting a few voices dominate
- Overloading agendas
- Failing to challenge unclear or vague conclusions
- Not following up on actions.

Preparing for the Meeting

The initial step in preparing for a successful meeting is to define a clear purpose and a set of outcomes, for that meeting and the project as a whole. To do this you need to be able to communicate why the meeting is taking place and identify the expected outcomes such as the decisions that need to be made, the input required from attendees and clarification regarding the boundaries for information sharing between attendees and/or the wider community.

Meetings will run more smoothly if there is a focused agenda. This should prioritise the most important items first. Agenda items should have realistic timings assigned to them to ensure that the meeting length is long enough for a full discussion of the required issues.

Items should be labeled so participants are aware of what is required from each i.e., decisions need to be made regarding the information, items are for discussion or for information only. Agendas and associated papers should be circulated in advance. If there are a number of papers this should ideally be done 7 days in advance to allow attendees to prepare, but 3–5 days would be adequate for shorter meetings.

If there is no assigned Clerk for the meeting, make sure that someone is allocated to the role of note-taker.

Creating the Right Environment

Start the meeting on time. Welcome attendees and ensure that introductions are made if required, especially if it is the first meeting of the group or additional members have joined. Clearly state the purpose of the meeting and outcomes so expectations are set from the beginning.

Reinforce respectful behaviours at the start of the meeting and use the University [‘Respectful, Inclusive Meetings’](#) Guide slide to help with this. Encourage behaviours such as not speaking over each other or interrupting, respecting different perspectives and challenging ideas rather than people.

Facilitating the Meeting Effectively

Keep the conversation aligned to the agenda and redirect if the discussion starts to drift. You can use language such as “That’s useful, but can we bring it back to the key question?”

Encourage respectful and inclusive participation. This could be by creating space for all members to participate by inviting quieter members to share their viewpoints or intervening respectfully when more vocal members of the group dominate the discussion. This can be done with redirecting phrases such as “Let’s pause there so others can come in.”

Help to promote psychological safety for staff members by acknowledging contributions positively, avoiding dismissive language and encouraging diverse viewpoints.

Keep an eye on the timing of the meeting and adjust, if necessary, with agreement from the group.

To ensure that everyone has the same understanding of the discussion and the decisions being made, regularly recap the key points and decision outcomes and ensure that these are minuted accurately.

Managing Disagreement Constructively

It can be difficult to gain consensus if there is a wide range of views within the group. Encourage the debate of ideas without focusing on the individuals themselves and seek

common ground. If needed, pause or move more complex issues forward by arranging future discussions. This can be done by deferring an issue to a future meeting to allow members to further research the topic, taking an issue offline to ensure the main focus of the meeting is not derailed, or setting up a sub-group if necessary. If a matter cannot be resolved it should be escalated appropriately following internal governance structures.

Responding to Unacceptable Behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour within a meeting can take the form of interruptions, dismissive language, personal criticism, discrimination, or bullying. This needs to be addressed promptly to ensure that all participants know that the behaviour will not be tolerated. Remain calm and reinforce expectations. There are a number of useful phrases in the [‘Meeting Etiquette Guidance’](#) which will help to reset behaviour in a professional and respectful way. Sometimes you may need to be more assertive, especially if a meeting gets heated, and the Toolkit also provides examples of what can be used in this instance.

Where necessary, as Chair, you may decide to privately follow up with the individual involved. This will provide an opportunity to discuss concerns and find a solution in a calmer and more private environment.

If behaviour is repeated or serious, your concerns should be documented and addressed in line with the University’s policies and procedures, with escalation where appropriate.

There are several Short Online Modules which address how to have difficult conversations, how to deal with unacceptable behaviour and the impact it has on colleagues. Examples of those available can be found [here](#).

Closing the Meeting

When closing a meeting, clarify the decision making to check everyone’s understanding and ensure that they are onboard with the outcomes. Be explicit with what was agreed and who is responsible. Clearly confirm the outcome of the meeting to avoid any ambiguity and ensure actions have owners, deadlines, and expected outcomes. Make sure that everyone knows the next steps, thank participants for their input and end the meeting on time.

Follow Through (After the Meeting)

After a meeting, clear and concise minutes, or the action log, should be shared promptly with participants.

Actions should be followed up to ensure that the owners are held accountable and the project remains on track.

Reflect on what worked well, and if there is anything that should be changed for the next meeting.