

Code of Practice for Academic Council Committees

Introduction

This Code of Practice comprises a summary of the essential definitions, principles and procedures governing Academic Council Committee operations. Its primary focus is on Committee operations at University-level rather than College or School/Faculty level, although a number of the principles may be applicable in these contexts also. The Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with guidance on committee servicing.

If you have any questions about this Code of Practice, please contact Ms Áine Flynn, Administrative Officer, Academic Secretariat (aine.flynn@ucc.ie ext: 2105).

The powers, authority, and the conduct of business of Academic Council are as set down in the Universities Act 1997 and in the UCC Principal Statute.

Definitions

A **Committee** of Academic Council is a body established by Academic Council and authorised to take decisions according to prescribed terms of reference and/or delegated powers. Each Committee of Academic Council shall have a clear, unique and necessary function, and be the deliberative forum for prescribed areas of business. Such Committees may be authorised by Academic Council to take decisions according to their terms of reference and delegated powers.

A **Sub Committee** is a body normally created by its parent Committee to carry out one or more aspects of that Committee's work for the indefinite future. A Sub Committee will commonly (but not necessarily) comprise a subset of the members of the parent committee. The Sub Committee's terms of reference and constitution should be defined by the parent Committee (subject to the formal approval of these terms of reference and constitution by Academic Council). Where a parent Committee deems it appropriate, it may further delegate its decision-making powers to one or more of its Sub-Committees with approval from Academic Council. Academic Council may itself establish Sub Committees targeted at specific areas of activity to report to one or more Academic Council Committee as appropriate. In such circumstances, Academic Council will define the terms of reference and constitution of the Sub Committee.

A **working group** is a body set up by a Committee or a Sub Committee in order *either*

- I. to examine a particular issue or particular issues periodically (on either a regular or an irregular basis) over an indefinite period; to submit reports thereon as and when requested by the Committee or Sub Committee concerned; and (where the working group meets irregularly) to be reconvened as directed by the Committee or Sub Committee;

Or

- II. to examine a particular issue or particular issues, within a predetermined period or for what is expected to be a finite period; to submit a report thereon to the Committee concerned; and upon completion of its business to be stood down by the Committee or Sub Committee.

It is for the parent Committee to determine in what form it wishes to receive the proceedings and recommendations of its Sub Committee(s) and Working Group(s) although Sub Committees and Working Groups shall be minuted and minutes will automatically be submitted to the Chair and Committee Secretary of the parent Committee.

Reporting requirements

The **terms of reference** and delegated powers of a Committee/Sub Committee and the reporting relationship and methods of reporting one Committee to another should be simply and clearly prescribed. The terms of reference of each Committee should indicate explicitly a reporting line to a senior Committee(s).

Membership appointment and election

A Committee's constitution should normally indicate how the Chair is identified, through her/his ex officio position or by appointment by the President. The **period of office for appointed Chairs** shall normally be three years with the possibility for renewal of one further period of office if the position is held by appointment.

Membership is as agreed by Academic Council. The **period of office for committee members**, either appointed or elected, shall normally be for three years with the possibility for renewal of one further period of office (three years) if the position is held by appointment.

Ex-officio members retain membership whilst they hold the relevant office.

Co-opted members (up to a maximum of three) shall be approved by Academic Council and shall normally serve for a maximum of one three year period of office only. If required to serve beyond

this period, Committees and Sub Committees are advised to consider whether the co-opted member/category should be added to the membership. Such a request must be placed before Academic Council for approval. Academic Council may exceptionally grant a further period of office of up to three years for a co-opted member.

Where a membership position is held by election, **the election process shall be managed by the Academic Secretariat** in accordance with agreed procedures.

When considering the **renewal of membership** Committee's shall be mindful of the need to manage membership rotation in order to assure business continuity. In order to encourage a balance between continuity of committee membership (with the steady growth in knowledge of a committee's business which this implies) and the opportunity for regular fresh input, all Committees are required to seek permission from Academic Council for any of their members, other than ex officio members, to serve for more than six consecutive years.

At the start of each academic year Committees and Sub Committees shall consider their terms of reference and membership and where adjustment is proposed shall recommend such adjustments to Academic Council for consideration and approval, having taken advice from the Registrar.

Committee Secretaries shall notify the Academic Secretariat (aine.flynn@ucc.ie) of impending **casual vacancies** in membership for advice on the process of identifying suitable replacements.

Equality Policies and Procedures

Academic Council shall endeavour to ensure that its academic governance arrangements are conducted in accordance with the **principles of equality of opportunity**. Therefore, Academic Council shall regularly review the achievement of this objective and shall encourage Committees and Sub-Committees to (1) take all reasonable steps to renew membership or to fill impending casual vacancies with staff from under-represented groups, and (2) confirm that this consideration has been taken into account in reviewing the membership.

Support for new Committee/Sub Committee Chairs and members

Officers and Committee Secretaries shall provide appropriate **briefing for new Chairs and members** on the work of the Committee/Sub Committee before new Chairs/members attend their first meeting.

Staff development and support in committee work shall be provided by the Academic Secretary and the Administrative Officer, Academic Secretariat, in partnership with the UCC Staff Development Team or as requested.

Timetabling and conduct of business

Reasonable **scheduling of Committee meetings** is essential and needs to take account of the workload of both (i) committee members and (ii) committee officers (i.e. Chairs, Committee Secretaries and key administrative or other officers who produce papers for the Committee). There may sometimes be a tension between the demands of (i) and (ii): for example, while scheduling meetings of different Committees in close proximity to each other may rationalise the 'committee diary' of committee members, it will tend to increase the pressure on committee officers to produce agenda papers and minutes quickly. To ease such tensions and to facilitate business efficacy the following practices shall be adopted:

- I. A **University-level Academic Council Committee Calendar** shall be scheduled each year by the Academic Secretariat in consultation with Chairs and Committee Secretaries. This schedule shall be agreed in a timely manner for transmission to Colleges to enable Committee timetabling at that level. A consolidated Academic Council Committee timetable shall be published each year in September detailing the schedule for the coming academic year.
- II. Committees/Sub Committees should not meet when there is insufficient business to justify their doing so.
- III. All Committees and sub Committee agendas and minutes shall be openly available on the University's intranet at a dedicated site.

Committee papers and minutes should be written in **gender-neutral language** - e.g., the term 'Chair', rather than 'Chairman', should always be used.

The Committee Secretary is responsible for ensuring the **agreed minutes** are signed by the Chair and retained. Staff and students at UCC shall have access to all minutes and agendas via the University intranet site and may request any papers considered by a Committee, unless specified as '**Confidential to the Committee**', by contacting the relevant Committee Secretary.

Names of Committee/Sub Committee Secretaries shall be published in the terms of reference and membership and made available on the intranet.

Quoracy

Quoracy for Committees and Sub Committees shall normally be one fifth of the membership (excluding the chair), and shall be no less than 3. A Committee or Sub Committee wishing to vary the normal requirement for a quorum shall submit a request for this variation to Academic Council for approval.

Special meetings

A **special meeting** of a Committee or Sub Committee of Academic Council (i.e. not timetabled in the annual schedule of meetings) may be organised by the Committee or may be requested by the same number of members of that Committee or Sub Committee as is required for a quorum.

Attendance

A member of a Committee or Sub Committee, in the event that he/she is unable to attend a meeting, may exceptionally arrange for a suitably qualified deputy to attend instead, subject to the prior approval of the Committee/Sub Committee Chair concerned.

Committees/Sub Committees may wish to invite officers or others to be present at meetings as 'in attendance'. Before setting up such arrangements, Committees should first consider whether there is a case for these officers becoming full members of the Committee/Sub Committee. In some cases, it may be essential for a particular administrative officer (or officers) always to be present at the meetings of the committee - but not appropriate for that officer to be a decision-making member of the Committee. In other cases, it may be appropriate for the Committee to advise officers that they are expected to be present at meetings only for discussion of those items of business which their advice will usefully inform.

Reporting of one Committee to another

Committees of Academic Council shall report as specified in their terms of reference or as required on the basis of the business conducted. Minutes of the various Committees shall be reported to Academic Board. Minutes of Academic Council and the Academic Board shall be issued to each College for information and consideration at College Councils as appropriate. Items requiring specific action by College Councils shall be specified by the Academic Secretariat as appropriate.

The reporting requirements of Sub Committees shall be as specified in their terms of reference.

Academic Council, as UCC's primary academic decision-making authority has the right to review a decision of any of its Committees taken under delegated authority or to refer a decision back to the Committee concerned for reconsideration.

Chair's Action

The Chairs of Academic Council Committees are empowered to take action on behalf of those bodies in any matters being in their opinion either urgent (but not of sufficient importance to justify a Special Meeting of the appropriate body) or non-contentious. The reasons and outcomes of such actions shall be reported by the Chair to the next meeting.

Confidentiality and business proceedings

The following are **categories of business for Committee meetings**:

- unrestricted or open business
- business that is 'Confidential to the Committee'

As a general rule, as much Committee business as possible should be unrestricted or open.

Exceptionally, Academic Council or its Committees may determine that an item of business should be treated as confidential. **Business that is 'Confidential to the Committee'** is permitted only where disclosure would be likely to prejudice:

- The personal safety or reputation of UCC staff and students.
- The security of UCC property.
- The commercial interests of UCC and its partners.
- Confidential relationships, both personal and commercial.

The workings of Academic Council and its Committees and Sub Committees shall be visible and their decision-making accountable. In designating their proceedings 'Confidential to the Committee' Committees should use this definition consistently and only if they judge this absolutely necessary.

(Code of Practice: Approved by Academic Council 26th November 2010)