# SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES' MEMBERS' GUIDANCE

January 2024

Academic Services

1. INTRODUCTION

This guidance has been developed for members of the Senatus Academicus (Senate) Standing Committees: Education Committee; Academic Policy and Regulations Committee; and Quality Assurance Committee. 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
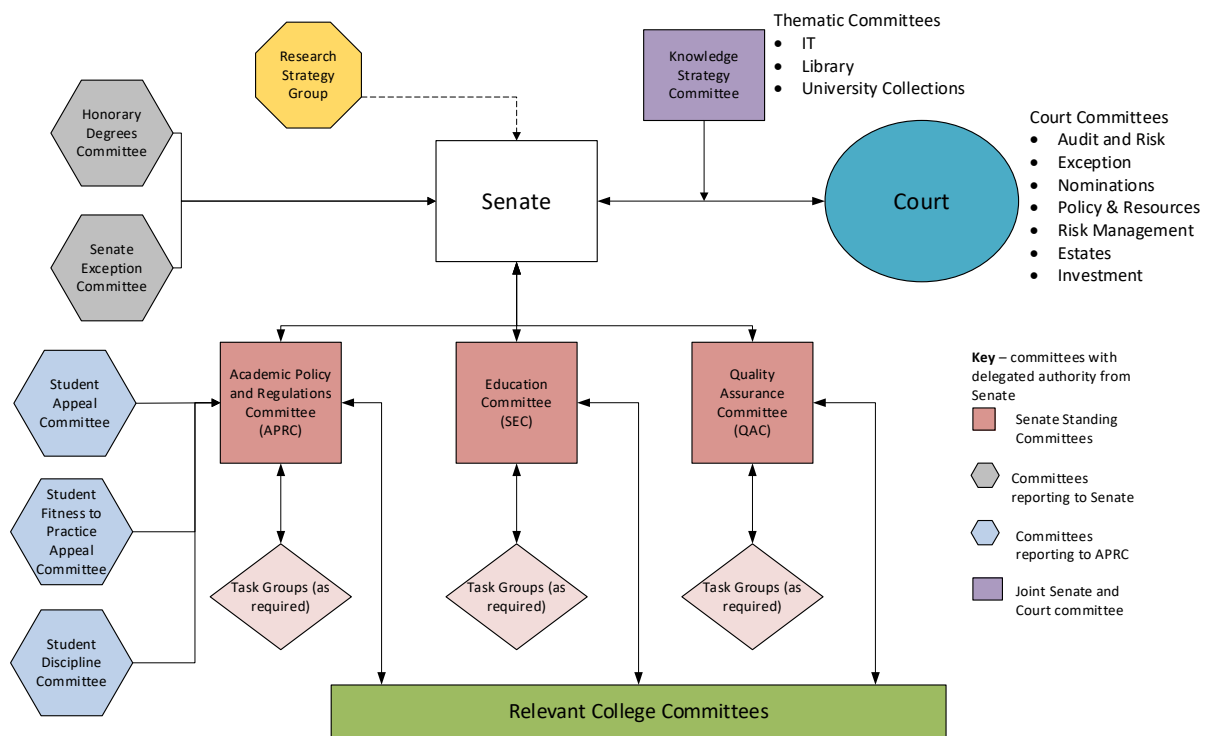
2. TYPES OF MEMBER

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 (normally one member from each College).

External member: a member appointed from out with the University. (At present, Quality Assurance Committee has an external member expected to serve a three year term). 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.

3. 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 "nine principles of public life" – duty, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership and respect: https://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/GaSP/Governance/Court/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.
- consider 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 The Scottish Specific Duties require the University (as a public body) to assess and review our policies and practices to ensure they meet the requirements of the Act to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations.

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.

<u>Convener's Action</u>
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. Full participation by all members is paramount to the success of the committee. Each member has equal rights and responsibilities when it comes to contributing towards the business and discussion of the committee, and in the rare occasions where a vote is taken at a committee.

Representative members

Some members of committees have a responsibility to represent the needs and wishes of a particular constituency. For example:

- College representatives represent the Schools and Deaneries within their College, and their College leadership;
- Students' Association representatives represent students at all levels and of all types;
- Senate representatives represent the wider elected membership of Senate.

 As representative members, they have a specific responsibility to ensure that they understand and advocate for the views of their constituency regarding issues and proposals under consideration by the committee. This will generally involve consulting members of their constituency in advance of decisions being made, for example via local bodies such as School and College committees, Student-Staff Liaison Committees, Student Council. Where major initiatives are being undertaken by committees, these normal methods of consultation may be complemented by more formal consultation, e.g. via surveys, focus groups, etc. Representative members also have a responsibility to inform and update members of their constituency about the work of the committee. However, where committees make significant or consequential decisions, they will always be expected to agree a communication plan to support the dissemination of that decision. 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.

Other members

Some ex officio[1] and co-opted members are appointed to the committee because they have a specific role or specific expertise which is relevant to the work of the committee. These members do

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[1] Some of the roles on committees, e.g. as College or Students' Association representatives, are technically ex officio because they are allocated by default to people holding a specific role within the College or Students'

not represent a particular constituency, but are expected to contribute their expertise to the benefit of the work of the committee. Like all other members, they also have a responsibility to disseminate issues appropriately and to bring relevant matters to the attention of the committee.

Any member of a committee who is uncertain about their responsibilities, or expectations regarding representation of a constituency, should approach the Convener of the relevant committee to discuss this.

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, communicating outcomes, and actively planning and contributing to committee business.

4. NEW MEMBERS' INDUCTION

New committee members will be invited to meet the convener and committee administrator shortly before their first meeting. The induction will cover important committee matters, including: terms of reference; roles and responsibilities of members; ways of working; and committee business and priorities. Academic Services staff will be available to provide ongoing advice and guidance on the operation of the Senate Standing Committees if required.

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

5. 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 and expectations of committee members. The powers and responsibilities of the committee as recorded in the terms of

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Association (e.g. Dean, or sabbatical officer). However, these roles fall into the category of "representative members").

reference are delegated from Senate. It is important that Senate Standing 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

6. PREPARATION OF COMMITTEE DOCUMENTATION

Agendas

These are prepared by the committee administrator, in consultation with the convener.

Papers

These are prepared by the paper author to a standard template https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees Papers should be submitted to the committee administrator by the specified deadline and no later than two weeks **in advance of the relevant meeting**.
Typical actions requested of a committee in papers include:

- To approve – e.g. a new or amended policy for which the committee is the approving authority
- To recommend for approval – e.g. where an agenda item is the responsibility of a parent committee
- To discuss – e.g. where a paper author is seeking further input to develop a policy or proposal
- To note – e.g. where the paper content is of relevance to the committee's terms of reference but no specific action is required

The paper template also covers:

- Resource implications, which should include implications for staff workloads.
- Equality and diversity. Paper authors should indicate whether any proposals within the paper carry implications- positive or negative- for any protected characteristics groups under the Equality Act 2010.

Minutes

These are prepared by the committee administrator and provide a formal record of the meeting. Minutes will be concise and objective whilst providing enough information for those not at the meeting to understand decisions made. Draft minutes will be shared with committee members (and an open version posted on the Academic Services website) once they are written by the administrator and approved by the convener. Draft minutes will be used to communicate decisions and actions agreed by the committee. Minutes remain draft until they are approved by the committee at the next meeting.

Action logs

These complement the minutes and are prepared by the committee administrator and used to track and provide updates on committee actions.

7. 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 line with sector best practice and ensures transparency of committee business.

Senate members are notified by email when the papers for Committee meetings are published and available to access on the Academic Services website.

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 only. 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 (e.g. 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.

Verbal updates 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 verbal updates 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.)

8.   CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

Meetings of standing committees are normally held in-person, with hybrid options available at the Convener's discretion. Exceptional meetings may be held online where necessary.

At a meeting, the Convener will lead members through the business. This will normally include:

- Welcoming any new members or guests, and noting apologies;
- Inviting approval of the minutes of the previous meeting;
- Introducing those presenting papers and leading discussion of papers;
  Summarising discussion and prompting decision-making by members. Decisions at standing committees are normally made by consensus.

9. COMMUNICATION OF DECISIONS

As stated above, committee members have a responsibility to inform and update members of their constituency about the work of their committee, including decisions made by the committee. However, where committees make significant or consequential decisions, they will always be expected to agree a communication plan to support the dissemination of that decision. Academic Services will also communicate regulation and policy updates, including the annual update to key stakeholders.

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.

10. TASK GROUPS

As well as the committees or groups detailed in the 'Committee Structure' above, the work of the Senate committees is sometimes 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.

11. USEFUL CONTACTS

Further information about each committee can be found on its webpage:

Education Committee https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/education

Academic Policy and Regulations Committee https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/academic-policy-regulations

Quality Assurance Committee https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/quality-assurance