GUIDANCE FOR DRAFTING PAPERS
FOR UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE BOARD AND UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES 2023-24

Summary

This short guidance note is designed to assist University colleagues in drafting appropriate, timely and effective paperwork for consideration by the University Executive Board (UEB), and University Committees, principally Senate and Council.

It provides specific guidance on:
- ➤ General principles for effective papers
- ➤ Reserving time on the agenda
- ➤ Completing the coversheet
- ➤ Format of the main report
- ➤ Style guidelines
- ➤ The executive summary
- ➤ Slide protocol
- ➤ Approval and submission of UEB papers
- ➤ Role of UEB Sponsors
- ➤ Approval and submission of Senate and Council papers
- ➤ Submitting papers: list of contacts
- ➤ Coversheet template
- ➤ Main report template

General principles for effective papers

- UEB, Senate and Council have responsibility for all major strategic decision-making, as well as monitoring the management and performance of the University. Further information on how the University is managed and governed, and the role of each of these groups, is available on the University website: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/governance/
- Effective paperwork is an essential part of decision-making at the University and ensures that the right decisions are taken at the right time.   Excellent paperwork will reduce our governance burden and lead to timely and robust decisions.
- UEB, Senate and Council receive a substantial volume of paperwork at each meeting and so it is important that paperwork is kept within the format and style guidance for ease of reading.
- It is also important that business for these groups is planned well in advance, where possible, and that meeting time is reserved for high-level decision-making and strategic discussion. This can only be achieved through collaboration between secretariat teams, UEB paper sponsors and paper authors.
- Essential elements of effective papers include:
    1. a clear coversheet setting out the purpose of the paper, with a clear 'ask'.
    2. a well-written Executive Summary.
    3. a paper which is succinct and no more than five pages long plus a one-page coversheet
    4. a paper which makes clear how the work being presented fits with the strategic objectives of the University of its legal or regulatory obligations.
    5. a paper which avoids the use of jargon and explains acronyms at first use.

Reserving time on the agenda

- All committees meet periodically thoroughly the academic year and have a large amount of business to consider annually.
    - ➤ UEB meets every other Thursday during term time (meeting dates; UEB paper deadlines)

- ➢ Senate meets three times a year for formal business.
- ➢ Council meets seven times a ear, including an Away Day (https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/executivesuite/University_of_Exeter_Committee_Dates_and_Deadlines_2022-23.pdf)
- Please send notice of agenda items to the relevant team as early as possible and certainly by the deadline for each of the Committees (see links above).
- For UEB unless unavoidably urgent, notice should be given a minimum of two weeks in advance of the meeting in order to allow sufficient time for the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar to review and agree the final agenda.
- Please contact the Secretariat for Senate and Council papers. Please note that the Council agenda will be closed six weeks prior to the meeting date.

Completing the coversheet
- For every paper, you will need to incorporate a coversheet including a completed checklist that is **no more than one page long**.
- The coversheet is important and will be the first thing that your audience will read and so it is critical to be clear and to include the correct information.
- Please also consider the specific audience to which a paper is being presented and tailor the proposed purpose/resolution accordingly. For example, a paper en route to Council may ask earlier Committees to consider specific issues to inform the development of that paper
- It is also important not to make the assumption that a Council audience has the same understanding of a HE context as UEB members, and to recognize that a paper for UEB will not be the same as a paper for Council
- The coversheet needs to include:
  - ➢ The proposed purpose/resolution of your paper and any actions required by the committee.
  - ➢ Confirmation that you have included in your paper the key issues highlighted in the checklist (e.g. Financial Implications / Risk Assessment / Equality and Diversity / People Impacts / Environmental and Sustainability Impact) and that you confirm this by ticking the appropriate boxes.
  - ➢ Cross-reference to the key issues you have including in your paper the sections where more detail relating to the key issues has been provided within the body of the paper;

The coversheet template is included below. An MS Word version can be requested from the Secretariat teams.

Format of the main report
- Reports must be **no more than five pages long.**
- If your paper is unavoidably longer than five pages (e.g. some business cases or statutory returns) please clearly indicate in the Executive Summary the rationale for why your paper is the length that it is. All papers that exceed the five-page limit will need to be agreed by exception with the Chair of the Committee on a case-by-case basis. **Please inform the relevant Secretariat team as soon as possible when it is anticipated that a paper will need to exceed the specified five-page limit.**
- Appendices can be utilised to provide further background information, but should only be included where absolutely necessary.
- Importantly, papers for Council will need to be tailored to the needs of Council members and will need to reflect what Council is being asked to do (i.e. note/approve the paper). This is likely to be different in emphasis to what UEB is asked to do with the same paper. UEB members will be very familiar with the detail of University activity and have responsibility for operations; Council members, who do not have responsibility for day-to-day operations, are looking at the strategic overview and implications.
- Appendices can be included as background information, but the information contained in them should not be essential to the discussion/decision-making process. Too much detail can mean that key points/issues are lost.

The main paper template is included below. An MS Word version can be requested from the Secretariat teams.

Style guidelines

- UEB, Senate and Council are 'paperless meetings' and these groups only receive papers electronically – and UEB and Council only via a specialist board papers software package. Please bear in mind that papers will only be viewed on screen so please avoid the use of complex or large spreadsheets and pivot tables where possible. Please ensure papers:
  - ➢ Use Arial 11pt or Calibri 11pt or 12pt fonts.
  - ➢ Include pagination - please add page numbers to the bottom right hand of the document. (Numbered paragraphs can also be helpful).
  - ➢ All appendices are labelled and internally referenced correctly. Any appendices in Excel should be converted to PDF before submission to ensure print margins are set correctly.
  - ➢ Council papers should address the needs of the non-specialist Independent members by avoiding jargon, with acronyms only used if they are genuinely in common currency (e.g. OfS) or if they are spelt out in full when they first occur in the text.

The executive summary

- The executive summary is essential to successful board-level papers and should be the first section in the main body of the paper.
- An effective executive summary should provide an overview of a report's purpose, methods, findings, and key conclusions/recommendations. It is an absolutely essential tool for busy board members who may not have a lot of time to digest the whole report in detail.
- There is a lot of free guidance available on how to write an effective executive summary. For example: RMIT Learning Lab: https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/beginning
- *Examples of successful executive summaries are available on request from the secretariat teams.*

Slide protocol

- The use of PowerPoint slides can be agreed in exceptional instances at the initial call for papers stage with the Secretariat, who will gain approval from the Chair of the Committee.
- At the meetings, it is not permitted to use supplementary PowerPoint slides unless by prior agreement. In these circumstances, you should use no more than five slides to frame the discussion.
- Slides must be in the corporate template.

The Role of UEB Sponsors

- Every UEB or Committee paper is sponsored by a member of UEB.
- It is the role of UEB Sponsors to:
  - ➢ Ensure your teams inform the Secretariat teams of your upcoming agenda items in good time
  - ➢ Quality assure papers and ensure they are presented in the required format
  - ➢ **Approve all papers** going in your name in advance of submission to the VC/Registrar/Chair of Council for final approval and circulation

Approval and submission of UEB papers

- The Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar may ask to review papers in advance of the submission deadline. The UEB secretariat team will inform you if this is the case, so please ensure that your paper is ready to share by the close of business on the Wednesday of the week before the UEB meeting that your paper is due to be presented to. Illustrative timetable:

Wednesday Draft papers to the VC/ Registrar for review	**Friday** Final papers submitted to UEB secretariat by *cob*	**Monday** Papers circulated to UEB by *cob*	**Thursday** UEB Meeting 0900-1200

Approval and submission of Senate and Council papers

- All Council papers must be approved by the Registrar and Secretary before the paper deadline which is two weeks before the meeting. If your paper has not been reviewed and approved by UEB, the Committee Secretariat will arrange for this but must receive the paper **one week before the paper deadline** (i.e. three weeks before the meeting). In the case of Council, the Chair receives all papers for review the day after the paper deadline, therefore there can be no late papers or deadline extensions. The Chair will remove any item from the meeting agenda if he has not received the paper on time.

- Not all Senate and Council papers will require approval by UEB. However, if you would like your paper to be considered by UEB prior to Senate or Council, please consult the UEB dates and deadline where the final UEB meeting date to consider Council and Senate papers is shown. Generally, it will be papers that have strategic or major resourcing implications, or for audit or regulatory reasons, that will need to be shared in advance with UEB. If you are unsure whether your paper requires UEB consideration, please contact the UEB Secretariat team.

Submitting papers: list of contacts

Papers should be emailed to:

- For UEB papers, please submit to UEB-support@exeter.ac.uk.
- For Senate papers, please submit to senate@exeter.ac.uk.
- For Council papers, please submit to secretariat@exeter.ac.uk.

Final Checklist

1. Have you informed the secretariat teams of your agenda item? ☐

2. Is your paper clear on the coversheet what your audience is being asked to do? ☐

3. Does your paper include an executive summary and required sections? ☐

4. Does your paper meet the length, format and style requirements? ☐

5. Have all acronyms been explained at first use and jargon avoided? ☐

6. Has your paper been quality assured and approved by your UEB sponsor? ☐

7. Have you checked all deadlines can be met? ☐

Coversheet:
https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/executivesuite/vceg/Updated_Cover_Sheet_July_2023.pdf

Template for Main Report

Most papers[1] should contain the following elements:

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE BOARD/SENATE/COUNCIL, [insert date of the meeting]

Document Title

Please note that the Executive Summary and information on key issues (eg Financial Implications / Risk Assessment / Equality and Diversity / People Impacts / Environmental/ Sustainability Impacts) **should now be incorporated as separate sections within the main body of the paper as detailed below.**

1. Executive Summary
Please summarise the key points in the paper and encapsulate the findings of the paper.

2. Context
A short paragraph contextualising the paper in order to make UEB/Senate/Council aware of the external/internal context, or perhaps as an aide memoire when issues are returning to UEB/Senate/Council for further discussion.

3. Main Proposals
This section should include
- Details of the issue/proposal
- Financial and other resource implications
- Analysis of any legal consequences and the risks of a course of action (and mitigation activities)
- Equality and diversity – in particular whether an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried or needs to be (separate guidance available)
- Health and safety issues

4. Recommendation/s to Council
Please clearly state what you would like Council to decide upon or put into action. Bullet point lists are the best way to achieve this.

5. Financial Implications
Briefly summarise the financial implications for the University, Colleges and Services. Please indicate if there are none, and the reasons for this.

6. Risk Assessment
Briefly summarise key risks. Please indicate if there are none, and the reasons for this.

7. Equality and Diversity
Briefly summarise E&D implications and indicate whether an EIA has been undertaken or needs to be undertaken. Please do not leave this blank but on the rare occasions that this section is not applicable to your paper, please highlight nil returns in advance to the relevant Secretariat team. If you are unsure what to include in this section, please liaise with the EDI team for guidance.

8. People Impacts

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[1] It is noted that some reports (for example research grant or admissions data) may follow a different (separately agreed) format to the template set out here.

Briefly summarise any staffing implications, including potential changes to staffing levels and profiles; impacts on ways of working; training requirements; and how the proposal is aligned with the HR strategy

9. Environmental/Sustainability Impacts
Briefly summarise the Environmental/Sustainability Impacts.

10.   Next Steps
Outline what will happen after the Council meeting if the paper is approved and the expected timeline.

11.   Communications
Papers may need to include a section outlining the communications issues relating to any proposal/decision, and a full communications plan for Council to discuss and approve if appropriate. This should include

- Brief communications timeline
- Which individuals and groups have been consulted on the proposals so far
- What plans are in place to consult with or involve colleagues going forward
- Highlight any action individual members are expected to take to implement or cascade any decisions.