

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

ACADEMIC SERVICES: QUALITY AND STANDARDS

ADVICE: Managing virtual meetings and committees

1 Introduction

This advice is intended to be used as a guide for secretaries in managing virtual meetings during any working from home/university closure period as a result of COVID-19.

This should be read in conjunction with relevant information services guides – where these are available links are provided.

A note for chairs will be developed.

2 Virtual meetings

The following process applies to running virtual meetings:

1. Contact the chair and agree whether the meeting needs to go ahead and if so what mode of virtual meeting is appropriate (see below). It is expected that business is prioritised with only essential business being taken to committees. Less formal meetings and catch ups can be facilitated easily online, depending upon priorities.
2. Agree agenda, request and circulate papers as per normal meeting protocols
3. Advise members as soon as possible of the mode of delivery for the meeting and let them know key dates in advance.

Note that rules on Quorum still apply for virtual meetings.

2.1 Agree agenda, request and circulate papers

With the full participation of members a virtual meeting is able to provide equitable levels of engagement and scrutiny to secure approvals and inform next steps for business.

The agenda for the meeting, where possible, should be prioritised and any business which could wait for an in later in person meeting should be postponed. Work with your chair to agree the agenda and if you/the chair are not clear whether business should be postponed seek advice from the relevant team.

2.2 Which mode of virtual meeting

Two modes of virtual meeting are recommended:

	Type of meeting	Definition
1	Virtual meeting via email	A meeting where papers and comments are collected by email. The Secretary provides a summary of members comments to the Chair with a recommendation regarding any approvals.
2	Virtual meeting via Microsoft teams	Microsoft Teams is a collaborative workspace where groups/teams can chat, share and collaborate on documents, track document versions, hold video calls/conferences as well as allocate and track tasks. <u>Should not be used for communications relating to sensitive or confidential information</u>
3	Skype for Business	Microsoft Skype for Business provides:

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web video conferencing with staff and students from your computer • Instant messaging • Virtual seminar facilities such as whiteboards, online Powerpoint presentations, shared desktops and applications <p>Appropriate where members are familiar with using skype for business. <u>Information services recommend that if people have not used skype for business before that Microsoft teams be used instead.</u></p>
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2.2.1 Virtual meetings via email

Process for running virtual meetings via email:

1. Once an agenda has been agreed and papers received publish papers in their usual home (e.g. committee site on Sharepoint).
2. Advise members of key dates i.e. when to expect papers and when the deadline for comments will be.
3. If there are a number of agenda items you may wish to set up a template for members to submit their comments (rather than these being returned in the body of an email). Make it clear to members what decisions are required to be made/recommended for each item.
4. Circulate papers and a copy of the spreadsheet to members with a request for completion by the deadline. You may wish to create a folder on Sharepoint online for members to directly save comments (see note below re. confidential items).
5. A few days in advance of the deadline send a reminder to members for their comments
6. After the deadline collate responses and summarise for the Chair, making a clear recommendation for the outcome/next steps. (If the outcome is not clear summarise the outcomes of discussion and arrange a time to talk to the Chair to agree next steps – the formality of this stage is dependent upon your relationship with the chair)
7. Once the chair has approved the decision, publish the outcomes of the scrutiny (as you would minutes) alongside the papers and inform members.

Where business is confidential or sensitive you should set up a meeting folder on Sharepoint online where members can save their feedback (committee papers should be published as per normal meeting protocol). Feedback relating to confidential items should not be provided via email – instead members should be asked to save their comments into the meeting folder. In these instances prepare a template for members to save their comments into and provide a link.

2.2.2 Virtual meeting via Microsoft teams

Microsoft Teams is a collaborative workspace where groups/teams can chat, share and collaborate on documents, track document versions, hold video calls/conferences as well as allocate and track tasks. This can be used as an online space to hold meetings.

Using Microsoft teams for a meeting means going ahead with the meeting virtually at the defined date and time. Members join the meeting virtually using the Microsoft teams space.

Microsoft teams is good for:

- Quick and easy chat with individuals.
- Quick and easy collaboration with small teams e.g. projects, research projects, cross departmental teams, collaborating with external partners

- Great alternative to email- all conversations are stored in channels that are easy to find and doesn't clog your inbox
- Good for collaborative document development and sharing ideas
- Great for individual desktop support via chat and screen sharing
- Can be used via O365, a desktop app or mobile app

Microsoft teams should not be used for:

- Communications with larger groups e.g. whole departments or the whole university.
- **Communications relating to sensitive or confidential information**

Full guidance on the use of Microsoft teams can be found [here](#). The following process should be followed:

1. Once an agenda has been agreed and papers received publish papers in their usual home (e.g. committee site on Sharepoint).
2. Set up a Microsoft team space for the meeting and add members (guidance on the use of Microsoft teams can be found [here](#))
3. Advise members of the format for the meeting and send them a link to the team space (they will also have received a link on creation of the team space). Microsoft teams works differently on different devices and with different wifi. Advise members to login to Microsoft teams in advance of the meeting to check it works correctly. Any issues should be logged directly by members to service desk.
4. During the meeting time the chair should lead discussion on the discussion board or via the video call function (this is up to the chair). The chair should ensure (as in an in person meeting) that any decisions are made clearly. Allow some extra time at the beginning of the meeting for people to join and overcome any technical issues.
5. Prepare a minute for the meeting as per normal meeting protocols and publish these as normal.

Any discussion on Microsoft teams discussion boards is saved and can be used to support your minute writing. Microsoft teams video conferences can also be recorded. Refer to the [Information services guides for instructions](#).

2.2.3 Skype for business

Skype for business is only recommended where members have a preference for the technology based upon previous experience. **Information services recommend that if people have not used skype for business before that Microsoft teams be used instead.**

Using skype for business for a meeting means going ahead with the meeting via video conference at the defined date and time.

1. Once an agenda has been agreed and papers received publish papers in their usual home (e.g. committee site on Sharepoint). Confirm that all members will have access to skype for business at the arranged meeting time and date.
2. Send members an invite to the skype meeting. Instructions for using skype for business are available [here](#).
3. Allow some time at the beginning of the meeting for all members to join and to overcome any technical difficulties.
4. Provide minutes of the meeting in the usual way, indicating clearly in the minutes that the meeting was delivered via skype for business.

4. Chairs action

If a virtual meeting is not possible, due for example to a number of staff being unable to participate, Chairs action may be appropriate.

Given the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 it is likely that Chairs action will be utilised more than normally permitted. Chairs action should be utilised if a decision is urgent and a meeting cannot be convened. Chairs action may also be appropriate if a decision is time critical but low risk.

If chairs action is being recommended as the approach where this would normally not be permitted, e.g. for external examiner nominations, please contact the policy owners to confirm this exception in advance.

The chair may also wish to convene a sub-group of the committee to inform any chairs action decision. Where a sub-group is convened quorum rules do not apply.

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