

CONVENTIONS FOR MINUTES OF STAFF-STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND COURSE COMMITTEES

Adapted from University of Leicester and SOAS guidance (references below).

All committees are subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, and the Data Protection Act, which apply to committee papers. Information in committee papers can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act by people who submit Freedom of Information requests; individuals can use the Data Protection Act to request access to personal information relating to themselves in committee papers; and the Data Protection Act contains privacy rights which have to be respected in how the University handles committee papers. Personal information means information about any identifiable living individual. Committee records will contain information about committee members and other people attending meetings (their attendance, reports of their views and opinions, actions upon them), and information about third parties who are mentioned in discussions.

Committees may have unreserved and reserved business. Unreserved business relates to agenda items which lead to discussion in the minutes which would *not* be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act; reserved business relates to agenda items which lead to discussion in the minutes which *would* be exempt from disclosure if requested under the Act.

Examples of items which should be placed in reserved business:

- Commercially sensitive information, eg references to ongoing negotiations.
- Information provided in confidence by individuals or organisations outside the College/ University.
- Information whose release might endanger the health or safety of any person.
- Information which might endanger the College's security.
- Legally privileged information, eg discussion of legal advice.
- Certain types of personal data about identifiable individuals, eg a staff member's exact salary.
- Highly sensitive discussions which might be impeded if the record of the discussion was to be placed in the public domain.

Committee members serve on a committee in an official capacity. Membership on a committee, committee members' views and opinions expressed at meetings and actions upon them should **not** be withheld as personal data.

The following information about third parties can be dealt with under open/ unreserved business and published in open minutes:

- Routine notices of the appointment, departure or promotion of staff (but not details of reasons, discussions prior to the event etc).
- Information about the roles, duties and responsibilities of staff.
- Minor references to individuals which do not convey anything substantive about them.

- Information which is already in the public domain (eg on the College or University websites).
- Information about the decisions or actions of staff in an official or work capacity, unless it is exempt for other reasons.

Other personal information which comes before committees should go into reserved business, as releasing it could breach the privacy rights of individuals under the Data Protection Act. The following are examples of information that should always be placed in reserved minutes:

- Sensitive employment-related information about individual staff (grievance, discipline, performance etc).
- The identity of internal and external examiners. This is to respect the long-standing anonymity of the examining process, and the expectation of examiners that their details will be kept confidential. In many cases, there should be no need to identify examiners by name. External examiners' reports can be discussed in open minutes in anonymised form.
- Information about individual students (academic progress, examination performance, discipline etc). However, the committee work of student representatives can be reported in open minutes (see above), as can the official activities of Students' Union officers (appointments of officers are published on the Students' Union website).
- Information about the health, welfare or personal lives of individuals.

Adapted from <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/lli/staff-development/docs/minutes/guidance-on-unreserved-and-reserved-business> and <https://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/foi/committees/>