



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

University  
Secretary's  
Office.

## **The Senate**

### **Standing Orders**

**Author:** University Secretary

#### **Introduction**

The Charter provides that there will be a Senate of the University which shall, subject to the Statutes and the control and approval of the Council, oversee the teaching and research of the University and the admission and regulation of Students. The powers and composition of the Senate are set out in Regulations. These Standing Orders of the Senate are secondary to the Charter, Statutes and Regulations. The Standing Orders set out the procedures for the conduct of the Senate in discharging its obligations, powers and functions.

The University Secretary is responsible to the Senate for the provision of advice in relation to compliance with its governing instruments, including standing orders. They are also responsible for ensuring information provided to the Senate is timely, appropriate and enables informed decision making. All members of the Senate should have independent access to the advice and services of the University Secretary, who must ensure that Senate members are fully aware of the appropriate rules, regulations and procedures. A procedural defect of which the Senate is unaware at the time does not invalidate decisions taken by the Senate.

### **1. Membership and Quoracy**

#### **1.1 Composition of the Senate**

The composition of the Senate is set out in Regulation IX.

#### **1.2 Appointment to the Senate**

The membership and electoral constituencies for Senate membership are set out in Regulation IX.

#### **1.3 Election of Membership**

The University Secretary is the Returning Officer, and will publish rules for the conduct of elections to the Senate and from the Senate to the Council, oversee the conduct of elections and announce the results. A Returning Officer's report will be made to the Senate in respect of all Senate elections.

#### **1.4 Attendance at Meetings**

Attendance is an obligation on members of the Senate and will be recorded and monitored. Apologies shall be sent to the University Secretary in advance of the meeting when attendance is not possible. Members cannot send a deputy to act in their place unless in the categories set out in Regulation IX Section 2.3. The University Secretary must be notified in

advance by the member of Senate that he/she has nominated a deputy for a specific meeting. Any deputies attending Senate meetings will be classed as attendees only and not entitled to vote. Attendance at meetings of the Senate and Senate Committees by persons other than those persons identified in the Terms of Reference is by approval of the Chair in advance of the meeting. Directors of Professional Services and other appropriate members of the University may be invited by the Chair to attend meetings on a non-voting basis, to speak to the Senate on particular matters within its remit. Members of the Senate should identify themselves by name and Department when first speaking at any meeting of the Senate.

### **1.5 Chair of Senate**

The President & Vice-Chancellor takes the Chair. In the absence of the President & Vice-Chancellor, the Chair shall be taken by the Provost & Deputy Vice-Chancellor. In the absence of the President & Vice-Chancellor and the Provost & Deputy Vice-Chancellor, they will nominate a Vice-President as the Chair or the Vice-Presidents will nominate a Chair from amongst their number.

### **1.6 Quorum**

The quorum for Senate shall be twenty members. The quorum may be challenged twice in any meeting; thereafter any challenge to the quorum shall be out of order. In the event of a successful challenge to the quorum, the options available to the Chair are to:

- adjourn the meeting to an alternative date;
- close the meeting and defer all the business to be transacted to the next ordinary meeting of the Senate;
- proceed with the meeting but clearly show in the minutes that the meeting was not quorate.

Any business requiring a decision will have to be referred to the next available meeting of the Senate unless it is considered appropriate for it to be dealt with using the urgent business procedure of the Senate (see 4.5. and 4.6. below).

## **2. Agenda, Reports and Minutes**

### **2.1. Meetings**

The Senate shall hold four ordinary meetings per year, the dates for which are notified to members before the start of the academic year and published in the Almanac of University Committees.

### **2.2 Order of Business**

Subject to the discretion of the Chair, the order of business at an ordinary meeting of the Senate shall be as follows:

- President & Vice-Chancellor's Report to Senate;
- Declaration of Conflict of Interests;
- Minutes of the previous Meeting;
- Matters arising on the Minutes;
- Matters requiring Approval;
- Any particular substantive items for discussion which require Senate consideration or approval;
- Reports from Statutory Bodies including a Report on the Proceedings of the Council,

- Reports from the Committees of the Senate;
- Other matters to be noted or approved without discussion;
- Report on Action Taken.

### **2.3 Agenda and supporting papers**

The President & Vice-Chancellor previews all business proposed by the University Secretary for the Senate's consideration and agrees the Senate's agenda.

As a matter of good practice, the University Secretary will normally issue a formal notice of an ordinary Senate meeting, to all those who are entitled to receive them, along with an agenda and papers, normally no later than seven days before the date of the meeting. The deadline for special meetings is 48 hours before the meeting. Where (in the opinion of the Chair) seven days' notice is not possible due to the urgent nature of the business to be considered at a meeting, the agenda and papers will be sent to members as early as reasonably possible and in any event three days in advance of the meeting, unless the Chair considers that the urgency is such that the three day notice requirement should be waived.

Members of the Senate may submit to the University Secretary items for discussion at the Senate meeting. The Chair of Senate has discretion over the inclusion of proposed items of business on the agenda, though must advise Senate on request of the basis for any decision for inclusion or rejection of requested items.

Specific mechanisms by which members can bring ad hoc business to the Senate are as follows:

- Members may contact the University Secretary with suggestions/requests for future agenda items. A reminder of how to do this will be included on all Senate agendas;
- Written Questions can be submitted in advance of the meeting and will be included on the agenda for each meeting of the Senate, and questions submitted in writing to the University Secretary's Office two days before each Senate meeting at the latest will receive formal answers by University Officers, either in writing or orally at the meeting. The author of a written Question may ask a supplementary question at the meeting, and the Senate will be allowed to debate the issue raised if the matter is within Senate's terms of reference;
- The agenda for each meeting will include a "President & Vice-Chancellor's Report" item, when the President & Vice-Chancellor will present and respond to questions from the floor. The President & Vice-Chancellor's Report is an opportunity for members of Senate to ask questions to Senate on topics which would not usually merit a formal item on the agenda. Members of Senate can ask any question provided it fits within the remit of Senate business. The University Secretary is the final authority on what is deemed within the remit of Senate business based on the Charter and Statute and the functions of the Senate as set out in the Regulations.

Items which request approval from the Senate or which make a recommendation for decision by the Senate will normally need to be approved and recommended by a committee of the Senate or the University Executive Board in the first instance. Persons who require an item to be received by a Senate committee should contact the secretary to that committee for guidance on their agenda processes.

At the first Senate meeting of each academic year, a provisional Senate business schedule (which is compiled by the University Secretary's Office in view of committees' plans and regular items of business - including regulatory requirements) shall be submitted

to the Senate for information. This provides transparency regarding the business that can be expected to come before the Senate as a matter of routine, and also provides an opportunity for members to consider prospective items for inclusion on future Senate agendas.

Reports and other papers for the Senate must be submitted to the University Secretary's Office no later than 14 days before the date of an ordinary meeting of the Senate. Authors of papers should follow guidance for the preparation of Senate papers, including by seeking advice on the content of papers at an early stage in the process, as necessary.

Papers are ordinarily circulated or tabled by the University Secretary, with the agreement of the Chair of the Senate. Papers shall not be circulated in advance or tabled at the meeting by members of the Senate or by others except with the agreement of the Chair, normally to be obtained through the University Secretary.

## **2.4 Format of Reports**

All agenda items must be sponsored by a member of the Senate. All items for the agenda should be written reports, submitted electronically to the University Secretary, unless agreed otherwise by the Chair. All circulations will be in electronic format, unless a request for a hard paper copy is submitted to the University Secretary no later than 14 days before the date of the meeting. In exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to meet requests for paper copies.

Authors of papers must write appropriately and succinctly for the audience and all papers must be accompanied by the cover sheet provided by the University Secretary's Office. It must be clear whether the matter is for note, for assurance, for report of decisions taken where it is a delegated matter, or for recommendation and decision. Where a recommendation is made it must be clear and the rationale and decision sought must be articulated.

## **2.5 Late Reports**

In exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the Chair, late papers may be circulated separately by the University Secretary's Office. The University Secretary must be informed in advance of the meeting and as soon as possible of any request to circulate a late paper. Papers circulated by members of the Senate, or tabled in a meeting of the Senate, without the agreement of the University Secretary and the Chair will not normally be considered.

## **2.6 Reserved Business**

The Chair may require student members to withdraw when matters are discussed relating to individual members of staff or individual students of the University and may withhold from student members papers relating to such matters.

# **3. Confidentiality and Declarations of Interest**

## **3.1 Classification of Information**

The Senate operates on the principle of transparency, unless there is good reason to impose confidentiality. Reports at Senate will be designated Public, Internal, Restricted or Highly Restricted. The author of any paper containing confidential information should mark it "Highly Restricted" in line with the classification scheme and it should not be shared with any person outside of the Senate without the approval of the Chair.

Members of the Senate have a responsibility to disseminate and communicate Senate business before and after the meeting as appropriate. Senate members are responsible for ensuring the secure storage and disposal of confidential Senate documents, whether in electronic or paper form.

### **3.2 Declarations of Interest**

The proper conduct of the business of the University requires that members of the Senate and its committees should both act and be perceived to act impartially, in the interest of the University, and not be influenced in their role by any personal, social or business relationship.

The agenda for each meeting will include a standing item, 'Declarations of Conflict of Interests'. Any member who believes that he or she may have a direct or indirect personal or financial interest in any matter to be discussed shall state that interest in advance to the University Secretary or in the meeting (which shall be minuted). There may be certain circumstances where the Senate member will need to withdraw from certain decisions, in order to protect themselves and the University from accusations of unfair bias or impropriety. Actions could include:

- Requiring the member to not attend the meeting.
- Excluding the member from receiving meeting papers relating to their interest.
- Excluding the member from all or part of the relevant discussion and/or the decision making part.
- Noting the nature and extent of the interest, but judging it appropriate to allow the member to remain and participate.
- Removing the member from the group or process altogether.

As directed by the Chair the conflicted member may be required not to speak or vote on that matter, or not be counted in the quorum at the meeting. For the purpose of this Standing Order, 'financial interest' shall include any directorship or shareholding which may be relevant but shall exclude any interest which a member of the University shall have in the allocation of funds to a Faculty/Department or other section of the University solely by virtue of membership of that Faculty/Department or section. A member who has declared an interest may be permitted to speak and to vote and to be counted in the quorum if the Chair rules that the interest declared is so remote or insignificant that it cannot reasonably be regarded as likely to influence a member in the consideration or discussion of, or in voting on, any question with respect to that matter.

## **4. Conduct of Meetings and Decision-Making**

### **4.1 Conduct of meetings**

It will be assumed that members of the Senate will have read all the papers circulated. The conduct of a debate will be determined by the Chair, who will not unreasonably refuse any member the right to speak.

Senate members are not members in any representative capacity and should exercise the responsibilities of the Senate in the best interests of the University as a whole. They should abide by the principle of collective responsibility.

Members should indicate a wish to speak by raising their hand (where in person) or using the digital equivalent (if not in person). Members shall not speak until called upon by the Chair and until they have been provided with a microphone or had their online microphone enabled. When the meeting of the Senate is not in person comments or responses provided in the 'chat function' will not be considered part of the proceedings of the Senate unless

directed by the Chair in the meeting and the response provided by or directed through the Chair.

Members have the right to speak and are not limited in the number of times on which they may speak on any item but are required to speak only as often as they judge necessary for the proper conduct of the business and for the proper fulfilment of the responsibilities of the Senate. In the interests of time, the Chair may curtail a line of questioning or a debate where the matter has been responded to or where no new points, from those already heard, are being made.

Members may raise a point of order on a perceived breach of Standing Orders; University Charter, Statutes and Regulation, or statute or common law, and are entitled to be heard on that point. The ruling of the Chair under advisement from the University Secretary on points of order is final.

If the Chair considers that any member is unreasonably impeding the efficient, expeditious and proper running of a meeting of the Senate the Chair may require that member keep silence or require they withdraw from the meeting.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

As a collegial body the Senate should proceed by consensus wherever possible, resorting to formal procedural mechanisms only when all other solutions have been exhausted. The Chair has discretion to accept or reject a formal recommendation put for debate, or an amendment to a formal recommendation, moved by a Senate member, and to determine the order in which amendments and recommendations are taken. Proceedings on any amendments must be completed before any decision is taken on the substantive recommendation as amended. Where there is more than one recommendation, the recommendation under consideration must be disposed of before proceedings on any subsequent recommendations are embarked upon. The Chair may at any time put a recommendation to the Senate whose effect will be to terminate the item of business under discussion at the time. A recommendation to this effect shall be decided upon without debate.

#### **4.3 Voting Decisions**

Decisions of the Senate should normally be made on the basis of consensus, having heard the opinion of members of the Senate, rather than by a simple majority. Where a consensus cannot be reached, the matter is in the jurisdiction of the Senate, the Senate is quorate and a decision is required this can be decided by vote if there is a clear recommendation on which a vote can be taken.

In the absence of a consensus the Chair may at his/her discretion, under advisement from the University Secretary, determine:

- That the debate be adjourned at (time);
- That the question/recommendation be put to a vote;
- That the question/recommendation not be put to a vote;
- That the Senate proceed to the next business item on its agenda;
- That the matter be referred back to a Senate Committee.

Voting decisions shall be made on the basis of a simple majority based on a clear recommendation. A formal vote can be held where the Chair deems it appropriate because a consensus view or clear majority view cannot be reached and a decision is required.

Only Senate members have the right to vote at Senate meetings, and only if they are not precluded from doing so by a conflict of interest. Attendees who are not members of the Senate may speak by invitation at Senate meetings to provide guidance, advice and opinion, but shall not be entitled to vote.

Voting on any issue will be conducted anonymously, using appropriate digital means, with the University Secretary acting as teller. The Chair has the right to exercise a casting vote if a vote is tied. The University Secretary must record the fact a vote took place and the outcome in relation to a recommendation in the minutes of the meeting.

If the recommendation is unclear or the Senate is unable to agree on the wording of a recommendation then the matter can be deferred by the Chair and a vote not take place.

#### **4.4 Questions Procedure**

Written Questions can be submitted ahead of each meeting of Senate in relation to matters on the Senate agenda and questions submitted in writing to the University Secretary's Office two days before each Senate meeting at the latest will receive formal answers by University Officers, either in writing or orally at the meeting. The author of a written question may ask a supplementary question at the meeting, and the Senate will be allowed to debate the issue raised. If so many questions are submitted as to cause disruption of the formal business of Senate, or if questions are not deemed to fit within the remit of the Senate, the Chair and Secretary reserve the right to refuse questions or to defer them to a future meeting. The agenda for each meeting will also include a "President & Vice-Chancellor's Report" item, when the President & Vice-Chancellor will respond to questions from the floor about his/her report. The President & Vice-Chancellor's Report is an opportunity for members of the Senate to ask questions on topics which would not usually merit a formal item on the agenda. Members of the Senate can ask any question provided it fits within the remit of Senate business.

#### **4.5 Decisions between meetings and Chair's Action**

Where necessary for the good of the University, the Chair is authorised, under advisement from the University Secretary, to act on behalf of the Senate between meetings, and at other times to deal with urgent business which requires a formal decision before the next available meeting of the Senate, subject to a 'Report on Action Taken' being made to the next meeting of the Senate. The decision will be confirmed by the Chair in writing. If any such matter is expected to be of significant interest or the subject of significant debate, members of the Senate will be consulted in writing, either in hard copy or by email, before any decision is taken, or a decision will be sought by correspondence, or a special meeting of the Senate will be scheduled. See below for more information on how members of the Senate may be asked to make decisions without a meeting.

#### **4.6 Decisions without a meeting**

The Chair of Senate may decide that circumstances are exceptional and that it would be expedient in the best interests of the University for decisions to be made via email. A decision made in this form shall be as valid and effectual as if it had been passed at a meeting of the Senate duly convened and held, provided that:

- a report setting out the proposed decision with an explanation of the reasons for it and instructions for how a member of the Senate is to signify their agreement (or dissent) to the decision is sent to all members entitled to receive notice of a meeting by the University Secretary; and
- the decision is agreed to by a simple majority of such members (provided that majority would form a quorum at a meeting of the Senate) in accordance with the instructions specified in the report, which shall specify the deadline for responses.

Where the Chair of Senate seeks a decision without a meeting of the Senate the University Secretary will be responsible for the conduct of any decisions taken, including keeping accurate records and reporting the decision to the subsequent meeting of the Senate under the 'Report on Action Taken.'

## **5. Format and Frequency of Meetings**

### **5.1 Format of meetings**

Senate meetings may be held physically (usually, but not necessarily restricted to University premises) or 'virtually' using digital communications tools. In exceptional circumstances, where no such physical or virtual meeting is able to take place, and where Chair's action is not deemed appropriate, Senate members may be asked to approve specific items by email. Senate members may also be sent information electronically in between meetings that require their feedback/input. Members are required to submit their feedback to the University Secretary, who will record and summate comments for a formal report to Senate at its next meeting.

### **5.2 Frequency of meetings**

The Senate shall meet at least four times per year, as set out in the Almanac. The Chair has the power to adjourn a meeting of the Senate either to an unspecified future time and date or to an alternative date. Any meeting of the Senate shall be postponed by the University Secretary if:

- sufficient members signify beforehand that they are unable to attend such that quorum cannot be achieved;
- if half an hour after the time set for the commencement of the meeting insufficient members are present to constitute a quorum.

In exceptional circumstances a special meeting of the Senate may be summoned, either by the President & Vice-Chancellor at any time, or on receipt by the President & Vice-Chancellor or by the University Secretary on the President & Vice-Chancellor's behalf, of a written request to do so from no fewer than half of the members of the Senate. The written request must state the reason for calling the meeting and set out the nature of the business to be transacted including the wording of any recommendation that is proposed. If the reason given means the matter cannot wait for the next ordinary meeting of the Senate then any such special meeting will be summoned on the earliest convenient day, normally in term time. A statement of the reasons for calling the meeting, and the nature of the business to be transacted and the wording of any recommendation, shall accompany the notice of the meeting. No other business, except that so indicated, shall be considered at the special meeting.



## **6. Reporting**

### **6.1 Minutes**

The University Secretary is responsible for the recording of the minutes of proceedings of all formal meetings of the Senate. Minutes of meetings will be recorded by a member of the University Secretary's Office and are approved by the University Secretary and the Chair before circulation to Senate in draft as an unconfirmed minute. The minutes of a previous meeting must be approved by the Senate. The University Secretary must be advised in writing, not less than twenty-four hours before the meeting, of any proposed amendment to the unconfirmed minutes of the Senate.

The University Secretary shall be responsible for maintaining a formal Senate Minute Book, which shall contain the signed minutes of each meeting of the Senate and the agenda and all papers, including any additional or tabled papers and copies of any presentations provided to the meeting. The Minute Books shall be retained in the University Archives as a matter of historical record.

### **6.2 Reporting between Senate and Council**

A report from the Council shall be received at the Senate. The Senate members elected to the Council may speak to the report of Council at the Senate. The Council Regulations require Council to inform, consult with or receive recommendations from the Senate in relation to certain matters and in those instances the Senate will normally consider the matter as a separate item from the Council report at Senate.

A report from the Senate will be included in the reports to the Council. As set out in Regulation II the Council can review, test, refer back, control, amend or disallow any act of the Senate and give directions to the Senate.

### **6.3 Committees of Senate**

The Senate will agree the title, terms of reference, membership categories and delegated powers of any Senate Committee. Committees of the Senate will have the title 'Senate' in their pre-fix to indicate that they are a committee undertaking work on behalf of the Senate and that they report to the Senate. Each Senate Committee will make a written report to the Senate. The Chair of each Senate Committee can speak to the Committee's report at Senate. Committee reports will include a report on matters decided (under delegated powers), for note or for decision. The Senate Nominations Committee will approve appointments and re-appointments to Senate Committees and report them to the Senate at its next meeting. The Senate Nominations Committee will approve appointments and re-appointments of Senate members to joint Council/Senate committees, on behalf of the Senate.

### **6.4 Working Groups**

The President & Vice-Chancellor has the authority, delegated to him/her by the Senate, to set up ad hoc working group(s) of the Senate where more detailed consideration is required and the matter does not fall within the remit of an existing Senate Committee. The terms of reference of such a working party or group shall prescribe the maximum period, not normally exceeding two years, within which it shall submit its final report to the Senate for consideration.

### **6.5 Amendments to Standing Orders**

The University Secretary will review the Standing Orders annually and propose any changes to the Senate.

Amendments to Standing Orders can be made by a simple majority of the Senate members present at the meeting at which the amendments are considered.

Amendments to Standing Orders do not take effect until the conclusion of the meeting at which the decision to amend them was taken.

The Standing Orders will be published on the University website and provided to new Senate members as part of their induction pack.