

Governance News

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Welcome

If you are reading this issue, you are probably a new member of Faculty Board or a faculty committee. The faculty’s Secretariat has put together the following information to help you get started in your role and become an active member of your committee.

The Faculty of Business and Economics has a very robust decision making process that allows checks and balances at several levels when important decisions are being made. As a member of a committee, you will be part of this consultative and collaborative process. You, and the group you represent, can make the most of your membership if you know how governance works, and help your committee communicate ideas and decisions to the whole faculty.

Why do we meet?

Universities in general and Monash in particular have a tradition, established by its statutes and regulations, of distributing responsibilities and decision making to groups of people. In our faculty, Faculty Board has been established by statute to oversee a series of faculty strategies and operations.

The Faculty of Business and Economics is very large and complex. Therefore Faculty Board established five committees and delegated to them part of the board’s work. These five committees report their findings and recommendations to the board. Faculty Board also receives reports from four faculty statutory committees, from the committees of the six faculty departments, and from several divisions, workgroups, review panels, and individuals.

In addition to the faculty’s formal governance structure described above, the faculty’s management also includes advisory groups, working parties, user groups and other forums. These have been established so people can meet to discuss issues and recommend changes and improvements to the faculty’s academic fields of interest and responsibility. When groups identify and discuss issues, they make recommendations to committees that report to Faculty Board. Faculty Board then makes decisions based on these recommendations, which are then recorded in the board minutes and reported to the University Academic Board.

To ensure that the time spent by you, the member, is productive, meetings need to have a purpose. Therefore Faculty Board and all faculty committees have terms of reference that describe what the committee will be responsible for, and where it reports. Committees also have a membership structure designed so that the right mix of people and expertise match its terms of reference. Good membership structures ensure that the committee has a balance of representation, expertise, diversity, and the appropriate size to enrich discussion and decisions.

How to prepare for a meeting

When preparing for your meeting, first consider why you have chosen, or have been chosen, to attend this specific committee. You may be representing a group of students, a department, or an administrative unit. Make sure you know your business, your group, or your team. This will make your representation of them to the committee more valuable.

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You should then try to find out as much as you can about the committee. A good way to start is to check its website. All faculty committees and boards have a website with the terms of reference, membership list, meeting dates, and the contact details of the secretary. Most websites will also have previous agendas and minutes. It is worth looking at the last meeting’s agenda and minutes to get an idea of what has recently been discussed, and what items are pending and are likely to be discussed in the first meeting you attend. Most secretaries have all pending items in a separate action sheet.

If you want to raise an item for discussion, make sure you meet the deadline for submission of items to the next agenda. Chairs only allow urgent and important items to be added to the agendas at the last minute.

The secretary of the committee will add your email address to the committee’s distribution list. This will keep you up to date with all of the committee’s business. Make sure you check for changes to venues, dates, calls for submissions to the agendas, e-votes, and other important issues that may arise in between meetings. You should contact the secretary if your contact details change or if you cannot be at a meeting.

“ If you have questions about items in the agenda, contact the secretary before the meeting. Clarifying and even correcting mistakes in the agenda before the meeting can save the committee a lot of time.”

You will receive an agenda one week before the meeting. Some committees are going green, so let the secretary know if you want a hard copy of the agenda. Otherwise, you will receive an electronic copy, and most secretaries will also upload the agenda on the website. It is important that you read the agenda, including the documents for discussion. If the agenda is very big, you can focus your attention on items that are relevant to your unit, department or group. Make sure you know about items in the agenda that have been posted by your department or group, as you may be asked to brief the committee, or answer questions.

If you have questions about items in the agenda, contact the secretary before the meeting. Clarifying and even correcting mistakes in the agenda before the meeting can save the committee a lot of time.

At the meeting, the chair drives the business, and the secretary makes sure that the decisions are recorded for further communication and reporting.

Now that you have read this article, we hope that you feel well prepared and keen to participate in discussions, give your opinions and express your department’s or group’s concerns and ideas.

What happens after the meeting is over?

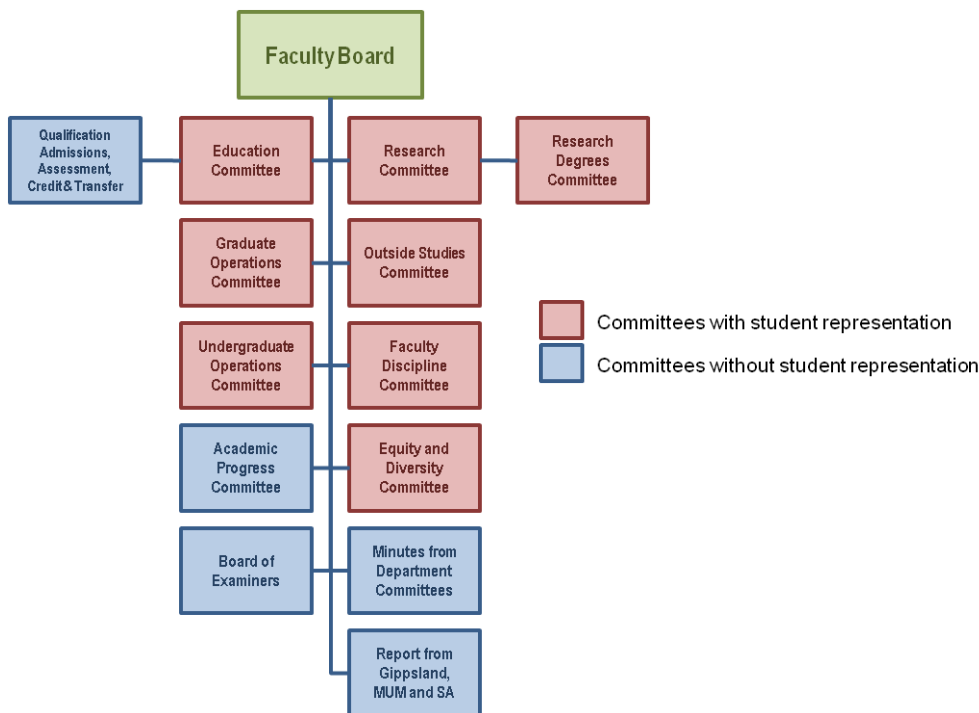
Communicating and taking action on decisions made by the committee is the most important part of the governance process. You need to be aware of what decisions made by the committee affect the group you represent and how you can better communicate these decisions back to them. If you a staff member, you can provide a report of the committee’s decisions at your department meeting, or if the matter is urgent, discuss it with your head of department. If you are a student, get in touch with the student associations on your campus.

To help you do this you will receive the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting (they will be confirmed at the next meeting after all members agree they are correct), and an action sheet. Use the action sheet as a checklist for what (if anything) you will be expected to complete before the next meeting. Sometimes you may be part of a small sub-group that has been given a task or asked to find information before the next meeting. The secretary will update the action sheet before the next meeting, with feedback from the responsible staff or sub-groups, and any pending items will be discussed at the beginning of the next meeting.

The secretary and chair also have an important role to play in ensuring that decisions made are implemented. The secretary prepares a report of the meeting that goes to Faculty Board, escalating the recommendations made. Faculty Board will decide on the approval of the recommendations made by the committees, and the chairs of the committees will speak to their reports and champion the recommendations. Once approval is given, the Secretariat ensures that the relevant data, policies and procedures are updated and the changes communicated to all faculty staff.

Sometimes your committee will discuss an item that needs to be brought to the attention of another committee, or another faculty. In this case, the secretary and chair will delegate or escalate the item to the relevant committee or faculty for discussion and resolution.

“Communicating and taking action on decisions made by the committee is the most important part of the governance process.”



The illustration shows the formal reporting lines to the Business and Economics Faculty Board

Committee Jargonese: Your Survival Guide to meetings

Adjournment. Postponing or breaking off a meeting for later resumption.

Amendment. An alteration or proposed alteration to the terms of a motion, designed to improve the motion without contradicting it. It can be to leave some words out, or to leave some words out and insert others in their place, or to add new words.

Co-opted Member. Co-opted members are usually members additional to a committee ie. they are not within the required list of members but provision is made in the terms of reference of the committee for their appointment to be made. They may be appointed as they are persons with a particular interest in the committee's functions or for a particular duration.

Dissent. If any members feel strongly about a motion that has been carried despite their opposition, they may request that their dissent or dissenting vote be recorded in the minutes.

Email Vote. The secretary will circulate a proposal to Committee members for approval via email to cast a vote 'for' or 'against' a proposal. Members will be requested to submit their vote via return email to the secretary within the notified timeline. Normally a non-response will be accepted as a 'for' vote.

Endorse. The Committee is asked to support a recommendation made to another body/action taken, where the recommendation/action did not require the Committee's formal approval.

Ex Officio Members. Individuals who are automatically members of a committee/board because they hold certain positions within the university, eg. Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Head of Department, University Librarian.

Motion. A proposed resolution before it has been adopted (that is, passed or carried) by the meeting. May be procedural or substantive.

Note. The Committee is informed of background information, sometimes with emphasis on a particular point.

Notice of Motion. At the end of the meeting, members may give notice of their intention to move certain points at the next meeting. This enables the other members to familiarise themselves with the issues involved in the meantime, and it ensures inclusion of the motions in the agenda of the next meeting.

Other Business. Any matter not otherwise raised during the meeting. Provision is usually made for general business at the end of the agenda.

Point of Order. Is taken when a person officially draws the attention of the chairperson of a meeting to an alleged irregularity in the proceedings. The alleged irregularity may be one involving facts (eg. that a quorum is not present), or one involving opinions (eg. that a speaker's remarks are not relevant to the subject of debate), or a mixture (eg. that a motion is outside the scope of the agenda).

Procedural Motion. Deals with the conduct of the meeting itself, eg. 'that the meeting be adjourned', 'that Item 7 be discussed in conjunction with Item 14'.

Quorum. The smallest number of members who must be present to constitute a valid meeting. Under Monash University Statute 1.2, no question may be decided at a meeting unless the quorum specified is present. If a quorum is not present within half an hour of the scheduled starting time the meeting shall be adjourned to another time.

Recommend. The Committee supports, but does not have the power, to resolve the issue/proposal; it has to refer it to another Committee or officer.

Resolve. The Committee is asked to support a recommendation.

Rescission Motion. A motion proposing that a resolution be removed from the books, either later in the meeting which adopted it or at a subsequent meeting, eg. 'that resolution 06/2/16 on the extension of the lunch period be rescinded'.

Special/Extraordinary Meeting. Held to discuss a specific topic(s) outside the normal meeting schedule.

Standing Order. (Or Rules of Order, or Rule of Debate), the permanent rules for the regulation of the business and proceedings at the committee/board meetings.

Starring System. Depending upon the type of committee/board, all items (or only selected items) may be discussed, using a starring system. Items may be starred before the meeting by the secretary/executive officer, in consultation with the chairperson. At the commencement of the meeting, members are given the opportunity to nominate items which they wish to star for discussion.

Statement of Pecuniary Interests. Members having a direct commercial or financial interest in any item before this meeting must declare that interest to the Chair via the Committee Secretary prior to consideration of the item, and must not take part in a vote on any matter concerning it.

Terms of Reference. Outline of the purposes, functions, responsibilities of the committee/board.

For a complete glossary please go to:

<http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/execserv/committees/comm-sec/index.html>

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