



FOUR

Planning for the Meeting

The previous section gave a broad overview of the roles of the chairperson and the secretary in meetings of council. This section goes into more depth about planning for the meeting and the vital roles and responsibilities of the secretary in this phase. The various actions that should be taken in planning for a meeting are discussed below.

In planning a meeting the following questions should be addressed:

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- What is the meeting trying to accomplish?
- What is the message that needs to be communicated?
- Is the meeting going to be worth the members' time?

| Notice of Meeting

Councils hold at least four ordinary meetings in the course of the academic year. The dates for these meetings are usually decided upon well in advance (towards the end of the previous year) by the chairperson and vice-chancellor, and published in the calendar for the institution by the registrar. At the same time it is useful to draw up an annual plan of issues to be covered in the meetings for the year. Institutional statutes and the Standard Institutional Statute also make provision for the holding of special and emergency meetings and the circumstances under which these may be called. The secretary has the task of giving due notice of any meeting – either

ordinary meetings already decided upon or special or emergency meetings on instruction from the chairperson. (The secretary has the authority neither to issue a notice of a meeting nor to convene a meeting on her/his own initiative.) The chairperson should be assured that the notice contains the correct information and notices should bear the signature of the issuing officer and the date.

Prior to the issuing of the formal notice of the meeting, however, the secretary should call on all members of council to submit written items for inclusion on the agenda. This would include any motion for consideration at the next meeting. Dates for submissions for the agenda (at least 21 days in advance of the meeting) are usually set in the institutional calendar in relation to the dates set for ordinary meetings.

Notices of meetings should contain, at a minimum, information about:

- the date on which the meeting will take place;
- the time at which it will start; and
- the place where it will be held.

Notices of meetings are also required to give information about all the matters to be dealt with at the meeting. In order to meet this requirement, notices are distributed along with the agenda, the minutes of the previous meeting and any other necessary documentation, bearing in mind that any confidential issues should be clearly designated as such.

| The Agenda

The word 'agenda' is a Latin word meaning 'the things to be done'. The agenda is a list of items or activities that have to be addressed in a specific sequence at a meeting. According to Britzius (1991) it is virtually impossible to conduct a meeting without an agenda unless it is a special meeting that has been called to deal with a single issue. In a special meeting all the participants know the nature of the business to be addressed. For ordinary meetings, however, an agenda should be circulated to all the attendees of the meeting to give them an opportunity to think about and prepare for the subjects to be discussed.

A good agenda always prioritises the business of the meeting. Provisional time allocations should be made for each item, and there should be clarity on whether specific items are for information, decision-making, approval or notification.

TIPS AND TRAPS OF DEVELOPING AN AGENDA

TIPS

An agenda should be:

- brief;
- clear;
- specific; and
- unambiguous.

It should take the following into consideration:

- decisions to be reviewed from the previous meeting;
- matters arising from the previous meeting;
- new matters; and
- submissions from members.

TRAPS

- A long agenda that may discourage members from attending (only relevant issues should be included on the agenda);
- failure to have the agenda ratified by the chair and vice-chancellor; and
- a secretary who is not skilled at drawing up an agenda.

In general, the agenda should follow the sequence specified below:

- Opening
- Welcome
- Attendance register and apologies
- Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting
- Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting
- New matters
 - X

- Y
- Z
- Any other business
- Date of next meeting
- Closure

At the meeting, it is assumed that members have read the minutes of the previous meeting and are in a position to correct any inaccuracies or respond to matters arising from the minutes. Under 'General', important matters that arise after the agenda has been circulated may be discussed with the consent of the chairperson and the majority of members. Extra sets of documentation should be available since there may be one or two members who have forgotten to bring along their meeting package.

| Venue

The acceptability and comfort of a meeting venue is very important, although this does not mean it has to be a five-star facility. Most institutions have council chambers specifically designed for the purpose of holding council meetings. In the event that another venue has to be used, important issues for consideration are that:

- all the participants should have clear directions to the venue in order to arrive on time for the start of the meeting;
- the venue should be free from noise;
- ample lighting is necessary;
- there should be no distractions;
- the temperature should be just right (you do not want to have members either sweating or shivering);
- if required, the public-address system should be working well.
- recording equipment should be available;
- seating arrangements should be such that all the members are able to see one another; and

- a notice should be put up to indicate that there is a meeting in progress.

All these arrangements should be taken care of by the secretary.

Good planning for the meeting should ensure that the meeting is held in a suitable location, at an appropriate time, and that members are provided with the necessary documentation in good time in order to arrive both informed and prepared.