

Standing Orders of General Purposes Committee 2025-26

Remit of the General Purposes Committee

The General Purposes Committee is responsible for considering matters of significance which do not fall within the remit of any other committee of Council. It therefore operates to ensure appropriate governance for issues which would not otherwise be considered elsewhere. It considers a wide range of matters including reputational issues, risk and compliance, policies, subsidiary companies, external relationships and University legislation.

Preamble

Council has adopted the following common set of principles within which its committees operate.

- **Subsidiarity** Handling of committee business through Council's main committees reflects the principle of subsidiarity, that decisions should be delegated to the lowest level appropriate to that decision.
- **Clarity** There should be clarity regarding the membership of the committee and the role of those in attendance, the flow of business to and from the committee, its terms of reference, delegations (both in matters delegated to the committee and by the committee), the reports coming to the committee and the reporting arrangements of the committee itself (eg to Council, to other bodies, to Congregation and the wider community of the collegiate University). Matters such as these are set out in the Standing Orders of a main committee of Council.
- **Flow of business** Where allowed by legislation and timeliness, most items should come to Council through one of its five main committees. Items normally should go to only one of those committees. If an item has to go to more than one, it should do so sequentially, so that a single report comes up to Council. The reason for an item coming through more than one main committee should be clearly documented for Council.
- **Timeliness** Handling also reflects the importance of timeliness. Ensuring timely decision-making may require Chair's Action; in such cases Chair's decisions are reported at the next available meeting.
- **Inclusivity** Consideration should be given to ensuring diverse membership of the committee and to conducting business in a way that encourages the full participation and engagement of all members to achieve effective decision-making.
- **Reporting** Items coming to Council should first and foremost enable Council members to exercise their duties as trustees. They therefore normally address key strategic opportunities and/or significant risks. These may be new risks not necessarily yet reflected in the current risk register.

Reports to Council should be brief and focussed. Detailed consideration, wherever possible, should already have taken place at the level of the reporting committee. Information recording this detailed consideration, in the form of minutes and supporting papers, is accessible to Council members via the SharePoint site.

1. Membership

1.1 Eligibility for membership and procedure for vacancies

Eligibility for membership of all committees is set out in general regulations. See Part 2 of Council Regulations 14 of 2002:

<https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-14-of-2002>.

1.2 Period of membership¹

Appointed, elected, and co-opted members of committees of General Purposes Committee (GPC), other than the student member, shall, in the absence of provision in these regulations, or in the General Regulations of Council for Committees, to the contrary, serve for three years.

¹ Regulation 2.2 of Council Regulations 14 of 2002: <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-14-of-2002>.

Such a member may serve no more than two full terms of office, and on completion of those two terms may not become an appointed, elected, or co-opted member of GPC until a full term of office on that committee has passed.

The student member shall serve for one year.

Further provisions concerning members whose appointment to the committee is tied to other matters, e.g. membership of Council are provided in the regulations governing period of membership.

1.3 Composition of GPC

GPC's composition, including its powers of co-option, are set out at regulations 1.1-1.3 of Council Regulations 15 of 2002:

<https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/part-3-general-purposes-committee>.

1.4 Inclusivity and diversity

In reviewing its membership at its first meeting of the year, GPC should consider whether to use its power of co-option to provide for a more diverse membership.

1.5 Eligibility to vote

Appointed, elected, and co-opted members of GPC, other than the student member, shall be entitled to vote, where at the chair's discretion, a vote is called.

2. Terms of reference

The General Purposes Committee's terms of reference are set out at regulations 1.5-1.6 of Council Regulation 15 of 2002

<https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/part-3-general-purposes-committee>.

3. Arrangements for meetings

Note: it is intended that the meetings of GPC will be held in person where possible, though with provisions to allow members to participate online if required. In the event that a meeting needs to be held online members will be notified of this. The provisions of these Standing Orders apply to online meetings, in person meetings and hybrid meeting, except as referenced in footnotes below.

3.1 Timing

Meetings of GPC shall be normally held at 11.00am on the Monday of the 6th Week of each term and at 11.00am on the Monday of the 10th Week of each Trinity Term. Items of business may be circulated for approval by correspondence in between meetings. The chair may postpone or cancel meetings at their discretion.

The Chair may call an extraordinary meeting at any time.

3.2 Declaration of personal interests

Members of GPC will be asked to declare any interest that could give rise to conflict in relation to any item on the agenda at the beginning of the item in question. All interests so disclosed will be recorded in the minutes. If the Chair deems it appropriate, the member shall absent themselves from all or part of the committee's discussion of the matter. Wording reflecting these provisions will be included at the beginning of every GPC agenda.

3.3 Order of Business

The order of business will normally be as follows, for both unreserved and reserved sections of the agenda:

1. Matters requiring active consideration (business that is 'above the line'):
 - 1.1 minutes of the previous meeting (to be taken as read unless any objection is raised);
 - 1.2 matters arising from the minutes;

- 1.3 other items requiring discussion and/or decision;
2. Matters not requiring active consideration (business that is 'below the line'):
 - 2.1 matters arising from the minutes;
 - 2.2 other items requiring approval or noting.

3.4 Quorum²

No business shall be transacted at any meeting of GPC unless a quorum is present.

For GPC, a quorum is one third of those members eligible to vote upon the business of the committee (rounded to the nearest integer) and must include at least one Head of Division and at least one of the three members appointed by Council.

A member who is participating in a meeting by telephone, video-conference or any other means of communication which permits all members simultaneously to hear one another, shall be considered present and therefore shall count towards the quorum.

If a quorum is not present within half an hour from the time appointed for the meeting or, during a meeting, a quorum ceases to be present, the business or remaining business of that meeting shall be deferred to another meeting, whether already scheduled or to be scheduled, or shall be dealt with by the Chair acting under delegated authority in accordance with these standing orders (see para 9.3 below).

3.5 Chair's casting vote³

The person taking the chair at any committee meeting shall have a second or casting vote in the event of equality of voting.

3.6 Deputy Chair

The internal Deputy Chair of Council shall act as deputy chair, to deputise as chair in the event of the chair's absence, or for an item in which the chair has a conflict of interest. Pro-Vice-Chancellors may also deputise as chair, if required.

4. Attendance at meetings

4.1 Voting members

Only individuals appointed, elected or co-opted to the committee or listed in 4.2 and 4.3 below may attend meetings on a regular basis. On occasions when the appointee is unable to attend the appointee will still receive the papers and be able to raise any comments or questions through the Secretariat or with the Chair.

4.2 Officers in attendance

Where they are not members of GPC, the following officers may attend any meeting of the General Purposes Committee for the full agenda: the Pro-Vice-Chancellors with portfolio, the Registrar, the Director of Financial Operations, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of Legal Services and General Counsel, the Director of Public Affairs, the Director of Planning and Council Secretariat, the the Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office (Vice-Chancellor's Office), the Head of Governance, and the Assistant Registrar (Governance). These officers may speak if invited, but are not entitled to vote.

4.3 Student member

The representative of the Oxford University Student Union is entitled to attend the unreserved business of a meeting of the General Purposes Committee, but not the reserved⁴ business and is not entitled to vote⁴.

² Regulations 2.6-2.7 of Council Regulations 14 of 2002 <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-14-of-2002>.

³ Regulation 1.3 of Council Regulations 14 of 2002 <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-14-of-2002>.

⁴ Regulation 2.3 of Council Regulations 14 of 2002 <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-14-of-2002>.

4.4 Those invited for particular items

Other individuals may be invited to attend for particular items and participate in the discussion.

5. Confidentiality of GPC's proceedings

5.1 Categories of business

Unreserved business is the business of GPC for which the student member may be in attendance. It may either be designated as 'public', 'internal', or 'confidential'. These definitions align with University information and data classifications: <https://www.infosec.ox.ac.uk/handling-information>.

Reserved business is the business of GPC for which the student member may not be present (see paragraph 4.2). It is always 'confidential' and the papers are marked accordingly. The expectation is that this category of business will be used as sparingly as possible. The following matters will be ordinarily categorised as 'reserved' business, and therefore as 'confidential':

- a. issues of particular strategic sensitivity;
- b. issues of particular commercial sensitivity; and
- c. matters pertaining to specific individuals, such as honorary degrees and decisions on appointments, promotions, and other matters concerning the personal position of members of the staff of the University; and the admission of individuals and their academic assessment and personal affairs.

The list above is not exhaustive and there may be occasion on which matters falling outside those categories listed above need to be treated as 'confidential'. If this occurs, the expectation would be to provide the explanation to GPC.

The student member shall receive the full agenda (edited as necessary in the opinion of the Registrar) but not the papers or minutes relating to reserved business.

5.2 Treatment of confidential business

Business that is designated 'confidential' may be discussed in person only with:

- a. other members of the General Purposes Committee;
- b. members of, and senior officers in attendance at, the committee(s) that have previously considered the issue;
- c. senior officers in attendance at the General Purposes Committee;
- d. senior officers in receipt of General Purposes Committee papers; and
- e. where the business is unreserved, the student member of the General Purposes Committee.

In exceptional circumstances, a GPC member may desire to discuss confidential issues with a person outside the groups in a-e above. In such a case, approval must be sought, with reasons, and obtained from the Registrar in advance of the discussion taking place.

A GPC member may seek further information on an item from the officer specifically named in the paper as being the source of such information. The same designation of confidentiality will attach to the information provided as to the item on the agenda.

At its meeting, GPC may alter either the designation of a paper, or its position within the agenda. For example, it may decide that a previously confidential paper should be designated as 'public'. If a change in designation is thought desirable following the General Purposes Committee meeting in which the item was considered, the Registrar has authority to approve such a change.

5.3 Discussion at meetings of GPC

Irrespective of the categorisation of business, in all cases views expressed by others present at meetings of the General Purposes Committee (either members of the General Purposes Committee or those in attendance) during the course of the General Purposes Committee meeting may not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone outside the meeting unless that person is either another member of the General Purposes Committee, an officer ordinarily in attendance, or, with the exception of discussions of 'reserved confidential' business, the student member.

6. Papers

6.1 Circulation

Electronic copies of the agenda and papers will be published on GPC's SharePoint site for members of the committee, officers in attendance, and others authorised to see the papers, normally five days before the meeting.

Above the line papers only will be circulated in hard copy to individual members if necessitated for reasons of accessibility⁵.

Members of Council will have access to the General Purposes Committee's SharePoint site.

Others for whom it is necessary for the discharge of their duties shall also have access to GPC's SharePoint site, subject to endorsement by the secretary of the committee.

The Keeper of the Archives shall have access to GPC's SharePoint site to download the agenda and papers for permanent electronic preservation.

6.2 Holding and disposal of papers

All information concerning the General Purposes Committee, including its papers whether in electronic form or hard copy, must be held in accordance with the University's Information Security Policy⁶.

Members of the committee and others in receipt of committee papers, including minutes, must ensure that copies of such papers in their personal possession are disposed of, when no longer needed by them; the secretary of the committee shall make appropriate arrangements for the confidential disposal of any such papers which are returned to them.

7. Self-review⁷

Each main committee of Council shall carry out a self-review of its operations and effectiveness at least every five years and shall report its findings to Council with recommendations for change where appropriate.

8. Risk register

The committee will review the University Risk Register biannually to ensure that the appropriate risks are identified and that suitable and effective mitigations are proposed, and will report to Council accordingly.

9. Delegations

9.1 Powers delegated by Council to the General Purposes Committee

In addition to those set out in Part 3 of Council Regulations 15 of 2002, Council has delegated the following powers to the General Purposes Committee:

- a. authority for appointing Council representatives to committees, boards of management etc. In turn, the committee has agreed that certain of the appointments which would ordinarily fall to it to decide under

⁵ Following on from a period of no hard copy papers having been provided, it will be assumed that no hard copies are required unless specifically requested, either for a particular meeting or generally.

⁶ <https://www.infosec.ox.ac.uk/>

⁷ The provisions governing self-reviews are at regulation 2.5 of Council Regulations 14 of 2002 <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-14-of-2002>.

the delegated powers under this heading should be delegated to divisional boards or other committees. Details of such appointing arrangements are available from the secretary on request;

- b. authority to approve matters relating to Kellogg College, St Cross College and Reuben College, including the annual reports, save for changes in by-laws and the terms and conditions of appointments of Fellows, Professorial Fellows and officers which currently require the approval of Council, on the understanding that the General Purposes Committee will bring forward to Council any matters which give rise to concern;
- c. authority to receive biannual reports from the University's subsidiary companies, monitor their performance and periodically review the procedures for the governance and oversight of the subsidiary companies. Council will retain responsibility for the establishment of new subsidiary companies, advised by General Purposes Committee;
- d. authority to receive the annual report from Council's Trusts Management Board;
- e. authority to approve the annual statement on slavery and human trafficking made under the Modern Slavery Act 2015;
- f. authority to receive and note on behalf of Council the annual report on the Van Houten Fund;
- g. authority to receive the Proctors' Annual Report, on the understanding that GPC will bring forward to Council any matters which give rise to concern; and
- h. authority to approve additions to electoral boards above the nine permitted in the regulations.

9.2 Other powers relating to the Committee set out in regulations

Suspension of regulations⁸

Council, or, in a case falling within the delegated authority of any of the main standing committees of Council, ... that committee, may ..., by a resolution carried by not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting, suspend the operation of any regulation, other than a regulation made by the Rules Committee under Statute XI, to cover some specific case.

Other matters

Below is an extract from Council Regulations 14 of 2002 (as amended from time to time by Council) which record powers in regard to appointments.

'2.1. These regulations shall apply to committees reporting directly to Council or to one of its main standing committees ("Main Committees").

2.2. (1) Appointed, elected and co-opted members of committees of Council, other than student members, shall, in the absence of an alternative provision in these regulations or Council Regulations 15 of 2002 to the contrary, serve for three years.

(2) Student members shall, in the absence of an alternative provision in these regulations or Council Regulations 15 of 2002 to the contrary, serve for one year.

(3) Where it is a condition of an appointment that the person appointed is a member of Council or another committee, the period of appointment shall coincide with the appointee's known membership of the latter, provided that the period does not exceed the maximum term allowed.

(4) In the absence of provision in these regulations or Council Regulations 15 of 2002 to the contrary, appointed, elected, co-opted and student members shall serve no more than two consecutive full terms of office. Casual terms of office shall not count towards this limit.

(5) In the absence of provision to the contrary, an appointed, elected, co-opted or student member of a committee of Council, who has served two consecutive full terms of office under regulation (4) above,

⁸ Section 20 of Statute VI.

shall not be eligible to serve as an appointed, elected, co-opted or student member of that committee until a full term of office on that committee has passed from the end of his or her period of service.

(6) Notwithstanding regulations (4) and (5) above, in the case of appointed, co-opted and student members, the General Purposes Committee of Council or, in cases falling within the People Committee's delegated authority or cases concerning the membership of the General Purposes Committee, the Chair of the People Committee, may determine that one further consecutive period is permitted in an individual case.'

9.3 Powers delegated by the General Purposes Committee to its chair

The Chair of the General Purposes Committee shall have power to give approval to any matter that falls within the General Purposes Committee's terms of reference, provided that the Chair is satisfied that the case for urgency is such that approval cannot await the next meeting of the committee, and subject to report of the decision at the next meeting. When the likely need for an urgent decision between meetings is foreseen, a report should be brought to the committee outlining the current position and asking for prospective approval of Chair's action on the committee's behalf. In case of doubt or difficulty, the Chair may, at their discretion, seek approval from other members of the committee by correspondence.

9.4 Powers delegated by the General Purposes Committee to other bodies

The General Purposes Committee of Council delegates as follows:

To the Education Policy and Standards Committee (EPSC) of the Medical Sciences Board:

- a. responsibility for approval and amendment of the Code of Conduct for Medical Students.

10. Reporting

10.1 Reports to Council⁹

The General Purposes Committee shall report to Council after each meeting as required. In so doing, it shall also refer to Council any matter that in the opinion of the committee requires the attention of Council.

In addition to substantive items that are referred to Council, the committee shall make available its minutes and supporting papers to Council on the business it has considered. Individual items will be marked with an appropriate level of confidentiality, as set out in the University's information asset classification system.

10.2 Reports to the General Purposes Committee

The General Purposes Committee shall receive reports on an annual basis from committees which report to it and from other entities related to its terms of reference:

1. Committees
 - a. The Clubs Committee.
 - b. The Committee for the Proctors' Office.
 - c. Security in International Collaboration.
2. Matters of a reputational or ethical nature
 - a. Data drawn from college financial information, from the College Accounts Committee.
 - b. Community Partnership Fund.
 - c. The Van Houten Fund.
3. Regulatory matters
 - a. Compliance with the requirements of the Office for Students.

⁹ Regulation 2.4(2) of Council Regulations 14 of 2002 "They shall make reports and recommendations to Council as they consider appropriate, subject to such policies and guidelines as Council lays down by regulation or otherwise." <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-14-of-2002>

- b. The number and types of complaints considered by the Proctors and, in general terms, the outcomes, for forwarding to Council, if they are a cause for concern.
 - b. Data protection and freedom of information.
 - c. The management of funds within OUDT, including the Vice-Chancellor's disbursement of unrestricted funds, from the Trusts Management Board.
4. The public understanding of the aims and activities of the University
 - a. The Public Affairs Directorate.
5. The University's relationship with external bodies
 - a. The Oxford Playhouse.
6. Matters of significance not within the remit of other committees
 - a. St Cross College, Kellogg College and Reuben College (annual reports).

In addition, the General Purposes Committee shall receive reports from:

1. The Security Subcommittee, termly.
2. The Subsidiary Companies annual report, biannually.

10.3 Terms of reference of sub-committees and panels of the General Purposes Committee

Terms of reference of the following panels and subcommittees of GPC may be found at <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/committees>

- Security Subcommittee of the General Purposes Committee