

[Guidance and Paper Templates for University Executive Boards, Advisory Groups and Committees

*This coversheet and paper template should be used by deleting and **replacing the black body text with report specific content** and the removal of all blue italicised guidance text in [] prior to submitting your coversheet and paper.*

If formatting is required, please do so using the Word styles functions set for the template.

[Guidance on accessibility for word documents](#) including how to use templates is available on the staff intranet including for [diagrams and pictures](#), [PDFs](#) and [excel sheets](#).

Authors are responsible for ensuring their paper/presentation is accompanied by a succinct and complete coversheet and papers/presentations correctly use this template.]

Title of Paper

[clear and unambiguous title to enable search]

[for main titles use Heading 1: formatted as Calibri 14, bold, 12pt after and single line spacing]

1. Executive Summary [required section heading]

[for section headings use Heading 2: formatted as Calibri 12, bold, 12pt after and single line spacing]

1.1 [for main document text use Normal text: formatted as Calibri 12, 12pt after and single line spacing, not justified]

Executive Summaries should be included at the beginning of all papers and ordinarily be 1-2 paragraphs long. The summary should outline any key issues and the purpose of the paper in the form of a short overview and seek to frame the debate and focus readers' attention on the key content and specific aspects for consideration.

Executive summaries may also benefit from including where relevant:

- key questions for consideration;
- how a proposed course of action contributes to the current University strategy (or, if it does not, explaining why such a course of action might still be appropriate);
- any significant trends which could present high level risks; and
- pertinent headline data.

1.2 The Executive Summary should be focused on the specific audience receiving the paper so that the Group or Committee's members can be clearer as to their role in considering the paper. Particular points of focus relevant to the audience, as well issues and conclusions should also be highlighted.

2. Paper and Presentation Content

2.1 The main body of the paper should provide sufficient detail to enable a Group or Committee to constructively consider the item of business, and in doing so, focus on quality over quantity. Members of Groups and Committees have significant levels of business to consider, read and prepare for and authors need to consider a careful balance between explanation and detail or evidence, and impact and focus on key issues to support decision making. Papers and presentations should be written as clearly, simply and succinctly as possible, avoiding unnecessary operational detail.

2.2 Ordinarily papers must be succinct and should **not normally be longer than 5 pages long** excluding annexes and presentations **no more than 10 slides** (both produced using on University templates). Exceptions to this principle include where an item of business concerns a matter which is of a complex nature. In such cases, a more fulsome Executive Summary should be provided.

2.3 Presentations accompanying a paper should not repeat the content of the paper: it might include a brief summary of the paper (five minutes maximum) or extra

information such as graphical information more appropriate for an oral or visual presentation.

- 2.4 Annexes should only be included where the information is central to the business in hand and is genuinely required to support members' consideration of the item. Annexes may not be included in the main agenda pack and made available through a meeting's Knowledge Section on Teams.
- 2.5 The main text of the paper should appear in numbered paragraphs with headings. Paragraphs are numbered to aid discussion at meetings (as members can quickly refer to a paragraph number that they wish to bring to members' attention).
- 2.6 Authors should not assume all readers have familiarity with higher education or University acronyms. Acronyms/abbreviations should be typed out in full for their first use, with the acronym/abbreviation in brackets. For example, Office for Students (OfS). Care should be taken to use current terminology e.g. the OfS and University guidance is to distinguish between specific minority groups as opposed to using terms which bundle students such as BAME.
- 2.7 It is responsibility of the author of a paper/presentation to check its formatting, grammar and spelling, accessibility formatting and data accuracy prior to sharing it with relevant paper sponsors.
- 2.8 Each item of business must have a sponsor who is ordinarily a member or standing attendee of the Group/Committee receiving the paper. All papers and presentation should be subject to review and sign-off prior to submission by sponsors and where authored by Professional Services staff the relevant Professional Services Director (or their delegate) prior to submission. Final decision about inclusion on an agenda rests with the chair of a Group or Committee.

3. **Purpose** *[required section heading]*

- 3.1 Papers may frequently serve a number of functions however it is important that there is clarity regarding their objectives. Below are the typical content and approach associated with particular purposes.

Assurance: papers providing assurance about a topic should include sufficient data/information to enable the group to measure and assess risk. This might include data that indicates volume and the numbers of failures/near misses, it might also reference mitigations, process improvements or whether agreed actions and plans are having the anticipated outcomes. This may involve providing a judgement in summary format for instance demonstrating completion/progress/delivery using a RAG rating, in addition to numerical or statistical analysis.

Options appraisal: an options appraisal will normally present the costs (including the opportunity cost) of a range of potential approaches or solutions alongside an assessment of the pros and cons of particular approaches (using evidence where possible). Options should include the option of doing nothing/maintaining the status quo. The paper may advocate one proposal (see below), rank them, or invite the group to make a determination (although a proposal to react to often works best).

Proposal for action: such a paper will typically set out a proposal for action and may seek 'in principle' approval in the first instance, recognising that final decision-making powers or financial approval may be the responsibility of another body or individual. If the proposal is not accompanied by an options appraisal the case for the proposed action or investment will need to be made, this will typically need to reference the University's strategy, KPIs, agreed business plans or student number targets and evidence how the proposal will contribute to these.

Performance/progress reporting: progress reporting should make clear previously agreed targets, KPIs, deadlines or objectives and map progress to date, including information about where performance lags expectations and the reasons for this.

Review: such a paper will summarise a review process, the methodology used, the findings, the outcomes and recommendations, and is likely to seek endorsement of the recommendations.

4. Use of Data in Papers

- 4.1 Any data presented is expected to be accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete. Reports should include relevant comparable/benchmark information if possible, particularly in assurance reports (such as sectoral, comparator institutions, University totals). Authors should use existing corporate data sources where available and reference this, (please note it is helpful to present time series data 3-5 years). If comparable data is not available please state this.
- 4.2 Data use needs to be mindful population sizes of datasets how information can best be presented. As a rule of thumb:
- use of percentages should be avoided for small data populations as they can be misleading as readers will not necessarily consider the scale of the population involved and that conclusions made based on this information may not be statistically valid. The use of numbers and/or percentages, and variable names should be consistent. Similarly, averages should be avoided for small data sets, sample sizes need to be large enough and representative to effectively use averages;
 - care must be taken not to over extrapolate data: subsets with populations of less than 50 are not generally regarded as statistically relevant;
 - when presenting people related data, consider data protection issues and whether individuals could be identified from small population data. Use <5 instead of actual numbers fewer than five;
 - if there is a University dashboard which provides your data in a real time format, you can refer to/show this link instead.
- 4.3 If you have concerns about the significance or validity of any data set please contact the Data Analytics Team for advice and guidance: data-analytics@lancaster.ac.uk.

5. Equality Diversity and Inclusion Considerations *[section heading where relevant]*

5.1 This section should be used to highlight any equality, diversity and inclusion considerations arising from this matter and how they have or will be addressed. This section could include:

- highlighting any relevant legal responsibilities and how these have or will be discharged including having due regard for the public sector equality duty;
- a headline assessment of any EDI related impacts of a proposal or initiative and how any negative impacts could be mitigated or, the process by which this assessment will be done; and
- how a proposal would support the University's achievement of its Equality Objectives.

6. Office for Students: Reportable Items *[section heading where relevant]*

6.1 The OfS requires that certain events are reported to it as part of its regulatory framework. In response to this, the University has a policy concerning reportable events which must be followed. If you think that your proposal, activity or decision-making could constitute a reportable event, please seek advice on these matters from the Director of Strategic Planning and Deputy Secretary (or, in their absence, the Head of Governance Services).

7. Freedom of Information

7.1 As a public authority, the University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which gives members of the public a right of access to all types of recorded information held by it. This includes the content of papers unless an exemption is applicable i.e. release would prejudice the University's commercial interests. The University has a legal obligation to provide information in response to properly-made requests. Authors should remain mindful of how statements might be read in the public domain. Consideration should be given as to when precision and clarity is required and when a less-specific statement is appropriate.

8. Recommendations *[required section heading]*

8.1 Give up to three clear recommendations as to what you would like the Group or Committee to do. Recommendations should be clear, precise, unambiguous and self-contained as they will form of legal record.

8.2 Groups and Committees can only act within their delegated authority as outlined in terms of reference. If authors are unsure about the delegated authority of a group or Committee they should seek advice from the relevant Secretary or Chair or Governance Services. Recommendations must match those made on the coversheet. For example:

The Board/Committee/Group is invited to:

- **approve/resolve/determine** *[the next steps for the project];*
- **note** *[the draft report prior to its consideration by Council];*
- **confirm** *[its support for the campaign];*
- **consider/discuss/comment** *[the proposed changes to the policy];*
- **advise** *[of any further changes it would wish to see to the Risk Register];*
- **recommend** *[the approval of the project and related expenditure to UPRG];*
- **endorse/support** *[the initiative's further exploration as outlined in the paper];*
- **receive** *[the options appraisal for information].*

Name of person submitting paper

Title

Date of document *[e.g. 4 October 2022]*