

GUIDANCE FOR DRAFTING PAPERS: VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXECUTIVE GROUP

This short guidance note is designed to assist University colleagues in drafting effective paperwork for consideration by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group (VCEG), Senate and Council.

VCEG, Senate and Council have responsibility for all major decision-making, as well as monitoring operational performance and management information. There is a need to ensure that paperwork is presented as effectively and succinctly as possible to VCEG (and onward to Senate and Council). The following guidelines have been developed to support and assist those individuals who are tasked with writing reports or papers for these groups. It covers the following:

1. General Principles
2. Template for Papers
3. Style and Submission Guidance

General Principles

- VCEG meets weekly and has a large schedule of business annually, so limiting paperwork to information that is essential for decision-making is appreciated. Senate only meets three times a year for formal business, and Council meets only seven times a year meaning both groups consider a large volume of paperwork at each meeting. Therefore **succinctness and brevity are essential**.
- Reports must be concise (**no more than four pages plus the cover sheet**) and must state a clear purpose and action for VCEG/Senate/Council. Appendices can be included as background information, but the information contained in them should not be essential to the discussion/decision-making process. Too much detail can mean that key points are lost. **If your paper is unavoidably longer than four pages (e.g. business cases) please use the coversheet template to provide a four page summary of the key information and any decisions.**
- Please avoid use of jargon and acronyms where possible. When papers are going to be presented to Council, they should address the needs of Independent members by avoiding Higher Education jargon, with acronyms only used if they are genuinely in common currency (e.g. OfS) or if they are spelt out in full when they first occur in the text.
- A template for papers is below, setting out the information each paper needs to contain.

The Coversheet

- Each paper must have a completed coversheet (template below). The cover sheet is vital in helping VCEG, Senate and Council members to understand what they are being asked to do. Remember it is the first thing that your intended audience will read and so having an effective coversheet will affect the reception of your paper.

- In the ‘Summary of the Paper’ section, papers authors must summarise the key points in your paper and any decisions required. It should not simply set the context for the paper.
- Please allow sufficient time to draft the coversheet appropriately and complete all boxes fully. A nil return in any of the boxes is not permissible. For instance, if there are no financial implications to your paper please state briefly the reason/s why this is. Examples of successful coversheets can be provided on request.

Template for Papers

Below is a sample outline template for all reports and the Coversheet to be used for most papers is provided below.

Most papers¹ should contain the following elements:

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

VICE-CHANCELLOR’S EXECUTIVE GROUP/SENATE/COUNCIL, [insert date of the meeting]

Document Title

1. Executive Summary

NOTE: The Executive Summary must cover the key points in the paper and decisions required/ encapsulate the findings of the paper.

State the purpose of the paper (choose from the following):

- i. For information.
- ii. To make recommendations for approval.
- iii. To put forward ideas for discussion.
- iv. To report back to VCEG/Senate/Council on a completed project or body of work.

This section needs to make clear in the first few lines of what VCEG is being asked to do; what actions they are expected to take; any decisions they are expected to make. It might be useful to list any recommendations here as well as at the end of the paper. This section may be identical to the summary on the coversheet.

2. Context

A short paragraph or two on the context of the paper is necessary in order to make VCEG/Senate/Council aware of the external/internal context of the paper (such as a change in government policy or internal process) or perhaps as an aide memoire when issues are returning to VCEG/Senate/Council for further discussion. If you have provided previous updates to VCEG/Senate/Council on the same issue please provide a short summary of work undertaken to date.

If relevant, please include a specific paragraph on who has been consulted or involved

¹ It is noted that some reports (for example research grant or admissions data) may follow a different (separately agreed) format to the template set out here.

and at what point, or what plans are in place to consult with or involve colleagues in the future.

3. Main Section

Whilst bearing in mind the overall limit of four pages, please include as much information in this section as is required for VCEG/Senate/Council to be able to undertake the task that you are asking of them. This may involve expanding on the information contained within the Coversheet.

Please also give consideration to covering the following as appropriate (this is not meant to be an exhaustive list):

- i. Details of your proposals (please give VCEG/Senate/Council more than one option to consider where appropriate/possible)
- ii. Financial and other resource implications
- iii. Analysis of any legal consequences and the risks of a course of action (and mitigation activities)
- iv. Equality and diversity – in particular whether an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried or needs to be (separate guidance available)
- v. Health and safety issues

4. Recommendation/s to VCEG/Senate/Council

Please clearly state what you would like VCEG/Senate/Council to decide upon or put into action. Bullet point lists are the best way to achieve this.

5. Next Steps

You must outline what will happen after the VCEG/Senate/Council meeting if the paper is approved and the expected timeline.

6. Communications

Papers should include a section outlining the communications issues relating to any proposal/decision, and a full communications plan for VCEG/Senate/Council to discuss and approve if appropriate.

As an example, the following questions should be considered i) what internal / external communications do we need to put around this initiative? ii) do we need to consult on this issue before making any further decisions? iii) who is going to do this?

Please state clearly if your paper can be shared more widely and with whom (e.g. College Executive Groups, Education Executive, Research and Impact Executive Group, Heads of Department).

Style and Submission Guidance

Papers must be submitted in one PDF file. VCEG/Senate/Council are paperless meetings and these groups only receive papers electronically via a specialist board papers software package. Please bear in mind that papers will only be viewed on screen so please avoid the use of complex or large spreadsheets, pivot tables or landscape formats where possible.

- Pagination - please add page numbers to the bottom right hand of the document. Numbering paragraphs can also be helpful.
- Arial 11pt or Calibri 11pt or 12pt should be used for all papers.
- Please submit documents in **one PDF document** (or two if there are separate appendices). **Please do not send through Excel spreadsheets but convert to PDF before submission.**
- VCEG papers should be emailed to Dr Victoria Alcock, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office (v.j.alcock@exeter.ac.uk) and Jean Lloyd, Executive Suite Manager and Council Co-ordinator (j.a.lloyd@exeter.ac.uk) by **12pm on the Thursday before the VCEG meeting** at which the paper is going to be considered. Papers will be circulated by close of the business day on the Thursday before the VCEG meeting. **Late papers will not be accepted and papers will be rolled over to the following week.** Early notice of agenda items coming forward is greatly appreciated to help manage the large volume of business.
- For Senate papers, please submit to secretariat@exeter.ac.uk.
- For Council papers, please submit to Jacqueline Hodges, Deputy Secretary and to Jean Lloyd Executive Suite Manager and Council Co-ordinator (secretariat@exeter.ac.uk).

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER**VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXECUTIVE GROUP**, [insert date of the meeting]**COVER SHEET**

Document title:	
Author/s:	
Sponsor on VCEG:	
Document History:	First/second/final version (<i>please include details of other groups/committees that have reviewed the paper before VCEG</i>)
Paper Classification:	Open/Confidential/Commercial in Confidence/ Legally Privileged (delete as appropriate) <i>Open: potentially open to all internal audiences</i> <i>Confidential Or Commercial in Confidence: – please indicate whether the paper should or can be shared with selected groups of staff e.g. College Executive Groups/PSLT.</i> <i>Legally Privileged: this must not be shared unless with the written permission of the paper author and sponsor.</i> <i>Please also remember that if papers include information that is considered Personal under GDPR, that this should be highlighted clearly that this should not be shared.</i>
Type of Paper:	For information/discussion/approval (<i>please delete as necessary</i>)

Summary of paper:

[Summarise the purpose and content of the paper. Please summarise the key points in the paper and decisions required/encapsulate the findings of the paper. If relevant, please indicate in this section how the paper will support or enable the University to fulfil its strategic priorities and/or supports VCEG/Council in undertaking its core duties and responsibilities.]

Financial Implications:

[Briefly summarise the financial implications for the University and for Colleges and Services.
Please indicate if there are none, and the reasons for this.]

Risk Assessment:

[Briefly summarise key risks. Please indicate if there are none, and the reasons for this.]

Equality & Diversity:

[Briefly summarise E&D implications and indicate whether an EIA has been undertaken or

[needs to be undertaken. Please do not leave this blank but highlight nil returns.]

People Impacts

[Briefly summarise any staffing implications, including potential changes to staffing levels and profiles; impacts on ways of working; training requirements; and how the proposal is aligned with the Attract, Retain, Perform HR strategy]

Communications Plan:

[Briefly summarise the following:

- Which individuals and groups have been consulted on the proposals so far and on what dates
- What plans are in place to consult with or involve colleagues going forward
- Brief communications timeline
- Highlight any action individual VCEG members are expected to take to implement or cascade any decisions.

VCEG is asked to:

[summarise actions required by VCEG at the meeting]