GUIDANCE NOTES FOR PRODUCING PAPERS FOR COMMITTEES (September 2015)

These notes are designed to ensure that committees receive an appropriate level of information and detail, in an easy to follow format, to enable them to complete their work effectively and efficiently.

GENERAL POINTS

1. Please do not ask for an item to be included on the agenda unless you have checked with the committee Secretary that the topic dealt with by your paper falls within the remit of the committee. If it does not, the Secretary will advise you whether the paper needs to go to another committee. It may not need to be seen by a committee at all, as it may be relevant to a matter dealt with by an individual rather than a committee.

2. The role of the majority of School committees is to develop School strategies and to monitor their delivery. These committees are not there to take responsibility for operational areas - these are the responsibility of others, such as the Deans or Professional Services Directorates.

3. Committees often receive a large number of papers. It is important that papers are focused, and as short as possible, setting out only the facts that the committee needs in order to do whatever it is being asked to do.

4. Please be clear exactly what you are asking the committee to do and why, and make sure that key issues are easy to identify.

5. Papers need to be written in plain English. Do not use jargon unless this is unavoidable, and all terms should be explained when they first occur in the text eg Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

6. If there are several options to choose from, set them out, and make your recommendation. The committee will <u>always</u> want to know what your recommendation is.

7. If your proposals have financial implications please make clear exactly what these are, including both long and short term effects. You must indicate, for example, whether your proposals are covered by previously agreed budgets. If this is not the case, how do you intend your proposals to be funded? Please bear in mind that after the budgets have been set for the year, there is only a very limited amount of contingency money available.

8. If you are recommending changes, please indicate a timeline, so the committee can see when you expect the changes to become effective, and what transitional arrangements are to be made, if these are necessary.

9. The School aims to make as much committee information as possible publicly available, so the committee Secretary will publish the **open** agenda, **open** appendices and **open** minutes of each meeting on the School's external website within 2 weeks of the minutes of that meeting being approved at the following meeting of the committee. Doing so will make the work of SOAS' committees more open and transparent, and will help the School to meet its obligations under Freedom of Information legislation. You will need to take this into account when you write your paper. Detailed guidance has been produced by the Information Compliance Manager on what types of items should go into open and reserved business: see 'Freedom of Information and Data Protection: Guidance for Committee Servicing' (http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/foi/committees/).

PRACTICALITIES

10. **All papers which go to The Board of Trustees, or any of the committees which report directly to it, are required to have a cover paper.** There is a standard format for cover papers, and a copy of the cover paper for The Board of Trustees is at Annex A.

11. Cover papers require an executive summary, which summarises the overall paper and any background information. The cover paper also requires you to set out any recommendations you are making, and information about the financial impact, risks and equality implications of your paper.

12. **All papers for committees which do not have cover papers** must include a sentence or two at the top of the document (under the title) which sets out exactly what you are asking the committee to do (this is the same as the information required in the first box on a standard cover paper) e.g.

> The Parking Permit Committee is being asked to:
> (i)   **note** the timetable for production of new permits, and
> (ii)   **approve** a procedure for issuing new permits.

If your paper is one or two sides of A4 in length this explanatory sentence should be followed by the paper's introductory paragraph.

If your paper is longer than two sides of A4, then your paper must have an executive summary after the sentence which sets out what you are asking the committee to do. This summary should be an easy to understand overview, which sets out the main issues/points that are made within the paper and brief information about your recommendations.

The following points refer to all papers whether or not they have a cover sheet.

13. All committee papers should be in aerial font, as this is recommended as one of the most readable fonts for those who have a visual impairment. Print should be size 11.

14. Any necessary supporting material should be included in Annexes. This does not mean that you should include everything you can think of in annexes attached to your paper. Please make sure that this supporting material really is necessary to enable the committee to understand your arguments. Please do not call this additional information an appendix, as when your paper appears on the agenda the additional paper will be an appendix to an appendix.

15. Where appropriate, if there is a lot of supporting material, you could say in your paper that committee members can contact you for more detailed information, and provide your contact details. Alternatively you could put information on to the intranet, and provide an intranet address for people to look at.

16. Please do not use 'track changes' when you are showing, for example, proposed revisions to documents, as these can easily be lost when your paper is being processed. Instead, use bold to show new wording and strike through items which are to be deleted.

17. Avoid referring to sections of your paper by page number, as the pagination may vary depending on the printer used. Refer instead to relevant paragraphs. Use section headings and number paragraphs, as it is much easier for committee members to discuss the document if relevant sections can be found quickly.

18. Please number the pages of your document in the bottom right-hand corner.

19. Make sure that your name and job title appear at the end of your paper, along with the date on which the paper was completed.

20. Please make sure that your paper is sent electronically to the committee Secretary by the agreed deadline. The Secretary needs time to process your paper, along with all of the others the committee will be dealing with.

21. Please do not send PDFs as it is not always possible to add appendix details electronically to papers in this format.

Jan Airey
Secretariat Manager
September 2015

TITLE

*1-2 line summary of the paper covering action/decision required of the Board of Trustees
e.g*
*The Board of Trustees is asked to **note** the following Report or*
*The Board of Trustees is asked to **approve** the recommendations in the report*

Executive Summary

Paragraph, drawn from main paper if necessary, that summarises the overall paper and any background information

To end with name of member of the Board of Trustees sponsoring the paper – who should be aware of this in advance of the meeting

Recommendations

List of any recommendations within the report

Financial Impact

Summary of the financial impact of any recommendations in the paper

Figures to be checked with the Finance & Planning Directorate prior to the paper being submitted

Risks

Brief summary of any of the risks.

Equality implications

A brief section, with any details in the report, on the equality implications of any decisions for people with any of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act (2010) [i.e. age, civil partnership / marriage, disability, ethnicity, gender including pregnancy & maternity, religion / belief /non-belief, sexual identity, sexual orientation]
(further advice available from the Diversity & Inclusion Managers if required)

The main paper then starts on a new page and typically be no more than 4 pages long with any supporting documentation provided in labelled annexes.