

Attendance Policy: The Senate and Standing Committees of the Senate

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POLICY

Attendance Policy: The Senate and Standing Committees of the Senate

Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	General Matters.....	3
2.1	Purpose of the Policy	3
2.2	Approval and Maintenance of the Policy	3
2.3	Related Policies	4
3.0	Scope of the Policy and Definitions	4
3.1	Scope of the Policy	4
3.2	Definitions.....	4
4.0	Responsibilities	6
4.1	Chairs	6
4.2	Members	6
4.3	Clerks	6
5.0	Attendance Issues.....	7
5.1	Prevention (Applies to All Members).....	7
6.0	Remedial Action	8
6.1	Requirement for Remedial Action	8
6.2	Elected Members of the Senate.....	8
6.3	Appointed Members of Senate Committees.....	9
6.4	Ex-Officio Members of the Senate and Senate Committees	10
7.0	Other Matters	10
7.1	Attendance by Non-Members at Senate and Standing Committees.....	10
7.2	Remote Participation in Meetings	10
7.3	Policy Implementation.....	11
7.4	Attendance Monitoring.....	11
8.0	Definitions	12
9.0	Further Help and Advice.....	13
10.0	Policy Version and History.....	13
	Appendix One – Template message to prevent a breach	14

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Policy outlines the attendance requirements and expectations of members of the Senate and its Standing Committees.
- 1.1.2 Nothing in this Policy shall be interpreted in a way that is contrary to the Charter, Statutes, and Ordinances. The Charter, Statutes, and Ordinances shall have primacy should this Policy be found to be in any respect contrary to the Charter, Statutes, or Ordinances.
- 1.1.3 The Principal and Vice-Chancellor shall have the final authority on the interpretation of this Policy.

2.0 General Matters

2.1 Purpose of the Policy

- 2.1.1 The effectiveness of the Senate and its Committee rely on the active participation from all members.
- 2.1.2 Serving on the Senate or one of its Committees is a privilege that requires regular attendance and active engagement by all Senators and Committee members.
- 2.1.3 However, it is recognised that other commitments and changing circumstances can make full attendance difficult for some members, however:

members of the Senate are expected to attend at least **four** of the **six** ordinary meetings per academic year. Standing Committee members should attend at least **67%** of their ordinary meetings per academic year (or nearest whole number equivalent).
- 2.1.4 The policy is intended to encourage participation of members and address attendance issues in a supportive manner.

2.2 Approval and Maintenance of the Policy

- 2.3.1 The Senate shall approve this Policy.
- 2.3.2 The Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness shall review this Policy every three years.

2.3 Related Policies

- 2.4.1 This Policy should be read with the Charter, Statutes, and Ordinances. In particular, terms used in this Policy shall have the definitions given in the Charter, Statutes, and Ordinances unless indicated otherwise.
- 2.4.2 This Policy should also be read with the following related policies:
 - a. The Senate: Standing Orders; and
 - b. The Standing Committees of the Senate: Standing Orders.

3.0 Scope of the Policy and Definitions

3.1 Scope of the Policy

- 3.1.1 This Policy applies to the Senate, its Standing Committees, sub-committees and short-life working groups. References in the text to 'Member', 'Chair' and 'Clerk' apply to the appropriate person in all of these bodies.

3.2 Definitions

Attendance Issue

- 3.2.1 The Senate normally has six meetings in a Session. An attendance issue shall be deemed to arise when a member:
 - a. has consecutive and/or non-consecutive absences amounting to more than **two** out of **six** ordinary meetings in the annual committee cycle (committees with more than six meetings per Session should scale up accordingly); or
 - b. has two **consecutive un-notified** absences; or
 - c. gives cause for the Chair or Clerk to be concerned over partial attendance¹.

Notified Absence

- 3.2.2 An absence is treated as notified when a member informs the Clerk in advance or, as soon as possible, in case of unforeseen circumstances.

¹ Any absences that occur because of circumstances that fall under the 'Protected Characteristics' as defined in the Equality Act (2010) shall not be counted as giving rise to an attendance issue for the purposes of this Policy.

Un-Notified Absence

- 3.2.3 If a member misses a meeting without informing the Clerk in advance (or, in the case of unforeseen emergency, soon after the meeting), this is treated as an un-notified absence.

Partial Attendance

- 3.2.4 Members who need to arrive late or leave early should inform the Chair (via the Clerk) before the meeting.
- 3.2.5 If a member frequently attends meetings partially, the Secretariat will seek to address this and find solutions with the member. The discussion should consider the circumstances of each meeting, such as unexpected length or time zone differences.
- 3.2.6 If the circumstances are genuinely beyond the member's control, the Chair may accept partial attendance. If, however, the Chair considers that frequent instances of partial attendance reduces a member's ability to fulfil their membership responsibilities, the Chair can decide that it forms an attendance issue and can commence appropriate remedial action.

Ordinary Meetings

- 3.2.7 If a meeting date is changed or an extraordinary meeting is added, members' individual circumstances are considered, and absences do not count as an 'attendance issue'.

Long-Term Absence

- 3.2.8 Committee memberships will be suspended during members sabbatical leave or leave of absence. Missed meetings during this period do not count towards attendance issues. Members must inform the Clerk of the start and end dates of their leave. During this period a replacement member will be allocated from the appropriate reserve list.

Categories of Member

- 3.2.9 Members can be designated:
- a. *ex-officio* – they hold a specific position that is included in the composition of the Senate/Committee;
 - b. *elected* – normally having been elected from a particular constituency for a set term of office;
 - c. *appointed* – normally chosen by the Senate to serve on a particular Committee for a set period; or

- d. *co-opted* – normally invited by a Committee to join it for a set period.

Persons in Attendance

- 3.2.10 Persons in attendance are non-members who are invited to attend meetings in order that they can inform discussions and/or hear at first hand matters being considered and assist with carrying out their role.

Observers

- 3.2.11 The Senate and/or any of its Committees may invite persons to observe meetings. They are invited at the discretion of the respective Chairs. It is normally expected that observers do not participate in discussions.

4.0 Responsibilities

4.1 Chairs

- 4.1.1 The Chairs, assisted by the Secretariat, share responsibility with the University Secretary for the effective operation of the Senate and each Committee. This includes managing attendance levels and ensuring the effective implementation of this Policy.
- 4.1.2 When considering any actions that may affect the continuing membership of any member, the Chair should seek advice from the Secretariat or the University Secretary.

4.2 Members

- 4.2.1 Whenever members are unable to attend a meeting, they must notify the Clerk, giving as much notice as possible.
- 4.2.2 This courtesy is especially important for any members who have been assigned work to undertake in advance of a meeting.

4.3 Clerks

- 4.3.1 The Clerk of each Committee:
 - a. maintains records of attendance at meetings (and publishes them in the minutes);
 - b. prepares annual reports of attendance and report these to the Senate;
 - c. in the course of the year, bring any concerns on participation levels to the Chair, and if necessary, the University Secretary's attention.

- d. assists the Chair with any preventative and/or remedial actions.

5.0 Attendance Issues

5.1 Prevention (Applies to All Members)

5.1.1 The Clerk will write to a member when attendance:

- a. is approaching the 67% threshold of meeting attendance, and one further absence in the academic year will cross the threshold.

5.1.2 In writing to the member, the Clerk:

- a. gives a reminder of the importance of consistent participation, and lays out the provisions of this Policy as they apply to that member; and
- b. invites the member to explain to the Chair the circumstances surrounding their absences, and any concerns the member has over their ability to fulfil their membership responsibilities. This can be via face-to-face discussion or by email.

5.1.3 The aim of the Chair's discussion with the member is to determine any assistance that can be given, and whether a resolution can be reached. Full consideration will be given to:

- a. the individuals' personal and professional circumstances and commitments, ensuring that due regard is paid to equality considerations;
- b. ensuring that the right of all participants to privacy in these discussions is respected; and
- c. the member's pattern of attendance in any preceding years of membership is taken into account.

5.1.4 Discussion outcomes are guided as follows:

- a. if the circumstances are agreed to be exceptional, or temporary, or where the absences fall under the Equality Act 2010, no further action is required other than the continued monitoring of future attendance; or
- b. if it is agreed that circumstances are likely to persist, with no acceptable resolution likely in the near future, then the

member is advised that remedial action will be required should the attendance threshold be crossed.

6.0 Remedial Action

6.1 Requirement for Remedial Action

- 6.1.1 Remedial action is required when a member presents an attendance issue (as defined in 3.2 above).
- 6.1.2 The remedial actions detailed below take account of the different categories of members of the Senate and its Committees.

6.2 Elected Members of the Senate

Deferral

- 6.2.1 The Chair of the Senate can defer remedial action in anticipation of the member's future participation being at the acceptable level.

Short-Term Solution

- 6.2.2 If deferral is not deemed appropriate, or if the attendance issue persists, the Chair asks the member if they wish to take an approved temporary period of absence. The electing body is to be informed of such a development. No replacement member would be sought at this time.

Longer-Term Solution

- 6.2.3 If the attendance issue continues to persist, the Chair can decide that this constitutes 'good cause' for removal of the member from membership of the Senate. The Chair therefore informs the member of the intention to remove them from membership and offers the member the opportunity to be heard in person by the Senate.
- 6.2.4 If the member does not take up the opportunity to be heard in person by the Senate, they cease to be a Senator with immediate effect, and the vacancy is filled in accordance with the Ordinance.
- 6.2.5 Should the member wish to be heard in person by the Senate, there shall be a brief opportunity at the next available meeting. One of the following outcomes shall apply:
 - a. should the Senate uphold the decision to remove the member from membership, the person ceases to be a

- Senator with immediate effect, and the vacancy is filled in accordance with the Ordinance; or
- b. should the Senate not uphold the decision, the member shall continue in membership of the Senate.

- 6.2.6 Any person, having been removed from membership of the Senate, cannot seek re-election until the remainder of their original term of office has elapsed.

6.3 Appointed Members of Senate Committees

Deferral

- 6.3.1 The Chair of the Senate Committee or Secretariat can defer remedial action in anticipation of the member's future participation being at the acceptable level.

Short-Term Solution

- 6.3.2 If deferral is not deemed appropriate, or if the attendance issue persists, the Chair or Secretariat asks the member if they wish a temporary approved period of absence. The appointing body would be informed of such a development, and a short-term replacement may be sought at the Chair's discretion.

Longer-Term Solution

- 6.3.3 If the attendance issue continues to persist, the Chair or Secretariat Operations Team Manager can decide that this constitutes 'good cause' for the removal of the member from membership of the Committee. The Chair therefore informs the member of the intention to remove them from membership and offers the member the opportunity to be heard in person by the Committee.
- 6.3.4 Should the Committee uphold the decision to remove the member from membership, the person ceases to be a member with immediate effect, and the appointing body is asked to appoint a replacement.
- 6.3.5 The appointing body shall not reappoint the individual to the committee until a period at least equivalent to the remainder of the original term of office has elapsed.

Right of Appeal

- 6.3.6 Any appointed member of a committee who is subject to any remedial action has the right to appeal to the Chair of the appointing body (via the Clerk to that body).

6.4 Ex-Officio Members of the Senate and Senate Committees

Deferral

- 6.4.1 The Chair of the Senate or Senate Committee, or the Secretariat, can defer remedial action in anticipation of the member's future participation being at the acceptable level.

Short-Term Solution

- 6.4.2 If deferral is not deemed appropriate, or the attendance issue persists, the Chair or Secretariat raises the matter with the postholder's line manager to seek an improvement (e.g. for the holder of a specific post in a School, the Executive Dean would be notified). For an ex-officio member with no line-manager, the appointing body will be notified.

Longer-Term Solution

- 6.4.3 If the attendance issue continues to persist, the Chair or Secretariat again raises the matter with the postholder's line manager/appointing body to seek an improvement.

7.0 Other Matters

7.1 Attendance by Non-Members at Senate and Standing Committees

- 7.1.1 Colleagues who are 'normally' in attendance at meetings are expected to exercise the same courtesy as members in notifying the Clerk of non-attendance, and should they present an attendance issue, they are subject to the same actions as an ex-officio member (i.e. the line manager informed to seek improvement, and their ongoing attendance given consideration).

7.2 Remote Participation in Meetings

- 7.2.1 Since the University operates over campuses on different continents, the majority of meetings are conducted using remote means.
- 7.2.2 When an in-person meeting is scheduled there will be an option to participate remotely; although it is expected that where possible members should attend in person.

7.3 Policy Implementation

- 7.3.1 This Policy will be publicised widely so that the University community can be familiar with its provisions. New members are given the Policy on appointment and/or during induction by the relevant Clerk, and/or the University Secretary. Chairs and Clerks shall remind members of the Policy at the first ordinary meeting of each annual cycle of meetings.
- 7.3.2 All decisions shall be taken at the discretion of the Chair. However, advice must be sought from the University Secretary or Secretariat before embarking on a course of action that may result in the removal of membership.
- 7.3.3 All decisions made under this Policy are reported to the next meeting of the Senate/Committee, and are logged in the annual report to the parent body.

7.4 Attendance Monitoring

- 7.4.1 The Senate and each of its committees submits an annual summary of the attendance record of individual members to the Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness. As such, the information is published under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Sub-committees and any short-life working groups report to the appropriate 'parent' body.
- 7.4.2 The Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness shall annually review the collated data on attendance at the Senate and its Standing Committees. Removed as section is repeated
- 7.4.3 Attendance reporting will be discussed by Chairs and Clerks as part of their regular planning meetings.

8.0 Definitions

- 8.1.1 Terms used in this Policy shall have the definitions given in the Charter, Statutes, and Ordinances unless indicated otherwise.

<i>Academic Staff</i>	means those Staff defined as academic Staff in the Statutes
<i>Charter</i>	means the Charter of the University
<i>Court</i>	means the Court of the University
<i>Executive Dean</i>	means the executive manager and leader of a School
<i>Ordinances</i>	means Ordinances made under the Charter and Statutes
<i>Principal and Vice-Chancellor</i>	means the Principal and Vice-Chancellor and Chief Accounting Officer and Chief Executive Officer of the University
<i>School</i>	means any primary academic unit of the University devoted to one or more academic disciplines
<i>University Secretary</i>	means the Secretary to the Court and Chief Operating Officer of the University
<i>Senate</i>	means the Senate of the University as defined in the Charter
<i>Staff</i>	means all persons employed by the University or by any member of the Heriot-Watt Group
<i>Statutes</i>	means the Statutes of the University
<i>Student</i>	means a person following a programme of study of the University, including taught and research programmes
<i>Vice-Principal</i>	means the Vice-Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor

9.0 Further Help and Advice

- 9.1.1 Members can gain further advice or support on matters related to this Policy from the respective Chair, Clerk or University Secretary.
- 9.1.2 The responsible office for this Policy shall be Governance and Legal Services.
- 9.1.3 Further enquiries regarding this Policy should be addressed to Governance and Legal Services – please email secretariat@hw.ac.uk.

10.0 Policy Version and History

Author: Secretariat

Date of Original Approval: Approved by the Senate 4 October 2017

Last Amended: June 2025

Date of Next Review: The Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness shall periodically review this Policy in terms of its currency and effectiveness

POLICY

Appendix One – Template message to prevent a breach

Email subject: Attendance at Senate/Senate Committees

cc-ed: Chair of Senate/Committee
University Secretary
Secretariat Operations Team Manager
Clerk of Senate

Dear (Senator or Committee Member)

I email in connection with your role as a Senator/Committee Member and the potential breach of the attendance policy as detailed in paragraph 5.1 of the Policy.

From the attendance records of Senate/Committee you are close to breaching the attendance requirement of the policy as you have had *(delete as appropriate)* **one un-notified absence** or *are close to breaching the policy as you are approaching the* **67% threshold** of meeting attendance, and one further absence in the academic year will cross the threshold.

I recognise that competing commitments and changing circumstances can make 100% attendance difficult for some. The Secretariat Operations Team Manager will be in contact to follow-up this message and seek to assist you in addressing any issues affecting your attendance.

In the meantime, if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or the Secretariat Operations Team Manager (Phil.Rowsby@hw.ac.uk).

Kind regards

(Clerk of the Senate/Committee)

POLICY