

University of Otago Academic Committee Nomenclature/Definitions

The University of Otago has a significant number of academic sub-entities within it. These operate at an Institutional, Divisional and Departmental level. This document seeks to establish commonalities of definition at a University level. Divisional and Departmental/Programme adherence to these definitions is encouraged, but it is understood this may not be feasible in all instances.

University Council

The University's Council is the governing body of the University of Otago, constituted and empowered under legislation.

Senate

The principal academic authority of the University with terms and constitution as defined in the Council approved Senate Statute 2011.

Boards

Normally empowered to make decisions and/or recommendations on specified matters. May provide advice and/or high level governance and oversight of particular activities. Have the authority to establish subsidiary Committees and Groups. Boards retain ultimate responsibility for actions made by subsidiary Committees and Groups. Definition includes Divisional Boards.

Committees

Normally indicates an entity with limited power and authority, with ultimate responsibility resting at a higher level. Best practice would suggest that Committees supplement the work, and make recommendations to and/or report back to the appropriate entity.

Sub-categories of Committees:

Standing/Proposals/Academic Committee

Normally applied to a Sub-Unit of a Board or Committee which will consider matters referred to it by a higher level Board or Committee and may act on behalf of the higher level entity.

Advisory Committee

Normally applied to a Committee that provides guidance to a higher Board or to a specific office, or to a role. Have a specific role but are not normally empowered to make decisions in their own right.

Sub-Committee

Use of Sub-Committee as a formal structure is not recommended but the terminology can be used for a less formal option where Terms of Reference are not required.

Groups

Normally more flexible in composition than a Board or a Committee. May co-opt members from various roles and areas based on current need. Best practice would suggest that Groups make recommendations to and/or report back to a parent entity.

Sub-categories of Groups:

Working Group

Normally applied to a Group that is established to consider or work on a specified task/project and would then be disbanded once that work or consideration is complete.

Advisory Group

Normally applied to a Group that provides guidance to a higher Board or Committee or to a specific office or to a person. Have a specific role but are not empowered to make decisions in their own right.

Operational Group

Normally applied to a Group that oversees and provides advice on practical and administrative matters in a specified area and that may or may not have limited authority to make decisions on issues that are practical or administrative – but not strategic – in nature.

Steering Group

Normally applied to a Group that exists to support projects and/or to steer projects from start to completion. Defined as a Group (rather than a Committee) due to having a more flexible composition that may co-opt members. A collection of staff with expertise/experience brought together to provide advice on work that is being undertaken by others

Liaison Group

Normally applied to a Group that provides an official forum for the discussion of issues that relate to particular areas such as Graduate Research, Library Services. Liaison Groups will report to a higher level Board or Committee.

Board of Studies

Normally oversees a particular academic programme or area of study. The use of the term Board in this sense does not necessarily need to match the use of 'Board' as a standalone term. Best practice would suggest that a Board of Studies makes recommendations and/or report back to the appropriate entity.

Note: In the context of the University of Otago, the Board of Undergraduate Studies and the Board of Graduate Studies are defined as Boards, not as Boards of Studies. The reference to Studies within the title is in connection to the terms Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Studies, rather than indicating entity definition.

Panel

Normally exists for the purpose of determining an award amongst applicants, or in order to conduct a review. Can be convened and disbanded upon completion of its undertaking.

Recommendations:

1. That the above definitions be accepted at the institutional level within the University of Otago context, in order to create common understandings of the roles and responsibilities of various categories of entity, and to provide clarity in relation to lines of reporting.
2. That once approved, these definitions are made available as a reference to assist with the nomenclature of future University entities and are adopted when refreshing existing entities.
3. That each entity as defined within this document has Terms of Reference that are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure roles and responsibilities are being met.
4. That Advisory Committees to the Vice-Chancellor consider nomenclature at upcoming meetings by reviewing current names and Terms of Reference against these definitions, in order to determine whether the current names remain the appropriate fit.
5. As there appears to be no significant difference in definition between Party and Group, to recommend that the term Party be abandoned.

Professor Pat Cragg, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

Compiled by Academic Committees and Services, Academic Division

Approved by DVCs/PVCs Advisory Group 8 November 2021, VCAG 15 November 2021, and Senate 24 November 2021