

How to be a good secretary

Role of secretary

The role of the Secretary depends on the style and size of the organisation. Some Management Committees have more than one person with formal responsibility for secretarial tasks such as a Minutes Secretary, Correspondence Secretary and Membership Secretary.

Each Management Committee will have its own way of doing things, and the way in which work is shared out can depend on the skills, interests or amount of time that a person has to offer.

Main duties of the secretary

The responsibilities of the Secretary of a Management Committee are summarised under five general duties.

- To keep an up-to-date list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of committee and ordinary members of the organisation.
- To keep careful, orderly records of the organisation's work. This will involve:
 - writing the minutes (unless there is a Minutes Secretary);
 - filing all committee correspondence received and copies of replies sent, in their date order;
 - filing reports received and made;
 - keeping a record of any of the organisation's publications, ie leaflets and newsletters, and reporting the activities of the organisation and future programmes to the press – unless there is an Information or Publicity Officer.
- To compile lists of addresses which are useful to the organisation, and to keep a record of the name of appropriate officials, or officers of voluntary organisations.
- To keep a diary of future activities of the organisation, and a record of previous activities.
- To prepare a report of the organisation's activities for the year, for the Annual General Meeting.

Characteristics of a good secretary

The role of Secretary of a Management Committee can be key to the efficient functioning of the Committee, particularly in organisations with few or no paid staff members. These are some of the qualities, skills and knowledge which should be demonstrated by those carrying out this role.

A good Management Committee Secretary will:

- be methodical, with a good eye for detail
- be well organised, with an orderly mind
- bring objectivity to the proceedings
- deal promptly with correspondence
- be able to take accurate notes of meetings
- make sure members receive all the necessary material
- bring the necessary material to the meeting
- work well with the Chairperson
- ensure quorum is met for meetings
- have knowledge or experience of committee procedures

Some DO's and DON'Ts for a good secretary

A Good Secretary Will:

- Be organised.
- Keep copies of all correspondence.
- Check quorum is met for meetings.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Work closely with the Chairperson.
- Make it easy for others to take over by keeping clear records.
- Prepare for meetings well in advance.
- Summarise discussions effectively.
- Keep people informed.
- Ensure accurate minutes of meetings are kept.

A Good Secretary Will NOT:

- Ignore correspondence.
- Keep information to her/himself.
- Be late for meetings.
- Throw away important papers.
- Write down trivial details of all discussions at every meeting.
- Rely on his/her memory.
- Repeat private conversations.
- Organise meetings at the last minute.