

## Managing Meetings

Meetings are ever-popular as a practical and convivial alternative to work. But if you are determined to run a successful and efficient meeting then the key, as ever, is proper planning.

If you will be chairing the meeting, take a minute or two to clarify the purpose of the meeting. What will have been achieved if the meeting has been successful? Also think carefully about who should attend. Attendance should be firmly linked to the purpose of the meeting. If a decision is to be taken, you need to invite only those who need to be committed to the decision. If it is a planning meeting, you need to invite only those who can bring important information and advice to the planning process. You should then make sure that everyone knows the purpose of the meeting, preferably by letting them have a short note in writing. This gives them an opportunity to suggest the names of others who might attend, or to suggest that they need not attend themselves.

If you are invited to a meeting, ensure that you understand the purpose of the meeting, if necessary by talking to the chairman, or the Private Secretary in the case of a meeting with a Minister. Then consider whether you really need to attend, in order to contribute information or to the discussion. Remember that it is seldom necessary for two people from the same team to attend a meeting which is not central to the objectives of that team. It saves a lot of time if only one person attends and reports the outcome to the other.

### *The Conduct Of The Meeting*

Unless there is only one easily defined subject, there should be an agenda, preferably circulated in advance. The Chair should decide, at the beginning of the meeting, approximately how much time will be given to each agenda item, and should give this information to those attending. And unless the Chair is certain that everyone knows everyone else, all attending should be asked to give their name and division, department etc. In a large pre-orchestrated meeting, it is better to prepare name-plates.

Those introducing papers circulated before the meeting should assume that they have been read, and should therefore limit their comments to emphasising one or two key points, conclusions or recommendations.

A note of the discussion should not be prepared unless it will clearly be helpful either for those who were not at the meeting, or in order to record discussion, for public accountability reasons, of a particularly difficult issue. However, a note of action points must always be prepared and circulated to all present. The Chair should appoint someone to do this (or someone to take a full note if necessary) either before or at the beginning of the meeting. An electronic white board is particularly useful, because action points can be written down as they occur and in full view of everyone, and can then be printed off and distributed at the end of the meeting. Otherwise use a flip chart.

### *Follow-up*

It is particularly important that names and time scales are attached to action points. And progress on all action points should either be reviewed at a further meeting on the same subject, or by the Chair or their nominee if no further meeting is to be held within an appropriate timescale.