

The role of the Secretary

The smooth running of the association depends on the efficiency with which you handle the records, correspondence and other communications.

Experienced secretaries will tell you that their duties often expand beyond what is normally expected of them.

The main purpose of the role is that of principal administrator for the association. The secretary carries out or delegates all of the administrative duties that enable the association and its members to function effectively. The secretary has a pivotal role within the association, with a close involvement in the running of the association.

It is important to know what all other persons are responsible for to ensure the association is united in its work. The role therefore requires the secretary to have good communication skills and a general knowledge of both competition and administrative aspects of the association.

The secretary is usually the first person an outsider contacts, and a good secretary is vital to the successful management of the association. The secretary is the principle administrative officer and provides the link between the members, the executive board and outside agencies (e.g. other clubs, members, the Government bodies such as the ISC and SportNI, the local community and the media)

Key tasks involved

The role of secretary is diverse and varied – individuals in this role will often be at the forefront of a mix of duties, all of which are as important as each other.

Typical duties include;

- ✓ Being the first point of contact for all enquiries.
- ✓ Representing the association at meetings (e.g. Board meetings, AGM's, Sports council Briefings).
- ✓ Keeping up to date with sports initiatives by compiling and checking a list of useful websites regularly;
- ✓ Affiliating the club to the EWF, IWF and ISC.
- ✓ Dealing with official correspondence.
- ✓ Organising and booking competition facilities.
- ✓ Organising the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- ✓ Organising and attending all executive board meetings.
- ✓ Taking and distributing minutes.
- ✓ Maintaining accurate records.
- ✓ Ensuring action points from meetings have been carried out.
- ✓ Organising special events.
- ✓ Supporting the association with funding applications.
- ✓ Collecting and analysing information from the members

To be a good secretary, you must:

- ✓ be methodical and reliable be a good communicator
- ✓ ensure that tasks you have delegated have been actioned
- ✓ be impartial
- ✓ be a good planner
- ✓ be alert to constitutional and legal requirements
- ✓ be enthusiastic about weightlifting
- ✓ be interested in people
- ✓ have tact and discretion
- ✓ have good organisational skills have good communication skills be able to maintain confidentiality
- ✓ be able to lead and supervise others
- ✓ be able to delegate
- ✓ be a good decision maker
- ✓ be a strategic thinker and be able to plan ahead
- ✓ be aware of the key agencies and partners that can support your club, and work in partnership with them.

The following are some of the essential items required by a secretary:

- ✓ Use of a computer and email address. A computer will help you produce letters, reports and posters quickly and accurately, and enable storage of information, such as:
 - membership lists
 - results of competitions
 - standard letters
 - financial records.
- ✓ An office computer package with templates and useful programmes may also be a helpful and relatively cheap investment.
- ✓ A filing cabinet.
- ✓ A set of folders (one for every project/topic).
- ✓ An official minutes book taking notes during board meetings.
- ✓ An annual diary/chart to record a schedule of all the clubs' activities, including events, competitions, closing dates, meetings and social functions.
- ✓ Lever arch files, ring binders or minute books to store typed copies of the minutes of meetings, reports and statements of accounts.

- ✓ Headed stationery and envelopes.
- ✓ Files for storing correspondence and records.
- ✓ Ring binders to store permanent records.
- ✓ A telephone, with access during the daytime and evenings, including an answer phone

Dealing with correspondence

You should read and reply to correspondence promptly, even if only to acknowledge the letter and passing it on to the relevant personnel.

By following these tips you should be able to deal with correspondence quickly and efficiently.

- ✓ Maintain a register of correspondence 'in' and 'out' by recording the date of receipt on all incoming mail. Make a note to whom copies have been distributed.
- ✓ Deal with each letter promptly. If you cannot answer the query, or need to wait until the next board meeting for a policy decision, send an acknowledgement explaining the reason for the delay. If this sort of thing happens often, prepare copies of a standard letter that you can use.
- ✓ Make sure that you are up to date with correspondence before committee meetings, so information can be distributed and dealt with at the meeting, whenever possible.
- ✓ Keep a copy or a note of the letters that you send and the date you sent them. File copies of correspondence under the appropriate heading, if you think you might need to refer to them again. Do not file everything just for the sake of it.
- ✓ Throw things away when the matter has been finalised, or they are no longer of any use.
- ✓ Keep contact details, addresses, email addresses and mobile telephone numbers, either on your computer or have a paper copy.
- ✓ Keep notes of important telephone conversations.
- ✓ Make informal enquiries or replies by telephone or a computer typed letter.

Standard letters are a big help, especially if held on a computer (you will find templates in most standard computer office packages). Spaces can be left to enter information that may change (including dates, names, fees, etc), but the overall form of many letters will follow standard themes

liaising with other members and External Agencies

The secretary has an important responsibility to keep everyone informed of decisions and events and to check that tasks have been carried out.

A close working relationship with the chairperson and treasurer is essential. The secretary should ensure that they are well informed on all matters relating to the association.

External liaison

It is essential that the association identifies and works in partnership with key external agencies, as this will provide the club with support and awareness of possible grants. Such agencies include the local authority, schools, leisure centres, community police, local businesses, the media and volunteer agencies.

These are some duties you may be called on to carry out:

- ✓ work with other agencies
- ✓ Act as the public officer of your association in the absence of a formal public relations officer.
- ✓ Project a favourable image and seek support from the public, business circles and the media.
- ✓ Liaise with officials, coaches, clubs, affiliated bodies, government agencies and committees.
- ✓ Liaise with associations (eg the national governing body or local sports partnerships)
- ✓ Process transfer applications.
- ✓ Enter teams in international competitions.
- ✓ Represent your association at meetings.
- ✓ Obtain association sanction for club or group events.
- ✓ Communicate information between association and club or group members, such as event deadlines.
- ✓ carry out general affairs
- ✓ Keep a register of members' names and addresses.
- ✓ Handle bookings and entries.
- ✓ Supervise kit and equipment.
- ✓ Respond to general duties as directed by the executive committee.
- ✓ Maintain a register of sponsors, partners and stakeholders .

Organising a meeting

If possible, prepare in advance an agreed schedule of meetings for the year; otherwise, it may be necessary to consult all the members about their availability before fixing a date for each meeting. In any case, you should always consult the chairperson before fixing the date of a meeting.

Give plenty of notice of the proposed date and time of the meeting.

An annual general meeting (AGM) or needs at least a month's notice. In the case of a smaller meeting, consult the members by email, letter or telephone, enquiring when they are available, prior to fixing the date.

Make arrangements for the meeting venue, including admission to the building, seating arrangements, and use of services (eg catering and photocopying).

Send adequate notice of the meeting to all concerned, including the venue, day, date and time, together with the agenda. The agenda may be prepared with the consultation of the chairperson and, if possible, should indicate clearly what decisions need to be made, so those concerned can arrive prepared. The minutes of the previous meeting should also be enclosed if they have not already been circulated, as well as any other correspondence or documents that members need to read before the discussion on the topic.

Members need the papers well in advance: about ten days before the date of the meeting is ideal (this is enough time to read them, but not long enough for them to be misled!).

Writing Minutes

At the end of a complicated discussion, using simple language, provide a brief, clear summary of what you think has been agreed. Confirm in a few words the decision, the action to be taken, who is going to take that action and by when.

The secretary is in an influential position, but has the sometimes difficult task of contributing to the discussions while keeping a record of the meeting. Do not assume that you will be able to remember all the decisions. Short notes and jottings taken during the meeting may seem perfectly clear at the time but a week later can cause confusion as to what was actually agreed.

Follow these guidelines when you write the minutes:

- ✓ List those people present and record the apologies for absence.
- ✓ Follow the order of the agenda and try to keep each section short.
- ✓ Give each sub-section its own separate heading and each point a separate paragraph.
- ✓ State the main issues and the decisions made
- ✓ Do not take sides when recording a discussion; Try to be objective, and outline the facts of each argument.
- ✓ Record the full text of motions and if a vote was taken.
- ✓ Write up the minutes as soon as possible after a meeting, while the discussions are still fresh in your mind.
- ✓ Circulate the minutes to all members of the committee soon after the meeting (ideally within a few days), so as to inform those who were absent and to remind those who have some work to do arising from the meeting.
- ✓ Make a diary note for a fortnight's time to follow up action points and check the jobs have been carried out.
- ✓ When documenting AGMs, which are usually governed by strict constitutional rules regarding procedures, keep a formal record, stating the names of proposers and seconders, quoting the exact text of resolutions, and the results of the voting. Committee meetings can be minuted more informally by simply stating the decisions that have been taken, unless any special request has been made to record disagreement.

Take down minutes following a standard style, choosing the appropriate word to suit the circumstances. Examples are as follows:

Agreed – indicates a strong consensus to support a particular course of action. Recommended – indicates a proposal to another committee or club.

Noted – indicates that a matter was reported, but no decision was necessary.

Received – indicates that a report was presented and accepted.

Approved – indicates that a recommendation has been endorsed.

Recognised – indicates that information was accepted, but no decision was taken.

Resolved – indicates that a motion was formally proposed, voted upon and passed.

The secretary is responsible for preparing for the AGM and for making arrangements to ensure that all members receive the necessary information. This may include:

- ✓ arranging venue, date and time collecting reports from other officers
- ✓ notifying members of the date, time and place of the meeting, which needs to be done well in advance and in compliance with the time period as stipulated in the constitution
- ✓ inviting and receiving nominations for the election of officers
- ✓ arranging the printing of the annual report and statement of accounts
- ✓ arranging for guest speakers, where necessary
- ✓ arranging catering and hospitality

The AGM is an opportunity for all members to attend, learn and question how the association is being run. They can comment on the annual report and statement of accounts, determine any amendments required to the constitution and rules, as well as elect the officers to become the board of directors for the coming year.

At an AGM, decisions should not be taken on any item that was not included on the printed agenda. This ensures that if any changes to the constitution or rules are being considered, all members have an opportunity to think about the proposals in detail and to prepare counter arguments, if appropriate.

The filing and maintenance of records is the responsibility of the secretary. It is important to know where you can find the information about all the different association activities.

Different procedures and policies can be disseminated via the website, email mailing list or newsletter.

Minutes of meetings, annual reports and statements of accounts are best kept in a separate folder or series of folders on your PC, or in ring binders kept in date order (the most recent copy at the front). This ensures that a good copy (the copy that has been signed to certify that it is a correct record) is always easily accessible and stored safely.

Do not remove these master copies from the ring binder.

If the secretary is responsible for maintaining current members records, this information may be kept in a box file, a ledger, or on a computer (with a back-up stored). If the association has a lot of members or regularly sends information to members, access to a computer that can mail merge and produce labels templates is an advantage.

Membership records may also be necessary for returns to Sports Council and in support of applications for grants or other means of financial support. Make sure the up-to-date numbers are always available.

Historical records are useful for reunions, fund-raising activities, recruiting volunteers, etc. Be selective, however, and throw away anything that is not worth keeping, is out of date or has no historical interest.

Most routine correspondence does not need to be kept at all, so ask yourself, 'If this information had been given over the telephone, would I have made a point of writing it down and filing it?' If not, throw it away.

things to avoid and things to remember;

Things to avoid

- ✓ Don't make the committee deal with lots of trivial topics. It is frustrating and annoying if important items are left off the agenda, or are not reached.
- ✓ Don't put the most important item at the end of the agenda in the hope that the committee will quickly deal with other matters and then be able to concentrate on this one. - People are more attentive at the beginning of meetings, and it is better to have their energy directed to important items at the beginning, rather than starting off with trivial points, which may get more discussion time than they warrant.
- ✓ Don't let members talk at length about their own pet project. A written agenda distributed in advance makes it much easier for the chairperson to bring the discussion back to the important issues.
- ✓ Don't let matters arising from the previous meeting take up most of the time at the next meeting. This is frustrating because nothing new is being accomplished, which is non-productive. Identify loose ends from the previous meeting and set them down as agenda topics of their own, putting them in priority order, near the end of the agenda.
- ✓ Don't let the board forget about the people they are serving. Too often a committee becomes immersed in its own activities, and disregards the needs and interests of the members.

Things to remember

You will be a good secretary on behalf of your club if you remember the following tips:

- ✓ You need to be motivated to do a good job.
- ✓ You need to be well organised and conscientious.
- ✓ All correspondence must be dealt with promptly.
- ✓ Follow meeting guidelines to ensure they are productive.
- ✓ Remind yourself that the important thing about keeping records, is keeping the right records and being able to find them quickly and easily. Have hard, paper copies, store the files on a computer and have back up facilities available.
- ✓ Remember to work in partnership with your executive board and external agencies to ensure the association runs effectively and efficiently.

It will not take long for you to become a very valuable and important member of the organisation, and your role off the platform is just as important as the people and results on it!

The 10 Secretarial Commandments:

1. Thou shalt prepare an agenda, with your chairperson, for every meeting.
2. Thou shalt make sure committee members are aware of the time and place of the meeting and ensure the chairperson starts on time.
3. Thou shalt not read the minutes of the last meeting in full (unless members require it).
4. Thou shalt not attempt to take detailed notes of discussions (only ensure that the key facts are stated).
5. Thou shalt record all resolutions taken exactly as passed by the members and ask the chairperson to repeat the words of the motion if you are unsure.
6. Thou shalt ensure that you record the names of the people responsible for following up a resolution, since failure to do so will result in you, the secretary, doing everything!
7. Thou shalt not volunteer for everything.
Delegate work and nominate committee members to assist – that's what they are there for.
8. Thou shalt not become too involved in debate. If you feel you want to have close involvement in a topic, ask for someone else to take the minutes for that item.
9. Thou shalt encourage members to put in written (even hand-written) reports to cut the waffle and help you in your duties.
10. Thou shalt remember that all committee members, especially the secretary, must help the chairperson.