

COMMITTEE SYSTEM AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA: INSIGHTS AND LESSONS

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ABSTRACT: *University governance and administration have generated much interest in recent times probably due to the reason that good governance does not only lead to higher performance in teaching, research and community service but also influences institutional standing and reputation. University of Education, Winneba has continued to develop a democratic and representative form of governance using 'the committee system of governance'. Its core values are accountability, transparency and involvement. This paper considers university governance and administration as based on delegating authority through the University Council and Academic Board to Schools or Faculties, Departments and Committees. It argues that University governance is considered as being effective when these levels of governance work together productively using the 'committee system.' The paper discusses that although university governance thrives on committees for its image, it argues that committee meetings deplete universities' primary business of teaching, research and community service depending on how it is managed. It finally recommends that concerted efforts should be made to review University committees to consolidate them and have fewer committees which will report more regularly to the parent bodies to enhance the 'committee system' objectives.*

KEYWORDS: Committee System, Governance Structure, University of Education,

INTRODUCTION

A university is a higher institution established for the purpose of acquiring, transmitting and extending knowledge (King, 2004). More specifically, Nuttall (2009) cited by Mereku (2011) explains further that universities are established primarily for teaching, research, scholarship and community service. Ghanaian public universities are usually established by the Government the day. An act of government establishing these universities gives them specific mandate to focus on. For example, the University of Ghana (UG) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) were established by Government Ordinance in 1948 and 1961 respectively whilst the University of Cape Coast (UCC) 1962; the University of Education, Winneba 1992 and the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT) 2000 were established by Acts and Laws. The UCC attained the status of full and independent university by Act 390 of Parliament in 1971 and subsequently the university of Cape Coast Law, 1992 (PNDC Law 278).

The UEW derived its authority as the only public university in Ghana that is responsible for the training of professional teachers for pre-tertiary institutions from Act 672 of the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, enacted in 2004. These documents (Ordinance, Laws and Acts) provide the universities their power to undertake their primary functions as intimated by Mereku (2011) above in addition to awarding certificates, degrees and diplomas.

Governance System of UEW

The evolving UEW system of governance, a committee system, which started in 1992 as an institutionalised form of bottom-up co-operation, has developed into a dynamic, vertical, multilevel system (at satellite campus basis) for policy making, policy implementation and application (Schaefer 2007). Just as England moved from the 'leader and cabinet' governance system through the 'mayoral system' and currently on the 'committee system', (Centre for Public Scrutiny [CfPS], 2012) the University of Education, Winneba has also not relented on her efforts to improve her governance system. Today, UEW has evolved its own type of committee system of governance which has commonalities with other public universities in Ghana.

University of Education, Winneba adopts the most democratic and representative form of governance 'the committee system of governance' which underpins its Statute. Its core values are accountability, transparency and involvement (CfPS 2012). Accountability in its operations and transparency of decision-making are of high priority, as is the need to ensure that decision-making is connected to people at the bottom level through the University Council standing committees and the Academic Board sub-committees (see **Figure 1** below). As good practice in the University community, it is believed that decisions should reflect the interests and wishes of those involved in line with established policies. As such, committees are used extensively where corporate decisions are required. University committees allow for sufficient intellectual resources to be generated for the incubation of ideas that have often led to the hatching of sound recommendations for the achievement of goals and objectives of the system. Some of the committees mentioned in **Fig. 1** undertake both administrative and academic managerial functions such as policy making, decision making, others deliberate but do not decide; some have authority to make recommendations to a superior authority; others are set up purely to receive information without recommending or deciding.

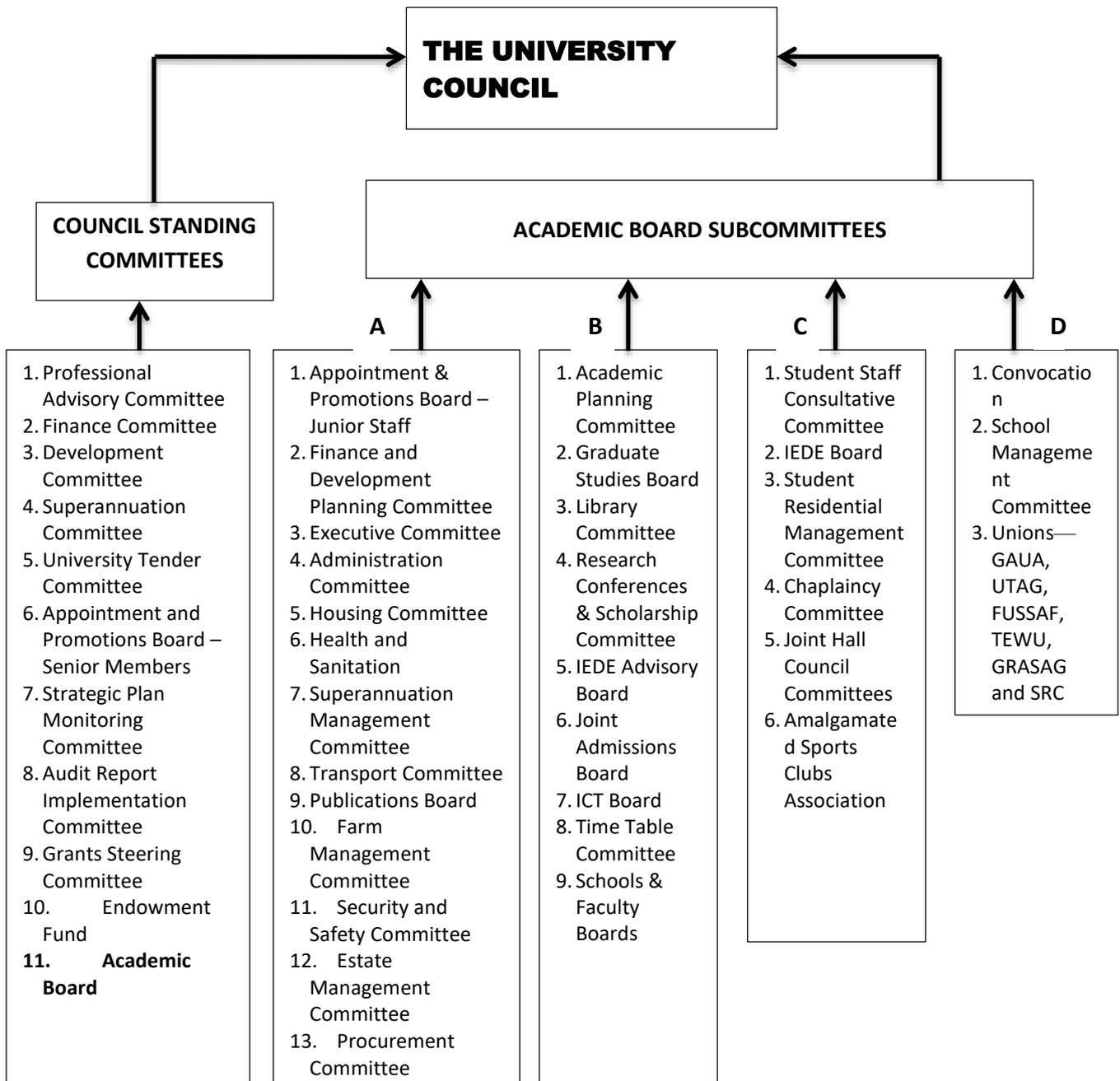


Figure 1: Statutory Committees of the UEW University Council.

Source: Writer’s own Framework Modelled from the University of Education, Winneba Statute (2007).

The Committee Concept and Types

Committee could be defined as a group of people appointed or chosen to perform a function or do a particular job on behalf of a large group. Oyebade, Ajayi and Oyeyipo (2007) contend that a committee is a sub-group of people in an organization identified and thought together to perform certain duties either on a temporary, permanent or semi-permanent basis. They further contend that the term is used in the context of selecting a smaller group of persons to perform the functions of a larger body that meets at intervals. Every committee is responsible to its source of authority. For example, the Appointments and Promotions Board operates on behalf of the University Council and therefore reports to the Council accordingly.

Types of committees include standing committees, advisory committees, and ad hoc committees. Standing Committees are required where the business to be delegated to the committees is one in which it will be required to perform more or less as a permanent feature. An example of this committee is the Academic Planning Committee. An Advisory Committee on the other hand is a special committee set up to offer advice to the parent body, or management or an individual on specific issues. The parent body is not bound to accept or act on the advice as presented. Such committees go into issues and make recommendations for consideration. An example of this is the Professional Advisory Committee of the University Council.

Committees could be Ad hoc, or formal/statutory in nature. Ad hoc committees are usually temporary, as they are created for a specific purpose, or to solve short range problems, while formal committees are established as part of the organizational structure, with specific delegated duties and authority. An example is the school/faculty boards which are empowered by the Academic Board, among other things, to determine all matters related to teaching and research in the School/Faculty and also determine all matters relating to students' progress. Ad hoc Committees have precise terms of reference and the life span of such committees depends on the time needed to complete the assignment given. An example of this is the Winneba Campus Street Naming Committee which was constituted by the Administration Committee.

Composition and Functions of Committees

The roles and responsibilities of all the principal officers—Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Finance Officer and the Librarian—as well as all the standing committees in **Fig. 1** as presented on page 3 have been prescribed in the University Statute. For example, Statute 15 and 16 make provisions for Meetings; Powers and Functions of the University Council as quoted below:

Statute 15: Meetings of the

University Council

- (i) In addition to the provisions of Section 9 (1) of the Act, notice of any meeting of Council and the business to be transacted shall be given in writing to each member of Council by the Registrar not later than ten days before the date fixed for the meeting.
- (ii) Notices and documents required for the purpose of the Act and these Statutes may be given or sent personally or posted. Where a notice or a document is sent by registered post, its service shall be deemed to have

been properly effected at the time when such document would in the ordinary course be delivered.

Statute 16: Powers and Functions

of Council

- (i) Without prejudice to the generality of the powers of Council as provided by the Act and these Statutes, the powers and functions of the Council shall include the following:
 - (a) to sell, buy, exchange and lease and accept leases of property;
 - (b) to borrow money on behalf of the University on security of the property of the University or otherwise;
 - (c) generally, to enter into, carry out, vary and cancel contracts;
 - (d) to control the finances of the University and to finally determine any questions on finance arising out of the administration of the University or the execution of its policy or in the execution of any trust by the University
 - e) to submit to the Minister an annual report on the activities of the University during that year.
 - (f) to be responsible for all measures necessary or desirable for the conservation or augmentation of the resources of the University and may, for this purpose, specify any matter affecting the income or expenditure of the University in respect of which the consent of Council shall be obtained before action is taken or liability incurred.
- (ii) In furtherance of the above, Council shall
 - (a) determine the allocation of all recurrent funds at the disposal of the University
 - (b) determine annually the expenditure necessary for the development of the University.
 - (c) prescribe the manner and form in which units of the University shall submit accounts or estimates of income and expenditure.
 - (d) have power, on the recommendation of the Academic Board, to confer the title of Emeritus Professor, Honorary Professor or Honorary Lecturer or other Academic titles.
 - (e) ensure that the Planning Unit works closely with the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) on policies relating to norms covering student and staff numbers and funding levels.

To be democratic against the backdrop of the core values of accountability, transparency and involvement, UEW governance committees are inclusive and very representative. In addition to being gender sensitive, they are also made up of the staff/faculty/student categories as indicated in **Fig. 1** by labels A, B, C & D on page 3.

Table 1: Representative Groups—Staff, Faculty and Students

Fig 1 Label	CATEGORY	EXAMPLE OF STANDING COMMITTEES
A	Mainly Staff	Finance & Development Planning Committee Executive Committee
B	Mainly Faculty	Academic Board School of Graduate Studies Board
C	Combination of Staff, Faculty and Students	Health and Sanitation Committee Student Staff Consultative Committee
D	Mainly Students	Student Representative Council Student Residential Management Committee

These categories mentioned above give a fair representation to all stakeholders, more especially students. By offering such opportunities to students, they are helped:

- to iron out differences of opinion.
- to reduce areas of friction to the barest by bridging the gap between management and students;
- to serve as an eye opener to students on various problems and constraints relating to issues under discussion at committee level;
- to help to enlist students to participate in proffering solutions to problems; and
- to make students willing to accept decisions in which they were part of the decision making process.

Since the composition of the committees as well as their roles and functions are prescribed, individuals per se may not be considered for membership into committees. Representation from a particular area of expertise or particular interest is sometimes considered but not usually the case. Depending on the functions of the committee and the provision setting it up, members contribute meaningfully to the best of their capabilities to the work of the committee. Obviously, membership of such committees will normally not be drawn based on the understanding and commitment to the University's vision. However, a balanced representation should be sought in drawing members of the committee if there is an opportunity to co-opt. Members of Committees are normally informed in writing. The chairman and secretary are clearly indicated when there are doubts in the statute provisions and the terms of reference of the committee is spelt out when it is an ad hoc one.

The Performance of Committees

The performance of committees depends on several factors including the composition, size, chairmanship, secretarial capabilities, time of meeting, the records of meeting, and provision of resources (Baer, Duin and Ramaley 2008). The Registrar who services the two executive

bodies (the University Council and the Academic Board) ensures that the Statutes are followed to the latter. The Registrar's Directorate comes out every year with a calendar of Statutory Committee Meetings where Assistant Registrars or Senior Administrative Staff categories are usually assigned to serve as secretaries to these committees and boards. The Registrar's Directorate at any point in time writes to all committees whose membership need replacements and ensures it is done. For example, when the out-gone SRC President handed over in May 2016, the Registrar requested for his replacement by the newly elected SRC President who officially attended the June 2016 University Council Meeting.

Notwithstanding, quite a number of the statutory meetings are called off when the Chairman's external schedules (most often the Council Standing Committees the Vice Chancellor chairs) are made to take precedence over the Registrar's Directorate Meeting Calendar. When this occurs and information is not well communicated and disseminated to the other secretaries of those other committees, different types of disagreements are created—chairman having to chair two meetings concurrently, senior members having to attend two meetings simultaneously, venue clashes, etc. which are subsequently resolved though, meaning one has to be compromised.

Chairmanship roles and responsibilities

Normally, the Vice-Chancellor of a university works through various established committees which are established for policy making and chairs any of them. He/she is allowed unrestricted rights of participation at the meetings of such committees. He either receives or has access to committees' documents. He/she delegates some of his duties to be carried out by some other members of the University Community and this form of delegation is spelt out in the Statutes. However, his/her actions are subject to the ratification of the committee. He/she like any chairman, therefore, needs to be apt to research for ideas and exchange of opinions. He should make motions available to members and allow members to air their views on issues on the ground. He/she must give precedence to members' ideas over his/hers, listen without premature judgment, and must put no one on the defensive. In addition to being democratic, he/she should be firm and enjoy the respect of his/her team. Above all, he/she should be known to have leadership competences in order to enhance speed, quality, objectivity and timelines in decision making.

Secretarial roles and responsibilities

University committees are usually serviced by professional administrators. The role of the Committee Secretary is quite explicit. The role includes drawing attention to any procedural issues, providing additional information or aspects of university governance which will have an impact on the decisions of the committee. The secretary provides administrative support to the committee, and also provides the following services:

- Convenes meeting on the directive of the chairman;
- Makes adequate arrangements in preparation for the meeting – booking and organizing the venue, and arranging for refreshment as may be necessary;
- Draws up the agenda for the meeting in consultation with the chairman;

- Prepares relevant papers for the meeting and circulates same including the agenda and the records of the previous proceeding of the committee to members (at least two weeks before the meeting);
- Attends committee meetings punctually,
- Advises the committee with respect to the acceptance procedure,
- Provides necessary information to guide the committee,
- Records the proceedings of the committee and notes the decisions,
- Prepares reports/minutes, extracts of the meetings,
- Takes follow-up actions, and
- Acts as a focal point for contact between the committee and the university community

University Committees rely on the ingenuity of the Secretary for committee servicing. The secretary is expected to bring to bear, on the business of the committee, his/her professional knowledge and competence. He/she is, therefore, expected to be familiar with the appropriate procedures and mandate of the committees as spelt out in its terms of reference. This will enable him/her give accurate and practicable advice to the Committee. In addition, the secretary must have a good understanding of the relationship of the committee he/she services with other bodies in the university and also maintain a frequent consultation with the chairman.

An experienced committee secretary tries to judge the mood of the committee, and particularly that of the chairman, so as to be able to perceive when the time is ripe to provide relevant facts, whether procedural or otherwise. The secretary must know the facts and learn to present them clearly and concisely, if he is to win the trust and respect of members.

It is essential that a committee secretary is always alert and able to report and document the proceedings of the committee as precisely as possible. If uncertain as to what the formal decision on an item of business is, it is his/her duty to seek clarification from the chairman or other members of the committee.

Duties of committee members

Activities of members of a committee involve attending meetings having studied the minutes and relevant documents for the meetings ahead of time; being active and participatory in the course of the meetings, and acquainting themselves with the operations of the committee, its terms of reference, acceptance procedure, conventions and schedule of meetings. It is also essential for members to familiarize themselves with the role of the committee within the broader committee structure in the university.

Deliberating on issues in committees sometimes poses a lot of problems. The choice of members of a committee is of great importance from the point of view of the way in which the committee approaches its tasks and the kind of decisions made. Membership of committees, therefore, as much as possible, should be based on the choice of the best brains to examine a problem in as rational and dispassionate a manner as possible, and to forward reasonable and practical proposals for dealing with it. The right mix of individuals is pivotal and can often influence the outcome of a particular issue. If care is not taken, strong willed persons can

change objectives for which a committee has been created (Chance, 2010). It is important that members make their points succinctly with decorum during committee meetings. Contributions should be worthwhile and rights of others should be respected. Equally very importantly, committee members representing any constituency are expected to report back to their constituencies so as to carry them along else the involvement core value as a chain would be broken.

The bottom-up involvement

The bottom-up involvement is devolutions of power by large organizations to their subsidiaries or component units to such an extent that problems are diffused and reports are simply forwarded to the Centre. It is the belief that such a system does not only allow for initiatives at the lower level but it also dispenses with bureaucracy and facilitates leadership training at the lower level.

To Sall, Lebeau and Kassimir (2003) policy making begins in a healthy university at any rate at the level of departments, among lecturers. It then rises to the level of the faculty where conflicting proposals from departments are reconciled at the faculty level. From the faculty, it goes to the Academic Board that reconcile conflicting proposals from the faculties and finally, the University Council where sovereignty resides. By tradition, the Council rarely alters any recommendations that come to it. He further asserts that in some universities their statutes prevent the university council from acting on academic matters except on the recommendation of the Academic Board. The bottom-up involvement is a distinctive characteristic of UEW governance.

Problems and Challenges of the Committee System

Committee system as a tool for fair governance is not devoid of challenges. On the subject of challenges of the committee system in Ghanaian public universities, the paper identifies four key issues; namely, the Vice-Chancellors chairing too many committees; unfair representation of non-academic staff; frequency of meetings and large financial expenditure.

To start with, the Vice-Chancellor chairs too many committees to allow for maximum efficiency and the specialization of his/her abilities. A Vice-Chancellor who is averse to a principle, considerably causes delays and postponement of meetings occur to the detriment of quick decision making and speedy implementation of needed administrative decisions (Baer, Duin and Ramaley 2008). According to him, Committees that could suffer such delays includes very important committees like the Development Committee, the Appointments and Promotions Committee to mention a few. This is because the Vice-Chancellor as chairman may be unable to attend the meetings, either giving to conflict of engagements within or outside the University, or deliberate manipulation by a chairman unwilling to discuss certain issues or due to other reasons connected with the chairman. Again, a Vice-Chancellor who chooses incompetent loyalists as members of committees does a lot of harm to effective university management. For instance, when he appoints incompetent loyalists as Deans, Heads of Department/Units and Directors, he inadvertently provides a fertile ground for the constitution of ineffective University committees since these same inexperienced heads may, as members of Academic Board dominate decisions.

Another problem worth noting is the unfair representation of non-academics on university committees. These committees are made up mostly academics; and this is usually attributable

to the nature of University business which is mostly academic. Not only this, issues that are administrative in nature become academic in universities because of their impact on teaching and research, and on staff and students. The non-academics are insignificantly represented on important committees of Ghanaian universities. It should, however, be noted that issues at stake may, on the surface, be regarded as academic related matters, but decisions may well involve the practical question of relative urgency, expediency and the level of priority to be accorded the issue within a given period. This supports the inclusion of University administrators and other non-teaching senior members in the composition of committees in the University. Notwithstanding, the academics who constitute the majority of the membership of Ghanaian university boards and committees, do not equally find it funny hopping from one committee to the other in addition to their normal teaching and research workload. Contrary views are always treated contemptuously. However, when such views, which the committee had refused to share, turn out to be right, the secretaries are always blamed for the committee's wrong action while committees are blamed for acting "illegally" (Calareso, 2007).

Equally important is the challenge of frequency of meetings. University committees differ in terms of the regularity of their meetings. Some committees have too many meetings, with little or insufficient intervals for follow-up activities and consequent piling up unwritten minutes of previous meetings. On the other hand, there are those committees with irregular or too few numbers of meetings. Also, at times, meetings are summoned only at the pleasure/arbitrary discretion of the chairman.

Last but not least, committees consume a large expenditure of finances and time in Ghanaian universities. A classical example is UEW which is multilevel and inter-satellite-campus in nature. For instance, the provision of logistics including snacks and lunch, payment of T&T and night allowances for those travelling, for ordinary meetings that could take three-hours in duration may cost a lot of money as numbers of members in the committees (such as the Academic Board) keep on increasing with the University vibrant expansion policy. Also, secretaries spend a lot of time collating and disseminating information on committees.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Committees

Although the committee system as a tool for university governance has many advantages, it could have its associated challenges depending on how it is managed. Some of the advantages and disadvantages are presented as follows:

Advantages

- The knowledge and comprehension of several people are likely to enhance reasonable consideration of topics while their prejudices will stand some chance of being balanced.
- It allows for spread of authority and involvement of members of the University in decision making, thus fostering both vertical and horizontal communication in the system.
- Committee decisions are more acceptable to stakeholders.
- It allows for differing viewpoints to be brought together in the same place and at the same time.
- It serves as a good coordinating mechanism

- Membership of committees boosts the morale of members of the university community who get motivated by being involved in decision making process.
- community and Management. The helps to reduce incidents of crises and rumour mongering.
- It reduces the pressure of the day-to-day operational responsibilities on university management so as to ensure effectiveness.
- It encourages group accomplishment rather than individual competition.

Disadvantages

- Committee meetings and discussions deplete the time meant for the primary business of teaching, research and community service.
- Multilevel campus committee meeting organization exhausts the university's financial purse.
- Refusal to implement the recommendations of committees often leads to demoralization members and in turn makes the committee system ineffective.
- Attitude of some committee members sometimes lead to delays in decision making.
- Some members do thorough home work to satisfy personal vendetta against a perceived offender or someone who is not in one's camp.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

University of Education, Winneba has continued to develop a democratic and representative form of governance using 'the committee system of governance'. Its core values are accountability, transparency and involvement. Accountability in its operations and transparency of decision-making are of high priority. It ensures decision-making is connected to the people through the University Council standing committees and the Academic Board sub-committees. As good practice in the University community, it is believed that decisions should reflect the interests and wishes of those involved.

There is hardly, however, any system in which some abuses cannot be found, but the extent to which such faults will affect the overall efficient functioning of a university will depend on the application of the internal checks and balances available within the system.

Nevertheless, concerted efforts should be made to review the University committees with a view to consolidating them and having fewer committees which will meet and report more regularly to the parent bodies to enhance the committee system objectives.

Equally importantly, to streamline things, there is the need for the University to have a University Committee Handbook containing the list of Established and Managerial Committees of the University, their Composition, Terms of Reference, Membership and Frequency of Meetings, and the general conventions to be applied in their operations. In addition, a continual review and updating of University Committees—the numbers,

procedures, membership and co-ordination of committees' plan of work should be given a sharper focus in the University of Education, Winneba.

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