



runningsports

Sport England supporting clubs and volunteers

the role of the secretary



what is runningsports?

The runningsports programme has been created, and is funded, by Sport England for the benefit of volunteers working in sport.

The runningsports programme provides products and services in a variety of formats to support the work undertaken by volunteers and sports development officers. From Role Outlines, Top Tips and Quick Guides through to workbooks, workshops, e-learning and qualifications, the range of resources supports three key themes of club and volunteer development:

- governance and administration
- finance and funding
- volunteers and volunteer management.

For further information about runningsports, visit

www.runningsports.org

or call 0800-363 373.



Throughout this Quick Guide, reference is made to 'clubs'. This term is used to include all sports organisations, such as leagues, county and area associations and other community groups, that provide opportunities, whether in an organised setting or a more informal environment.

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role of the secretary

The secretary acts as the principal administrator for the club and will be responsible for carrying out or delegating all of the administrative duties that enable the club and its members to function effectively.

The secretary has a pivotal role, with close involvement in the running of the club. It is important to know what all other members of the committee are responsible for, to ensure the whole club is united in its work. The role therefore requires the secretary to have good communication skills and a general knowledge of both the playing and non-playing sides of the club.

The secretary provides the link between the members, executive committee and outside agencies (eg other clubs, leagues, the national governing body [NGB], local community and media). The smooth running of the club depends on the efficiency with which the secretary handles the records,

correspondence and other communications, which can come in the form of letters, telephone calls, texts or emails.

This Quick Guide provides some useful tips to meet the challenges ahead.

Here is a summary of some of the more typical key tasks that the secretary may take on directly or delegate to other members of the committee:

- being the first point of contact for all enquiries
- representing the club at meetings
- keeping up to date with sports initiatives by compiling and checking a list of useful websites regularly
- affiliating the club to the local league
- registering players

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- dealing with correspondence
- organising and booking match facilities
- organising the club's annual general meeting (AGM)
- organising and attending committee meetings
- taking and distributing minutes
- maintaining accurate records
- ensuring action points from meetings have been carried out
- organising special events
- supporting the club with funding applications
- collecting and analysing information from the members.

A good secretary will be:

- well organised and have good communication skills
- able to maintain confidentiality
- methodical and reliable
- a good communicator
- able to delegate and action tasks
- impartial
- a good planner
- alert to constitutional and legal requirements
- enthusiastic about the sport
- interested in people
- tactful and discreet
- able to lead and supervise others
- able to delegate
- a good decision maker
- a strategic thinker, able to plan ahead
- aware of the key agencies and partners that can support the club and work in partnership with it.



term of office

A term of office is sometimes governed by the Articles of Association, and you should check existing rules before deciding on the length of appointment.

The secretary's term of office can be governed in one of two ways. One way is to make it a once-in-a-lifetime appointment, for one year only. The alternative is to elect the most capable person and allow that person to remain in office for as long as he or she continues to be re-elected.

The Annual System

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It prevents an individual from becoming too powerful and influential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each new secretary takes time to acquire knowledge and experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It rewards long service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the secretary begins to establish the requirements of the position, he or she is replaced.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It saves one person from having to carry the responsibility continuously. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It can encourage inconsistency and instability in the club when constantly faced with change.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The club gradually acquires a pool of skilled individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The secretary may not gain any detailed knowledge of the work of the club, which might increase the power and influence of those who do remain in office for long periods (eg the chairperson, treasurer or other staff).

Having a Longer-term Secretary

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The secretary becomes familiar with the workings of the club and can provide leadership with continuity and consistency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An individual can build up a wealth of knowledge, experience and authority, which may result in a club being 'controlled' by its secretary and therefore not listening to new ideas or ways of working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The secretary becomes skilled at supporting the chairperson, which may improve the quality of meetings and the decisions made. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The club might become so dependent on the secretary that it has difficulty finding a replacement when he or she retires.

Neither system is perfect. A compromise that allows key members of the committee to be elected for a maximum period (eg not more than four years) can preserve the best of both.

equipment needed

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

- use of a computer and an email address; a computer will help the secretary 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
- files for storing communications and records
- ring binders to store permanent records
- a set of folders (one for every project/topic)
- notebook(s) for taking notes during meetings
- an annual diary/chart to record a schedule of all the club's activities, including events, competitions, closing dates, meetings and social functions
- files, ring binders or minute books to store typed copies of the minutes of meetings, reports and statements of accounts
- headed stationery and envelopes
- a telephone, with access during the daytime and evenings, including an answerphone
- Internet access
- a Dictaphone.

dealing with communication

Incoming communication should be read and dealt with promptly; in the first instance, an acknowledgement of the letter/email should be sent before forwarding it to the relevant person at the club for actioning.

By following these tips, a secretary should be able to deal with the club's communication quickly and efficiently:

- Maintain a register of communication 'in' and 'out' by recording the date of receipt on all incoming mail, making a note of whom copies have been distributed to.
- Deal with each letter promptly. If you cannot answer the query, or need to wait until the next committee 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 can be used.
- Keep up to date with communication before committee meetings so information can be distributed and dealt with at the meeting, whenever possible.

- Keep copies of letters sent in a safe, secure filing system.
- 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.

Creating standard letters can save time, especially if held on a computer (templates can be found on 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, such as:

Thank you for your enquiry, which will be dealt with at the meeting on _____ .

I am pleased to say that you have been accepted as a member.

The fee for the year is _____ payable to the treasurer by _____ .

Thank you for your letter regarding _____ . I enclose some information that may be of assistance to you.



liaising with other members and external agencies

The secretary has an important responsibility to keep everyone informed of decisions and events and to check tasks have been carried out. Members are the lifeblood of the organisation and should receive regular communication from the committee.

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

external liaison

It is essential that the club identifies and works in partnership with key external agencies that can help to provide the club with support, including information on funding. Contacts might include the NGB representative, local authority sports development officers, school sports partnerships, partnership development managers, school sports coordinators, community police officers, local business support groups, the third sector development agencies and the media.

The secretary may be called upon to carry out some of the following duties:

work with other agencies:

- act as the public officer 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 NGB or local league):

- process transfer applications
- enter teams in competitions
- represent the club at association/ league 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.

meetings

Meetings provide an opportunity for members to make their point and get consensus or authority to put it into action. However, meetings can take up huge amounts of time, and it is therefore important that they are planned and carried out effectively.

With the chairperson, the secretary will need to think about:

- holding meetings only when necessary; if you only need to announce information, perhaps an email or a website post will do – save meetings for meaningful interactions
- topics to cover, the order in which to cover them and the environment you want for the discussion
- circulating discussion items and necessary information ahead of time; let people know what's expected of them at the meeting so they are prepared to come with their comments.

annual general meeting

The club rules should state how notification of the AGM must be given to members. As secretary, you should be aware of any special rules of the club and follow them strictly. The meeting could be declared invalid if the rules have not been followed.

A good meeting will:

- motivate the 'team' of volunteers
- allow the message to be put across and clarification sought
- help forge good relationships between colleagues and members
- promote sound decision making
- clearly communicate issues
- clearly define the outcome of decisions and action required.

An unnecessary or unproductive meeting will:

- waste time and money
- be demotivating and frustrating for members
- diminish the status of important meetings
- have no constructive outcome or action and therefore prevent the club from running effectively.

More information on how to run meetings can be found within the *Effective Communication* Quick Guide. To download a free copy or to purchase other Quick Guides in this series, visit www.runningsports.org

setting the meeting

Once the meeting date has been agreed, the secretary is responsible for making arrangements to ensure all members receive the necessary information. This may include:

- arranging the venue, date and time
- notifying members of these details – this needs to be done well in advance (the constitution usually stipulates the minimum period of notice required)
- working with the chairperson to set the agenda
- collecting reports from other officers
- arranging for guest speakers
- arranging catering and hospitality.

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

Consider the seating arrangements. Depending on the meeting and what you want

to achieve, the layout of the room is important. Choose from the following options:

- theatre/conference style – useful for presentations to larger groups of people and a simple question and answer format; not good for group work or discussions
- boardroom style – useful for small meetings of up to 15 people, as discussions can take place and eye contact with all can be maintained
- small tables – useful for working in small groups to achieve ideas and solutions; a central focus to the front of the room for presentations is essential
- horseshoe style – useful for working with informal groups in a workshop format; the focus will be on the facilitator.

Remember to send adequate notice of the meeting to all concerned, including the venue, day, date and time, together with the agenda.

the agenda

The positioning of points on the agenda is important. Make sure an important item does not immediately follow a contentious matter that might make the group fractious and disagreeable. Nor should it be at the end of the agenda; if some members feel strongly against it, they will oppose it and could have it thrown out with little or no discussion because everyone else is eager to finish the meeting.

A sample meeting agenda

There will be a meeting of the

_____ Committee,

at _____ (place),

on _____ (date),

from _____ (time).

- 1 Welcome and introductions
- 2 Apologies for absence
- 3 Minutes of the last meeting – to approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record
- 4 Matters arising – to consider any matters arising not otherwise included on the agenda
- 5 Financial report – to receive a report on the current financial position and to make any decisions regarding budgets, fees, expenses, payments etc
- 6 Consideration of reports from officers and subcommittees
- 7 General business – updates from individual teams or sports sections
- 8 Administrative business, including consideration of statutory matters (eg date of AGM)
- 9 Any other business
- 10 Date of next meeting

Distribute papers that need to be discussed in advance so people come to the meeting with their comments and prepared to discuss the topic in hand. This gives the meeting a feeling of achievement and the impetus to progress rapidly.

at the meeting

It is the role of the chairperson to:

- make initial introductions and welcome new members
- set out the purpose of the meeting and any outcomes it is expected to deliver
- advise what time the meeting will end
- state any ground rules
- check that everyone has the relevant papers
- review and approve previous meeting minutes
- ask members present to declare if any item on the agenda represents a conflict of interest to them
- strike a balance between keeping the discussion moving forward and ensuring that everyone who wants to speak has an opportunity to do so
- allow points of view to be expressed
- hold discussion
- draw conclusions
- agree actions.

As secretary, you may be asked to act as timekeeper to assist the chairperson and ensure all agenda items are covered and the meeting ends at the agreed time.

The chairperson may confirm a decision by common consent of the whole meeting, rather than by a majority vote. To get this consensus, round off the discussion by saying, 'Is it agreed then...?' or 'I take it we are all in favour.' Then restate the decision and wait a few seconds to

give everybody a final opportunity to voice any opposition. It is important that you record all actions and decisions accurately; if unsure, ask the chairperson for clarification.

The secretary should:

- ensure there is a minimum quorum number needed to hold the meeting and agree any actions
- ask the chairperson to sign off the previous meeting minutes
- take spare copies of the agenda and papers for those people who have forgotten to bring theirs
- circulate an attendee list so members can write their names, title and where they are from for accurate records
- position yourself next to, or close to, the chairperson so you can confirm agreed action points
- ask members to state if they have any other business to avoid unnecessary discussion at the meeting.

writing minutes

At the end of a complicated discussion, use simple language to 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 often has the 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.

top tips for writing 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 if a vote was taken and ask the chairperson to repeat the words of the motion if you are unsure.
- 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) to inform those who were absent and 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.
- Gain approval from the chairperson before minutes are distributed.

To speed up minute taking:

- create a template on a computer and, if possible, use a laptop
- use a Dictaphone to record the meeting; you can listen back to the tape after the meeting to ensure actions are recorded accurately
- ask officers giving a verbal report to provide you with a copy of their written text for you to drop into the minutes.

Choose the appropriate word to suit the circumstances. Examples include:

- agreed – indicates a strong consensus to support a particular course of action
- recommended – indicates a proposal to another committee or club
- noted – indicates a matter was reported, but no decision was necessary
- received – indicates a report was presented and accepted
- approved – indicates a recommendation has been endorsed
- recognised – indicates information was accepted, but no decision was taken
- resolved – indicates a motion was formally proposed, voted upon and passed.

keeping records

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

Minutes of meetings, annual reports and statements of accounts are best kept in a separate folder or series of folders on the computer 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 member records, this information may be kept in a box file, a ledger or on a computer (with a back-up). If the club has a lot of members or regularly sends information to them, access to a computer that can mail merge and produce label templates is an advantage.

Membership records may also be necessary for returns to regional or national associations 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 communication 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.

If you are keeping databases of any kind, you need to notify the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) of the purposes for which your club processes personal data. Check out the Data Protection Act Top Tips for more information, or go direct to the ICO website at www.ico.gov.uk



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 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 in their own right, putting them in priority order, near the end of the agenda.
- Don't let the committee members 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 need to be motivated to do a good job.
- You need to be well organised and conscientious.
- Deal with all communication 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 copies, store the files on a computer and have back-up facilities available.
- Work in partnership with your executive committee and external agencies to ensure your club runs effectively and efficiently.

It will not take long for you to become a very valuable and important member of your club, and your role off the pitch or court will often become as important as the people and results on it!

glossary of terms

Agenda: List of items to be dealt with during a meeting (eg matters arising from a previous meeting, new communication).

Annual general meeting (AGM): A meeting held once a year, which involves all of the club members, not just the main committee. An AGM will be used to discuss the end-of-season finances, elect new committee members and decide on the future direction of the club. AGMs are strictly governed by the club's constitution.

Articles of Association: The regulations governing the relationships between the shareholders and directors of the company. They are a requirement for the establishment of a company by law. Together with the memorandum of association, they form the constitution of a company.

Communication: Telephone calls, letters, emails, text messages and face-to-face meetings.

Constitution: A written record of the principles that govern a club.

Minutes: A formal record of any discussion, agreements and action points arising from a meeting.



useful contacts

Sport and Recreation Alliance

Burwood House
14–16 Caxton Street
London SW1H 0QT
Tel: 020-7976 3900
Website: www.sportandrecreation.org.uk

Child Protection in Sport Unit

NSPCC National Training Centre
3 Gilmour Close
Beaumont Leys
Leicester LE4 1EZ
Tel: 0116-234 7278
Website: www.thecpsu.org.uk

county sports partnerships

For a complete list of county sports partnerships, check out the Sport England website at www.sportengland.org and search for 'county sports partnerships'.

English Federation of Disability Sport

SportPark
3 Oakwood Drive
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3QF
Tel: 01509-227 750
Website: www.efds.co.uk

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)

The Tower
2 Furnival Square
Sheffield S1 4QL
Tel: 0114-278 6636
Website: www.navca.org.uk

National Council for Voluntary Youth Services

3rd Floor
Lancaster House
33 Islington High Street
London N1 9LH
Tel: 020-7278 1041
Website: www.ncvys.org.uk

national governing bodies of sport

For a complete list of national governing bodies, check out the Sport England website at www.sportengland.org and search for 'national governing bodies'.

SkillsActive

Castlewood House
77–91 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1DG
Tel: 020-7632 2000
Website: www.skillsactive.com

Sport England

3rd Floor
Victoria House
Bloomsbury Square
London WC1B 4SE
Tel: 020-7273 1551
Website: www.sportengland.org

Sport Northern Ireland

House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road
Belfast BT9 5LA
Tel: 028-9038 1222
Website: www.sportni.net

Sporting Equals

1301 Stratford Road
Hall Green
Birmingham B28 9HH
Tel: 0121-777 1375
Website: www.sportingequals.com

sports coach UK

Chelsea Close
Off Amberley Road
Armley
Leeds LS12 4HP
Tel: 0113-274 4802
Website: www.sportscoachuk.org

sportscotland

Doges
Templeton on the Green
62 Templeton Street
Glasgow G40 1DA
Tel: 0141-534 6500
Website: www.sportscotland.org.uk

Sport Wales

Sophia Gardens
Cardiff CF11 9SW
Tel: 0845-045 0904
Website: www.sportwales.org.uk

Sports Leaders UK

23-25 Linford Forum
Rockingham Drive
Linford Wood
Milton Keynes MK14 6LY
Tel: 01908-689 180
Website: www.sportsleaders.org

Volunteering England

Regents Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
Tel: 0845-305 6979
Website: www.volunteering.org.uk

Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation

3rd Floor
Victoria House
Bloomsbury Square
London WC1B 4SE
Tel: 020-7273 1740
Website: www.wsff.org.uk

Youth Sport Trust

SportPark
3 Oakwood Drive
Loughborough
Leicestershire LE11 3QF
Tel: 01509-226 600
Website: www.youthsporttrust.org

more help from runningsports

This Quick Guide is one of a series that has been created to provide information about some of the key sports volunteer roles, and information and solutions on topics that have an impact on sports volunteers.

Log on to the **runningsports** website to find everything you need to help you with:

- **governance and administration**
- **finance and funding**
- **volunteers and volunteer management.**

Network Members are able to download the guides for **free**. If you are already a Network Member, access the Quick Guides from the Network Member Intranet.

To become a Network Member, log on to the **runningsports** website and click on the 'Register as a Network Member' icon on the front page.

For further information on this or other titles in this series, contact **runningsports**:

- **telephone: 0800-363 373**
- **email: info@runningsports.org**
- **website: www.runningsports.org**



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