

Guide to Using SUMS

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GUIDE TO USING SUMS

1 Preface

The purpose of this '**Guide to Using SUMS**' is to help SUMS members get the best out of SUMS. It explains how to:

- Access SUMS services
- Disseminate knowledge about SUMS among members' senior managers
- Use SUMS to determine and define tasks to be undertaken.

It sets out the role to be played by the nominated person in each member institution, known as the Member Representative, who is to be the principal channel of communication with SUMS and also explains how a member institution's relationship with SUMS differs from the relationships it may have with other management consultants.

Further information can be found at our web site: www.sums.org.uk.

2 Induction of New Members

To help new members understand SUMS and how best to access the full range of benefits that derive from SUMS membership an induction plan has been devised, which has three components:

1. A briefing session for new Member Representatives; this will be conducted by one of the Managing Consultants and may involve another experienced SUMS Member Representative
2. This '**Guide to Using SUMS**'
3. A briefing pack to assist new members bring SUMS membership benefits and opportunities to the attention of their Senior Management colleagues that contains a:
 - 'Guide to Using SUMS'
 - PowerPoint presentation; this to be given jointly by the new member and one of the SUMS Managing Consultants
 - SUMS Leaflet and most recent Annual Report.

3 Change of Member Representative

To help new Member Representatives understand SUMS and how best to access the full range of benefits that derive from SUMS membership the member's Key Contact (KC) details of which can be found at <http://www.sums.org.uk/members/kcc> (whose role is developed in section 7.1) will take responsibility for meeting and briefing the new Representative.

4 What is SUMS?

4.1 SUMS Management Consultancy

Southern Universities Management Services (SUMS) is a specialist management consultancy which works exclusively in Higher Education; it is a company limited by guarantee and is a registered charity. SUMS was established by a group of universities who saw benefit in working with management consultants who understood the HE sector and who could therefore quickly grasp their needs. SUMS is owned by its member universities.

SUMS has two divisions, the Consulting Division and the Purchasing Division, which is known as Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium (SUPC). This Guide deals solely with the consulting activities of SUMS; further information on SUPC can be found at www.supc.procureweb.ac.uk/

4.2 SUMS Philosophy

SUMS philosophy is one of openness with clients and client staff.

SUMS operates as a partnership for the development and sharing of good practice in HE management. Members share fully and freely the outcomes of work undertaken by SUMS. Each member has the right to equal benefits from membership.

SUMS exists to support its members and believes that members' interests are best served by SUMS offering independent advice. Advice on sensitive issues is given in confidence.

If a client decides to decline to accept SUMS findings, SUMS having understood the reasons will work constructively to support the client.

4.3 SUMS Members

SUMS membership has grown over the years and member institutions now number around thirty. Membership is open to like-minded institutions.

Application by a higher education institution (HEI) for membership to SUMS is made to the Managing Consultants. The Management Committee of SUMS approves membership applications. Upon acceptance into membership the HEI is asked to nominate a Member Representative who will then be the principal point of contact and who should be empowered by their institution to attend and vote at general meetings of the Company and to elect directors.

Once elected as a member a HEI has full and equal rights with all others. A member may resign by giving 12 months written notice at 31 July in any year.

4.4 SUMS Governance

The Management Committee of SUMS comprises six elected directors, one of whom is the Chair of the SUPC Board of Management (an advisory committee of the SUMS Management Committee), plus up to two further directors co-opted to provide specialist contributions in the areas of HR and Finance (where required).

The directors of SUMS (who each may serve for four years and retire in rotation) provide strategic direction and support for the Managing Consultant and Chief Executive.

Details of SUMS members, Member Representatives and Management Committee can be found at our website and in our Annual Report.

4.5 SUMS Staff

SUMS staff are well-qualified professional people drawn from varied professional and commercial backgrounds including: Information Systems and Technology, Marketing, Business Processes, Engineering and Management Accounting. All have an understanding of and an empathy with HE. Their work experience in HE extends across the administrative and business processes and ranges from policy through strategy development to tactical and operational management.

Short staff curriculum vitae are available at our website.

5 Consulting Fees

The cost of SUMS is met from an annual membership subscription. SUMS does not charge members fees for its services undertaken within the framework of the annual work programme.

The Management Committee of SUMS sets the annual members subscription, approves the budget and brings forward the directors' report and accounts for approval at the AGM at which all nominated Member Representatives are entitled to vote on resolutions, inter alia, to approve the accounts, appoint the auditors and elect directors. The accounts of SUMS are maintained by The University of Reading, SUMS does not have a bank account and all funds are channelled through The University of Reading.

6 Range of Services

There is a very high probability that SUMS has something to offer whatever the management issue in HE. SUMS has wide experience working across university administration, particular strengths include:

6.1 Systems and Process Review

Process and Systems Review including the development of specifications for information systems as a basis for software acquisition, including:

- Student Information Systems
- Timetabling and Space Management
- Research Support and Administration
- Financial Systems
- Human Resources and Payroll
- Residential Accommodation and Conference Management
- Content Management
- Customer Relationship Management.

6.2 Organisational and Departmental Review

Organisational and Departmental Review of administration functions wherever they are located including:

- Student Services
- Academic Registry
- Information Services
- Library
- Marketing and External Relations
- Human Resources
- Estates
- Finance
- Commercial Services
- Research
- Student Residences.

6.3 Themes and Special Topics

SUMS works with its members in specific areas including:

- Benchmarking
- Academic and Administrative Restructuring
- Change Management
- Risk Management and Business Continuity
- IT Healthcheck
- Administrative Services Review
- Business Process Improvement
- Performance Indicators
- Timetabling and Space Management
- Quality Assessment.

7 Access to SUMS Services

7.1 Key Contacts

An experienced member of SUMS consulting staff is nominated to work closely with each member institution; this person is known as the Key Contact (KC). Their key objective is to develop the member relationship to enable SUMS to understand each members needs.

The KC will work closely with the Member Representative and will be responsible for meeting and briefing new Representatives as and when they are appointed.

7.2 SUMS Work Programme

SUMS undertakes work for members according to a rolling programme of assignments. The work programme comprises both specific items requested by members and reserve slots that a member may call off.

Each member is asked to channel their requests for assignments through their nominated Member Representative to the KC. It is the responsibility of the Member Representative to request and instigate assignments, although SUMS is happy to assist with the identification phase.

The KC will make arrangements with the Member Representative to visit, at least annually, to discuss requirements for assignments for inclusion within the work programme. Precise requirements for each assignment will be explored subsequently in greater detail at a Terms of Reference (TOR) meeting. To support efficient delivery and make best use of our resources it is important that SUMS Members commence assignments at the time agreed during the TOR meeting.

7.3 Time Allocation

There is no specific upper or lower limit to the time to be committed to the work that will be included in the work programme for any member. It is expected that all members will share the benefits of membership and that there will be an equality of treatment among members.

The staffing of SUMS is maintained to provide an average of ten consultant weeks of assignment work per member per annum and this is broadly assigned as two weeks on collaborative assignments and eight weeks on institutional specific assignments.

SUMS may also be able to undertake additional work outside of the work programme for non-members at commercial fee rates and for members at a discounted rate. Should members wish to explore this further they should do so through their KC.

7.4 Requesting Assistance and Advice

Approaches to SUMS should be made to the KC through the Member Representative. As a general rule members find that channelling requests for SUMS assistance through the Member Representative is to be preferred since this:

- Ensures that the HEI's priorities for SUMS assistance are met
- Informs the Member Representative of the requests made and the service delivered by SUMS and can help them assess the use and value of SUMS membership.

There may be occasions when SUMS does not have the ability to help but may be able to suggest lines of enquiry, for example to other members or other consultancies. SUMS will always endeavour to respond to requests at short notice; consideration should be given to how flexible the timing can be and over what period the work can be done.

As a preliminary to discussions of requirements thought should be given to:

- The contribution sought from SUMS
- The objectives of the assignment
- The scope of the work
- Those within the HEI with whom SUMS staff would work
- The timing of the assistance required.

As soon as a consultant with the right experience is able to begin work on an assignment SUMS will contact the HEI to arrange a Terms of Reference meeting.

8 Conduct of an Assignment

8.1 Terms of Reference

It is important that the background to an assignment and its objectives are clearly understood by all parties. The Terms of Reference (TOR) meeting should ideally be chaired by the Member Representative and be attended by the Head(s) of the divisions in whose area the assistance is sought and such other persons whose contribution is directly relevant. The SUMS Assignment Manager and the consultant who is scheduled to undertake the assignment will attend.

The TOR briefing is normally given by the member representative with contributions from colleagues and typically covers:

- Background to the assignment, including how and why the request has arisen
- Special circumstances prevailing
- Details of what is required
- Objectives for the assignment and expected outcomes
- Timing
- Reporting requirements i.e. day-to-day liaison, progress reports, presentations, draft reports.

There will be opportunity for questions and discussion of points. Following the TOR meeting SUMS will draft a TOR letter setting out our understanding of the assignment for review and approval by the member.

Unlike external consultants, SUMS does not quote a fee for work within the annual work programme since costs are met from the members' annual subscriptions.

8.2 Approach

The approach to be taken to an assignment will be outlined in the TOR letter. Once TOR are agreed SUMS will schedule a date to begin work in discussion with the Members' members of staff.

A work plan will be prepared by SUMS to assist in planning and managing the assignment. It is important that the agreed timescales for assignments are adhered to by both parties. It is of particular importance that preparations are made to commence assignments on the agreed dates. Slippage impacts on the work programme, not just of the individual member's but of all members. An initial meeting is usually held with the Head of the appropriate division to agree a schedule of staff to be interviewed.

8.3 Assignment Management

A SUMS Managing Consultant or when appropriate a nominated experienced SUMS consultant will manage the assignment (the Assignment Manager).

8.4 Administrative Support

We ask that the SUMS consultant be provided with access to office space, the computer network and limited secretarial support principally for making appointments.

8.5 Staff and Trade Union Briefings

In accordance with our normal practice we ask that staff and trades union representatives are advised that SUMS is to provide assistance to the HEI before we begin work. Often it will be convenient to copy the SUMS TOR letter to appropriate departmental managers.

8.6 Communication

The SUMS consultant will keep the nominated member of the client's staff (and/or Member Representative) informed of progress. Should any difficulties arise or guidance be required the consultant will make reference to the Member Representative. The Member Representative is asked to raise issues or concerns at any stage with the SUMS consultant or with the Assignment Manager so that they may be properly resolved.

The consultant will keep the Assignment Manager informed of progress and review issues and findings as they arise.

8.7 Presentation of Findings

As the assignment progresses towards completion a formal briefing is generally arranged to enable SUMS to present their findings to the member representative and the Head of division. At this presentation, there are opportunities for questions and discussions, which may prompt the need for further enquiries.

At this stage members may wish to arrange for a presentation of the findings to be made to other senior staff (and staff more generally).

After the presentation, a draft report is prepared and then reviewed by the Head of division for factual accuracy. The report is then presented to the Member Representative for finalisation.

Upon completion of a report a member will be asked how many copies of the final report they require and for permission to release the report to other members on request.

8.8 Quality Assurance

On completion of an assignment, an 'Assignment Review Questionnaire' is sent to the member representative with a request that the assignment is reviewed with the Head of division and the outcomes fed back to SUMS. This

assessment is part of the SUMS quality monitoring arrangement and is an input to SUMS staff performance management.

9 Exchange of Good Practice

9.1 Reports

Copies of reports prepared by SUMS for members are generally available to all members on request. A member may withhold agreement to release a report where particular reasons apply.

SUMS reports are the property of SUMS and should not be released to non-SUMS members without the agreement of both SUMS and the commissioning member. As a general rule reports are not released to non-members.

Notice of permission to release copies of the report to other members on request is noted by SUMS. Note is also made of requests received from other HEIs for copies of reports.

9.2 Lessons Learned Occasional Papers

Lessons Learned Occasional Papers are compiled following completion of similar or linked assignments; these are circulated to members.

9.3 Good Practice Groups

SUMS facilitate a number of Best Practice Groups to which members are invited to participate. Members' Representatives are typically Heads of division. Each group has its own agenda and calendar of activities. Current SUMS groups focus on:

- Process Review
- Information Services and Technology Developments
- Timetabling and Teaching Space Management.

9.4 Seminars and Events

SUMS puts on a series of seminars and events that are linked to work undertaken or support new initiatives.

A current programme and details can be found on our web site <http://www.sums.org.uk/index/events>.

10 Further Information

Members may search our web site or simply chose to email SUMS@reading.ac.uk or telephone 0118 935 7073 to ask "Have you done anything on?"

11 Questions and Comments

Your questions or comments on this guide together with suggestions for additional information should be directed to Bernarde Hyde, contact details as above.