



Part 3. How do committees work?

This series of guides is for members of BSI's technical committees and anyone interested in the development of standards. It is designed to accompany BS 0, *A standard for standards* and gives you information on:

[1 The benefits of being involved in standardization](#)

[2 How to work with BSI](#)

[3 How committees work](#)

[4 How standards are created](#)

[5 Different types of standards and related publications](#)

[6 Legal aspects, training and European Directives](#)

[7 Background, history and helpful links](#)

This is a guide to the how committees are meant to function, what happens if things go wrong, and what is expected of committee members and chairmen.



Committee membership

The development of a standard is a collective endeavour that needs to involve a wide range of legitimate interests. There also needs to be a deep understanding of the subject and of the needs of those who are likely to use the standard. All these are brought together in the form of a BSI technical committee.

For practical reasons committees have to be restricted to a manageable size and it is necessary to set certain criteria for membership. It is generally expected that those sitting on a committee will:

- actively represent a collective body that has legitimate interests in the work of the committee; and
- be able to demonstrate expertise in some areas of the committee's work.

It is important that a close and effective liaison is maintained between committee members and the organizations that they represent.

BSI expects that a body to be represented on a committee will usually be able to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- be an accountable, formally constituted organization with a defined scope or terms of reference consistent with those of the committee;
- be an authoritative voice for a defined interest or group of interests affected, or potentially affected, by the work of the committee;
- be committed to active support for the principle of consensus based voluntary public standardization.

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Membership will not normally be granted to an organization seeking to advance a single proprietary interest; individual companies are usually expected to be represented through an appropriate trade or professional association. Any organization deemed to be exploiting membership solely for its own commercial advantage may have its membership privileges withdrawn.

Other individuals, companies or organizations might be deemed eligible for membership if it can be demonstrated that their participation would be of wider benefit to the work of the committee. This is at BSI's discretion, and membership cannot be claimed as of right.

BSI has a responsibility to establish and maintain a fair and comprehensive balance of interests within each committee. No quotas apply and the nature of the balance will vary from committee to committee. [SPSC](#) is the ultimate arbiter in the case of disputes concerning representation on a committee.

When necessary, committees are empowered to co-opt individuals to bring the benefit of their expertise to specific projects. The status of a co-opted member is subject to regular review.

Consensus

Together with the requirement to submit all potential British Standards to public comment, development by consensus is the principal defining characteristic of a British Standard.

It has its origins in the desire to achieve the general acceptance and application of a standard within its intended sphere of influence. This entails trying to ensure that the interests of all those likely to be affected by it are taken into account, and that their individual concerns are carefully and fairly balanced against the wider public interest.

Achievement of consensus entails recognising this wider interest and sometimes making certain compromises. Trivial or vexatious objections are unlikely to gain support and may be over-ruled. However, where a member sustains a fundamental objection and supports it with sound arguments these concerns will be taken seriously.

If such objections are not voiced and sustained, normally within the context of a committee meeting where they can be put the test, it will be assumed that consensus has been achieved.

It is the responsibility of the committee chairman to steer the committee towards a consensual resolution of conflicting views and interests, and BSI staff are always available to support and advise as necessary. A disputes procedure is in place for those cases where fundamental objections cannot be overcome.

Failure of consensus rarely occurs in the BSI standards making process, which is evidence of the professionalism and commitment of all those involved.



Standards of conduct

BSI expects that all those participating in its standards making work will maintain high standards of commitment, personal conduct and professional integrity in all aspects of these duties.

Those sitting on committees do so voluntarily, and are unpaid for their services. They have a right to expect courteous and open-minded treatment by their colleagues and for their views to be considered and respected. They should also be able to rely on their colleagues' active participation and commitment and on their constructive approach to solving problems, removing obstacles to progress and achieving consensus.

There may be times when matters considered to be of commercial or political sensitivity are brought to the committee's attention. Those doing so should be able to rely on such information being used solely for the purpose for which it was offered to the committee.

Conversely, they should also be aware that BSI cannot be held responsible for any breach of confidentiality in such cases.

BSI expects that organizations represented on a committee will liaise closely with their nominated representative in order for their viewpoints to be established and their interests pursued effectively. They are also expected to accept that it will sometimes be necessary for those interests to be put aside in favour of the higher purpose of developing standards that are ultimately of benefit to the entire community.

Those representing the UK in European or international forums have a particular responsibility to ensure that the UK's influence is not compromised by poor standards of advocacy, commitment or personal conduct.

BSI reserves the right to suspend or remove a committee member or nominating organization for any breach of these principles that are deemed to undermine its standards making work.



Committee disputes

Prolonged disagreements within a committee (or, occasionally, between committees) can be very damaging and every effort should be made to resolve them quickly. Initially, it is the responsibility of the committee chairman to lead this task, with the support of the committee secretary and other BSI staff as appropriate.

If it becomes apparent that these efforts are not succeeding, nor likely to succeed within a reasonable timescale, the [Operations Director](#), British Standards should be alerted without any further delay. A detailed investigation of the problem will be undertaken and remedial measures will be proposed.

Suggestions and complaints

BSI is committed to continual improvement in all its processes and practices, and is very receptive to any constructive suggestions or proposals for promoting the principle.

There might be occasions when a committee or one of its members might feel a need to make a complaint about some aspect of BSI's management of the standards making process. It is important to bear in mind the scale, range and complexity of standards work undertaken by BSI, and the limited resources available to support it. Some complaints have their origin in unreasonable or unrealistic expectations.

Efforts should be made to resolve complaints informally and at an immediate level wherever possible. However, should this appear not to be feasible, the [Operations Director](#) should be alerted, and the complaint will be investigated independently and confidentially.

Committee chairmen

A chairman of a BSI Technical Committee or Subcommittee holds a key position in our standards work and has an important set of responsibilities.

These include:

- leading the Committee in its formal deliberations, with the objective of establishing a consensus on all matters brought to it for its decision;
- ensuring that a UK viewpoint is established on European and international standardization matters within the Committee's purview, and that effective measures are in place for representing those views in the appropriate forums;
- contributing actively to the strategic planning of the Committee's activities and work programme;
- alerting BSI British Standards to any perceived imbalance in the constitution of the Committee, or under-representation of important interests or expertise;
- in all of the Committee's business, exercising judgement without bias, mindful of the far-reaching consequences that sometimes attach to a Committee's decisions;
- having regard to the reputation and standing of BSI and its work
- in consultation and conjunction with the committee secretary or BSI contact point, taking all necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that the business of the committee is undertaken fully in accordance with BS 0 and its supporting documentation, particularly with due regard to confidentiality and the standards of conduct required of committee members

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It should be noted that, whilst a chairman is expected to have at least the level of technical expertise that is commensurate with membership of the committee, it is not expected that he or she will necessarily be its pre-eminent technical expert. However, especially in the case of committees responsible for a wide subject range, it is desirable for a chairman to have a sound working knowledge of the full extent of the committee's technical interests. It is also desirable to have an understanding of the application of the standards for which the committee is responsible, and of the markets in which they are used.

Together with being an effective communicator and competent manager of meetings, the principal qualities sought in a chairman are the abilities:

- to lead and to listen;
- to assimilate and evaluate complex information quickly;
- to see all sides of an argument;
- to be able to reconcile opposing arguments and to forge an acceptable consensus
- to win and maintain the support and respect of colleagues.



When appointed, a chairman has to relinquish the role of representing a particular organization or interest. It is recognized that, for reasons of financial or practical support, a chairman might need to maintain links with an organization represented on the committee, and in such cases this should be known to BSI and to all members of the committee. If, exceptionally, a chairman has to represent the view of a particular organization in a committee meeting, this has to be declared and the chairmanship surrendered to another, disinterested member for the duration of that item of business.

Those offering themselves for chairmanship should also be aware of the importance of thorough preparation for meetings and the need for attention to all the documents presented to a committee. This, combined with being the principal interface between a committee and BSI, is likely to place rather greater demands on time than is usual for a committee member.

Chairmen serve for terms of three years (which may be renewable by mutual agreement) and are appointed by the next senior committee; in the case of a subcommittee by the appropriate technical committee; in the case of a technical committee by SPSC. In the case of committees falling under the jurisdiction of the British Electrotechnical Committee (BEC), the appointments are made by the BEC and offered to SPSC for ratification.

Appointments are usually made on the basis of a nomination made by BSI staff, based on an evaluation of candidates against the criteria discussed above. It is usual to consult a committee as to its views on the chairmanship, but elections are not held and the committee's views are not binding on BSI.

Chairmen are generally appointed from within the committee membership, but there may be occasions when this is either not appropriate or not feasible. Prior membership of a committee is not a pre-requisite of appointment to its chairmanship