

dr Anna Cybulko

dr hab. Julia Kubisa prof. UW

Recommendation on the scheduling of official meetings at the University of Warsaw

Based on the regulations concerning work–life balance and the experience gained while performing equality-related functions at the University of Warsaw, we recommend that meetings of the statutory bodies of the University and other important official meetings be held during standard working hours, i.e. between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., adequate in relation to the opening hours of childcare and educational institutions.

In order to promote good practices and shape standards at the University of Warsaw, His Magnificence the Rector of the University of Warsaw has ordered that, during the 2024–2028 term of office, meetings of the University Senate shall begin at 12:00 noon.

Justification

We are increasingly receiving reports concerning the difficulties faced by individuals seeking to combine their professional duties related to membership in statutory bodies and organisational tasks at the University of Warsaw with their family and caregiving responsibilities.

An important issue is that official meetings are often scheduled outside the opening hours of childcare and educational institutions. Such an organisation of working time significantly hinders the ability to fulfil caregiving responsibilities, including care for children and dependent persons. For individuals who collect their children or grandchildren from childcare and educational institutions, this creates the need to make difficult choices: to bear various costs of arranging additional care or, in extreme cases, to resign from participation in meetings of the Councils and other important gatherings.

The scheduling of official meetings, particularly meetings of statutory bodies, should take place during hours which enable all entitled individuals to participate without incurring additional private costs. The fact that academic teachers have non-standardised working hours does not mean their caregiving responsibilities are any different. Academic teachers independently manage their working time according to their individual needs, which vary. This means that meetings should be held at times that are convenient for the majority, taking into account external factors such as caregiving obligations.

It should also be taken into account that administrative staff, who work fixed, set hours, also participate in meetings. Scheduling meetings outside their working hours significantly limits the pool of individuals who might potentially wish to engage in activities for the benefit of the Faculty and the University.

It is important to emphasise that such an approach to organising meetings constitutes a form of discrimination. It discriminates against individuals with caregiving responsibilities, as meetings scheduled after 5:00 p.m. become difficult for them to attend or result in incurring

additional costs. One may also identify here a case of indirect gender discrimination, as the majority of those adversely affected by this seemingly neutral arrangement are women.

Participation in meetings of the Faculty Council and the Discipline Council is an important aspect of university activity; it is taken into account in promotion procedures and in periodic evaluations. Therefore, it is crucial that all individuals who have been elected or nominated as representatives are able to participate in such meetings on equal terms.

Impairing the ability to participate in meetings of statutory bodies and other gatherings, such as department or chair meetings, by scheduling them at times when it is significantly difficult for individuals with caregiving responsibilities to attend, excludes this group from having a voice, feeling influence over their workplace, and playing an active role in the academic community.

Many units at the University of Warsaw have implemented organisational solutions regarding official meetings which support work ergonomics and work–life balance. These include, among others:

- reserving one day per week for organisational meetings so that on that day, alternately, meetings of Faculty Councils, Discipline Councils, department meetings, etc., take place;
- starting meetings at 1:00 p.m. with clear communication that this timing respects the family commitments of some staff members;
- enforcing time discipline during meetings to ensure they do not end later than a predetermined hour.

The good practices presented here may serve as inspiration for introducing new solutions. If needed, we offer support in developing new, optimal organisational arrangements which are both inclusive and tailored to the needs of the unit.

We also remind that the recommendation to organise official meetings in accordance with the opening hours of educational and childcare institutions was included in the Gender Equality Plan for the University of Warsaw. It stems from the diagnosis of the needs of the university community, as indicated in the “Equality at UW” survey conducted in 2018–2019, and was reinforced by the studies “Being a Parent at UW” (2022–2023) and “Equality at UW 2” (2024). This is also consistent with the provisions of the EU Work/Life Balance Directive.