

University Governance – comments on consultation paper

Linda Whitebread MBA, Administrative Officer Academic Division (Criminology)

1. Role of VC
2. Unified Administrative Service and the General Board
3. Ask the Judge!

1 Role of VC

- 1.1 It is unclear whether the VC is seen as a policy leader (para 5.1) or an administrative officer accountable to the Council (5.3). Is s/he Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary? In 5.2 the VC is 'responsible for the overall *direction* and management of the University and its finances' (my italics). Does this mean directing as in 'steering', or directing as in 'organising'? The difference, between a policy role and an administrative role, is crucial and needs clarification.
- 1.2 Pro-VCs: if the VC is a *policy* leader, I can see the role of the Pro-VCs – except why not just call them Committee Chairs, and give them proper time and resourcing to do the job? (Incidentally, para 5.4 talks of up to 5 Pro-VCs and then lists 6 functional areas.) But if the VC is a policy leader, why would s/he be accountable to the Council and not chair it (5.3)? Conversely, if the VC is the chief *executive* officer, then why would the Pro-VCs be accountable to him/her (5.4)? How would duties be split between VC and Registry, who also seems to be the chief executive officer? This is left very hazy.
- 1.3 An organisation chart, giving lines of responsibility, would be useful. We requested one many times during the reorganisation into the Unified Administrative Service, and one was promised (eg, to me, by the Registry, at an administrators' meeting), but never forthcoming.

2 Unified Administrative Service and the General Board

- 2.1 When I came to the University in January 2000, everything seemed quite simple. There was a Treasurer, who headed a division concerned with the financial and physical resources of the University; a Secretary General, who headed a division concerned with the business of the University, ie teaching and research; and a Registry, who headed a legal, secretariat, division. Appropriate committees of academics steered these divisions and were in turn accountable to the main policy-making and strategy body, the Council. The VC, as policy leader, chaired the Council. Now, I may have got this all quite wrong, and certainly there have been problems associated with this simple model, in practice not least the growth in importance of the General Board Committee, which arguably in many areas has become virtually as powerful as Council itself.
- 2.2 But now, we have the 'Unified' Administrative Service: there are 7 divisions to coordinate instead of 3, the Registry is a *supremo* in overall charge of everything, and nobody seems to know what the VC, the Treasurer, and the Secretary General are going to do. There is still to be a General Board

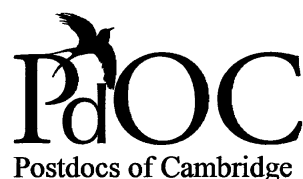
Committee, but not a General Board Division, and its nearest equivalent, the Academic Division, is relegated to one of 7 and is on a par with, for example, Health and Safety. Various matters have to be considered both by the General Board, and by the Council, or by special joint committees reporting to both. This takes time, and obscures accountability.

- 2.3 It seems to me that having gone down the route of the Unified Administrative Service, it now makes sense also to abolish the General Board Committee as presently constituted and strengthen further the role of the Council. To maintain clear accountability, and speed up decision making, we should get away from the current situation where there is overlap between two bodies (Council and General Board) such that they both consider matters at the same level.
- 2.4 Each of the new Divisions should have its own Committee, reporting either directly or indirectly to the Council. There should indeed be a committee with a remit broadly as described in para 6.5, to emphasize the importance of the core business of the university. However, it should clearly be seen as reporting to Council. It would be helpful not to call it the General Board, so that it is not confused with the Committee in its present guise.
- 2.5 Again, a chart of the committee structure would provide clarification.

3 Ask the Judge!

- 3.1 If a course on Education Management taught me anything, it is that no structure is a sure-fire recipe for success (or failure), since the reality is that the people within an organisation each have different agendas, perspectives, and circumstances; participation in the decision making process is fluid; and informal networks (subversion) will always play an important part. Cambridge especially, with its collegiate structure, long history, and commitment to decentralisation and democracy (while of course minimising bureaucracy and delay!), is going to find it difficult to construct the 'perfect' system.
- 3.2 What do the people at the Judge Institute think? – they're the experts!

18 March 2002



PdOC is a small group of postdocs (Unestablished Researchers) in a wide range of academic disciplines across the university and colleges. The steering committee of PdOC have discussed the proposed changes to the university governance, and we further discussed our views with Gordon Johnson, the chair of the committee on Governance. We have summarised our conclusions below:

A) We suggest the following with specific reference to the proposed changes to the systems of governance:

- We welcome the changes that relate to the greater inclusion of contract research staff in the university's system of governance.
- We recognise that the proposals for change are at an early stage, but would value the opportunity to be involved in discussions throughout the process.
- Membership of Regent House should be automatic and immediate on appointment as in the case of Junior Research Fellows.
- We recommend that the number of seats on council for postdocs be ring-fenced (3) and kept under review in order to respond to probable continuing changes in the demographics of the university. e.g. Contract research staff (CRS) now outnumber permanent staff in Cambridge 2:1 and this ratio is likely to increase in the future.
- There is a need to ensure the continuity of CRS representation on the Council in recognition of the short-term nature of employment.
- To maximise the effectiveness of the governors the number objectors required for the veto of a grace should be fairly large.

B) General points on possible improvements to governance:

Governance should generally be more open. In addition, measures should be taken to help short-term contract workers to settle in more quickly and to encourage interdisciplinary discussion. This will benefit the university and colleges by generating more productive research within the short period of each person's research grant.

- At present the rules of the university are accessible to all in the form of the statutes and ordinances. However, for the benefit of contract research workers, who are only here for

a short period, it would be tremendously helpful if a short explanation of the actual processes were written down and displayed, for example on the web page. It would also be extremely helpful if university business e.g. meeting minutes were published on the web.

- The information about the university should be written in plain English. The current form of administrative language is attractive and historically interesting but can be a hindrance to the practicalities of university life. This is especially the case for the large number of employees who do not have English as their first language.
- Postdocs should form a part of as many relevant committees as possible.

C) Postdocs face a number of particular difficulties and it would be useful if the governance was arranged to be able to address these:

- Postdocs and JRFs should be encouraged and enabled to involve themselves in both university and college life. In other words, all JRFs should have space in a department and all university postdocs should have college affiliation. Whilst postdocs take on a large, yet unofficial role with respect to directly supervising part II/III project students and PhD students, they should also be encouraged to involve themselves in college life.
- Lists of contract research workers should be drawn up to assist management. This is particularly important in an institution that is increasingly large, and has a very high turnover of staff.
- A permanent member of staff should actively manage postdoc facilities. It is unrealistic to expect volunteers to do this.
- Steps should be taken to encourage postdocs to take an interest in university affairs. We invited 317 postdocs on our e-mailing list to come and discuss these issues and only 6 people responded.
- Ways should be explored in which the large number of postdoc scientists can be viewed as providing an opportunity rather than a threat to other disciplines.
- Ways need to be found to encourage departments to work together. At present this is hindered by their need to compete for funds.

Written by Jennifer Clark
Chair of PdOC, on behalf of the PdOC Core Group.

<http://www.postdocsofcambridge.org>

26 June 2002

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY REPORTER 1065

Bill Kirkman
Secretary & Editor

Dr Timothy Mead
Registry's Office
The Old Schools
Trinity Lane
Cambridge



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

The Cambridge Society

18 March 2002

Dear Tim

The Executive Committee of the Cambridge Society will be considering at its meeting at the end of April the possibility that the Society might have a constructive role to play in the selection of external members of the University Council, if the decision to have external members is taken.

I shall of course write to you after the meeting with any suggestions which are agreed by the Committee.

Yours ever
Bill

Bill Kirkman

The Cambridge Society
Fitzwilliam House
32 Trumpington Street
Cambridge CB2 1QY

Subject: Membership of the University Council

Dr T J Meade,

Mr John Horton of Churchill suggested that the Cambridge Society of Victoria might wish to express its views to this enquiry and more particularly whether or not there should be representation on the Council drawn from alumni.

Accordingly, I canvassed our members but to little effect. I guess this is because we are far removed from the source of action.

More cynically, we understand that the Council is already quite large and the addition of more members might be counter productive.

Perhaps one of the members who find themselves on the Council for other reasons could then be charged with looking after the interests of alumni?

I apologise for being late with this reply.

Kind regards,

Mike Gregson , Secretary Cambridge Society of Australia (Victoria).

Subject: Composition of the University Council

Greetings from Fiji

An invitation to comment on proposals regarding the University Council <published at <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2001-02/weekly/5873/5.html>> has been brought to my attention. I support the inclusion of at least one member of the Cambridge Society, to be nominated by the membership of the Society and representing university alumni, to the Council. I believe that this would, in part, address some of the problems identified in the above document, with the current situation.

Yours sincerely

Peter M. Forster
Secretary of the Fiji Islands Branch of the Cambridge Society

I feel very strongly that Alumni, and particularly those who demonstrate their continued interest in the University by maintaining membership of the Cambridge Society, should have a voice on the University Council. Also, I think that we have enough brains amongst our members to be able to do very well, thank you, without outsiders as members.
Ron Newstead, Retiring Secretary, the Cambridge Society of Portugal.

The Cambridge Society

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Hon. Secretary: John Roberts
Officers: Michael Eamon, Peter Hustwit, Martin Morgan

14 March 2002

The Registry
University Offices
The Old Schools
Cambridge CB2 1TN
U.K.

Original copy of letter sent 14 March by Email to: change@admin.cam.ac.uk

Dear Sirs:

Thank you for inviting comment on the University Governance Notice published in the *Cambridge University Reporter* on 6 February 2002

We are unanimous in not approving of the proposals to parachute in external members to Council into the two key roles of Chairman and Chairman of the Audit Committee (Para. 7.12 d), allowing them to be made instant members of the university (Para. 7.5) and, at the same time, greatly increasing the difficulty to control matters, by the stiffening of the requirements for calling ballots or even discussions of a Grace etc. in Regents House (Para. 9.2). We are frankly appalled by the proposals, which appear to us to make no rational attempt to address the need for change set out in Para. (3). With both the Chairman of Council and Chairman of the Audit Committee in the hands of "external members", it looks like a classic power transfer to non-members of the university.

Why would the university wish to move so far so fast? Why not test the water first? The steps once taken are not easily reversed. We were, of course, saddened that alumni representation on the council received no mention. This would have been a better way to gradually introduce some external influences to the Council and would also add the first element of internationalism, to which the university often pays lip service. The inclusion of alumni, particularly those who had spent their working life outside of academia or in different countries, would have been a more prudent and effective start to the introduction of external influences.

Yours sincerely,


for President

The Cambridge Society of South Australia suggests that consideration should be given to a representative of the alumni of the University being on the proposed University Council.

It is common in Australian universities for there to be such a position with nominations being called and, if necessary, a ballot of alumni held to determine the successful candidate.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL LLEWELLYN-SMITH

Hon.Sec.

I find it surprising that the University has not considered the potential role of the alumni of the University in its governance. The University is essentially inward-looking, and yet it has access to a list of the "great and the good" that many other organisations would die for. Cambridge members are on the board of almost every public company, in government and chair major public bodies. Disasters such as CAPSA would hve perhaps been forseen if more involvement from the rest of the world had been requested. There is life outside Cambridge!

Suggestion: Include some places for alumni in the governing body.

TJ King MA PhD (Corpus 1973-1979)
Cambridge Society South East Wales branch

Subject: Membership of the University Council

Dear Dr Mead,

I write as Secretary of the Surrey Branch of The Cambridge Society concerning the consultation exercise over the future governance of the University.

At a recent meeting of our Committee, I was asked to send the Committee's comments to you, as follows:-

1. It is normal for pre-1992 universities to include a number of alumni on the governing Council, but the Consultation Paper makes no reference to this type of representation, despite the fact that other bodies could have entry to the Council which have no connection with the University.

2. We accordingly recommend that provision be made, in the final proposals, for the election of a certain number of alumni to the University Council, the electors being the graduates of the University.

3. We also feel that The Cambridge Society should have some electoral role in the selection of members of the Council.

Yours faithfully,

E.D. Peacock
Hon.Sec. Surrey Branch, Cambridge Society.

Dear Dr. T. J. Mead:

I am writing to you about the proposed changes to the membership of the University Council. I ask that the University of Cambridge consider the importance of having alumni of the university represented on the Council since they are an important stakeholder group in the University. Please place my name on the e-mailing list concerning any changes that are either proposed or decided with respect to the composition of the University Council. Thank you for your time and attention.

Yours sincerely,
Debra Enzenbacher, Ph.D. (St Edmund's 1990)

Dear Sir,

I strongly feel that there is a role that Cambridge Alumni can play in the Cambridge University Council. This could be done with a number of seats to which alumni are elected/nominated by vote by alumni organizations to which they belong.

best regards

Rajendran Raja
Trinity College 67
Trinity Fellow 73