

## Council's Consultation Paper on Governance

### Comments from Downing College

#### **The Vice-Chancellor**

It will be helpful if the Vice-Chancellor is given a more explicit role as the leading academic and administrative officer of the University and also greater authority and power to discharge these responsibilities.

He or she might indeed be given responsibility for the overall direction and management of the University and its finances, but surely under the Council. Otherwise the Council is relegated from the principal policy-making body of the University to a moderating and advisory body. The proposal that the Vice-Chancellor should no longer chair the Council is not supported. Some of his or her authority derives from the chairmanship of the Council giving the opportunity to lead in that forum as well as more widely. The appointment of one of the three new external members to this role, places a figure unfamiliar with the University in the Chair and weakens the position of the Vice-Chancellor. This point is relevant to the Colleges, the Vice-Chancellor is currently well placed to represent the views of the Colleges at the Council, being a member of the Colleges' Committee and Chairman of the Senior Tutor's Committee. His ability to do this will be weakened if he is not the Chairman, but an officer of Council. As Chairman he can still be accountable to the Council; indeed as accounting officer as far as HEFCE is concerned he is already accountable for much of the activity of the University. Leadership in the form of Chairmanship of the Council fits better with the fundamental framework of the University as a self-governing community of scholars. A Vice-Chancellor acting too explicitly as a Chief Executive will find it harder to maintain the essential level of collective support and consensus at Faculty, Departmental and College level.

#### **The Pro-Vice-Chancellors**

It is clearly important that the Vice-Chancellor should be supported by experienced and senior University figures to whom he or she can delegate a range of duties. However, the more Pro-Vice-Chancellors there are the more time will need to be spent in co-ordinating their work, and supporting them administratively. It is likely to be more efficient to have a smaller number of Pro-Vice-Chancellors each working for the major fraction of their time, than a larger number each working a smaller fraction. The relative volume and nature of the tasks to be undertaken by the Pro-Vice Chancellors also needs careful thought. Much executive action and thinking on forward policy is undertaken by the administrative staff of the University, particularly the Registry, Secretary General, Treasurer, and now the Directors. There is some risk of having more Generals than Colonels, leading to a multiplicity of new ideas and proposals at the conceptual level with insufficient support staff to convert new proposals efficiently into working practices.