

Of the unestablished staff, Senior Research Associates and Research Associates are already eligible for membership (Statutes and Ordinances, p6, footnote 1). The remaining category of Research Assistant comprises more junior unestablished workers often doing a PhD while working on a contract. If the minimum qualifying period is set at three years most of these staff will be excluded anyway, but if a shorter period is specified many more staff with little involvement with the running of the University will be given a vote. Their colleagues, research students doing a PhD, who are supported on studentships from Research Councils etc. will not be similarly enfranchised. Care needs to be exercised before adding a large new category of staff to the Regent House. From the College point of view the balance of the Regent House is already very largely tilted in the direction of scientific and research staff with little involvement in College affairs. Hence any votes on issues close to the interests of the College already fall to be determined by an electorate which is predominantly made up of staff with no College connection. The new proposals risk shifting the balance even further away from the Colleges. The same point applies as far as the Arts/Science balance is concerned since unestablished workers are mainly scientists.

More fundamentally the question should be asked whether a smaller Regent House would not be more effective as the Governing Body of the University albeit as legislative rather than an executive body. Just as the Senate became unwieldy and lost its powers in 1926, so a Regent House of 5000 will have a reduced credibility as a Governing Body. A smaller body comprising those members of the academic community active in guiding the work of the Faculties, Departments, and Colleges, would be a more credible and effective Governing Body.

The further proposal made for the Regent House is that the calling of a ballot or a Discussion should in future require the request of 50 members instead of 10. As pointed out by the Principal of Homerton at the meeting of the Colleges' Committee on 9 February, issues not infrequently arise which affect closely an institution within the University where the collecting of 50 signatures could be difficult. To cope with such issues a requirement for (say) 25 signatures would be preferable. Calls for ballots and Discussions have in any event been rare, and have not usually been introduced irresponsibly. It should also be remembered that enough time needs to be allowed between the publication of a Grace and the calling of a ballot. If the number of signatures required is increased the current time interval of ten days will be insufficient.

By contrast Discussions are these days often misused, with remarks made on quite extraneous topics about which individual speakers wish to put down markers. The publishing of a code of practice for Discussions could be useful in curbing abuse and helping to ensure that Discussions, which can be a valuable forum for the exchange of views, are not abandoned because of the way they are being used.

**S G Fleet
Master**

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