

From Emmanuel College

21st March 2002
RMB/CC/203

The Vice-Chancellor
The Old Schools
Cambridge

The Governing Body of Emmanuel College has discussed the consultation paper on University Governance and I am writing to you to let you know the main points that arose from that discussion.

1. There was general agreement that the University's administrative procedures would benefit from review and appropriate revision.
2. There was general criticism of the way the consultation paper University Governance is written. The broad outlines of the proposals were clear, but the details lacked clarity. In particular, the following points were raised:
 - (A) It was hard to assess what were going to be the responsibilities of the Pro-Vice-Chancellors. In addition, the proposals for selection of Pro-Vice-Chancellors and for protection of their University careers whilst they were in post were felt to be quite inadequate. The strong feeling was that it would be difficult to recruit for the posts from the large research-active constituency of academics as they would fear for the emasculation of their research as their duties of the Pro-Vice-Chancellors took hold. These concerns would undoubtedly also be at the front of the minds of the Heads of Departments or Faculties of potential Pro-Vice-Chancellors. The suggestion that their fears might be assuaged by the appointment of a Postdoctoral Research Assistant for the duration of their Pro-Vice-Chancellorship was considered to be severely flawed.
 - (B) There should at the very least be regular, formal meetings of Pro-Vice-Chancellors and these meetings should report to the Council. The most satisfactory resolution would involve the formation of a Pro-Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The relationship of such a committee to the Council and/or the General Board would need to be clarified.
 - (C) The proposal for the future relationship between the General Board and the Council is unclear.
 - (D) No convincing case has been made for retaining the General Board.

3. Reservations were expressed about the appointment of external members to the Council. Those members of the Governing Body who have had experience of such individuals elsewhere are of the opinion that these distinguished people “all too often become the creatures of the administration”. The nub of the problem is that the University would undoubtedly wish that external members of the Council should be drawn from a distinguished group of people who had risen to the top of their respective careers. The danger is that for such people, membership of the Council might form just a single string in the bow formed by a large portfolio of responsibilities.
4. The logic of the Vice-Chancellor not chairing the Council was accepted, but the arguments for an external member of the Council acting as Chairman are weak (not least as a result of the points made in (3)).
5. The intrinsic indivisibility of the University from the Colleges is briefly mentioned in the consultation document, so it is extraordinary that it is proposed that there should be a reduction on the Council in the representation of the colleges (through their heads). At the very least this is inopportune. It was felt that while there might in future be a case for rethinking college representation, this was not the time to do so. The old *modus vivendi* between the university and the colleges had broken down. It was wrong in principle to reduce college representation in advance of the establishment of a new working relationship. There was also thought to be a case for a wider college representation on the Council than the heads alone. Strong support was expressed for the notion that the members of the Tripartite Committee should be *ex officio* members of the Council in addition to the current Heads of Houses.
6. Although there was strong criticism of the devolution of resources to the Schools, most of the members of the Governing Body who contributed to the discussion were in favour of this.
7. The Governing Body expressed the opinion that the increase of the numbers required to call for a ballot on a Grace to fifty was much too large a step and quite unjustified by any argument in the document. Several members would have been happy with raising the number to thirty, although the *status quo* remained the preferred option for many in the absence of any reasoned argument to the contrary.
8. Any proposed reform of governance should be assessed on its potential to increase democracy, to reduce opacity in decision-making and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of those delegated to make decisions; the proposals are rather weak in that regard.

Emmanuel has a large Governing Body and individuals hold a wide range of opinions. I think that most believe that however bad the system is at present, it is not sufficiently broke to need the kind of fixing proposed in this document. The University is doing very well indeed on any real measure of performance, and it is a mistake to react too violently to the recent administrative glitches.

From the Master of Fitzwilliam College

Dear Iris

Fitzwilliam College's response to the Consultation Paper on University Governance. The College wishes to register concern about the limitation of the voice of colleges implicit in a reduction in the number of Heads of Houses on the University Council to three out of twenty-six members, and also that the input from colleges should be at such a late stage in proceedings.

Yours sincerely

Brian Johnson

GIRTON COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

GOVERNANCE
response to Consultation document on Governance
published by the University Council

Girton College has discussed the document through its Council, the regular executive organ of the College, but there has been no opportunity for discussion at its Governing Body.

The College endorses the move to put structures into place that will both facilitate procedures of accountability and enable the University Council to discharge its executive functions effectively. Given this support of the aims laid out in the consultation paper, it wishes to make the following comments. The first is in response to the problem identified as that of 'culture' (3.4), that is, how Cambridge University defines itself.

1. It notes the principle stated in the consultation paper (4.1.iii): 'that governance arrangements must reflect the need for the Colleges to be appropriately involved in University affairs'. However, the very form of this statement points to a flaw in the way the vision is to be implemented. The term 'University' is used simultaneously to include and to exclude Colleges. [Hereafter university (including colleges) and University (excluding them).] Until now ambiguity has probably served Cambridge well; at this present moment of institutional clarification, however, it would probably be helpful to decide what we wish to mean by the terms university / University.

A paper on governance might have been expected to spell out the implications of Cambridge's dual governance structure. The reference to Colleges as 'major constituents' is simply not carried through (2.5). If Colleges are distinguished from all the other institutions that make up the university in being self-governing (in accordance with their membership of the university under the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge Act), several organisational consequences follow, especially in relation to management and accountability, manifest for examples in bodies such as the Bursars' Committee and Senior Tutors' Committee. Yet this side of the university seems to have dropped out of the equation. To the extent that the Council's executive and strategic functions are supposed to apply to the university as a whole, such bodies surely fall within its purview. They are not reflected in the proposals for Council membership. One might have looked, for example, for a Senior Tutor to be on the Council.

GIRTON COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

What is reflected in the proposals for Council membership is the fact that the Council has, in addition to its oversight of the university, particular executive and strategic functions in relation to the University. It is obviously important that it discharges them. Thus when the document refers to the General Board as being responsible for the academic and educational policy of the University, it does indeed mean the University and not the university (it is after all the General Board of the Faculties). It is specifically in relation to Council's University functions that it makes sense to have places on the Council for all the Chairs of the Councils of the Schools.

Reduction in numbers aside, if it is thought sufficient for heads of house to 'represent' College interests on the Council, the chances are that the Colleges will continue to be bracketed off from the University. Pace 2.5, it is not the '*representation* of College interest ...[with a view to] close co-operation and collaboration' that matters to academic democracy but a definition of the university's institutions which includes the work of colleges from the outset.

2. Girton College Council is divided over the desirability of external members. Accepting the proposal that the Vice-Chancellor no longer chair the Council does not mean accepting the proposal that the position is best filled by an external member. One view is that at a moment when auditing procedures are themselves coming under public scrutiny, it is necessary to be imaginative about the models we follow; a business model of what an executive body should be like might or might not be appropriate, and the point should not be assumed. The case for uniqueness (of Cambridge's governance structure) is also a case for institutional diversity at a national level.
3. There is lack of emphasis on value for money and no statement on the likely cost of implementing the proposals.
4. The document does not of course give reasons for the decisions it lays out; as it stands, however, there is an apparent lack of awareness of the governance of similar institutions.

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19 March 2002

Dear Tim,

University Governance

I summoned an Extraordinary General Meeting on 27 February to discuss the consultation document on University Governance published in The Reporter on 6 February 2002. The meeting authorised me to reply on behalf of the College and asked me to make it clear that the College does not find the proposals acceptable as they stand. There was concern over many matters of detail but the most serious disquiet was expressed over what was felt to be the marginalisation of the role of the Colleges. It was felt by many that, if the proposals were to be implemented as they stand, there would be a large swing towards a concentration of power on the University Council.

Caius is a large college. There are 110 Fellows who are entitled to attend General Meetings. Almost inevitably there was a wide range of opinions. I also received a dozen letters from Fellows responding to the consultation document. Since opinions in them range from ardent support to powerful opposition, it is difficult to pull together the various

points of view into any coherent form. I shall, therefore, try to concentrate on those matters that attracted widespread agreement.

1. The Size and Composition of the Council

Many felt that the proposed new Council would be too large to be effective. Even more concern was expressed at the proposed reduction in the number of members of the Council to be elected by the Regent House. There was a widespread view that this would lead to the Council being dominated by ex officio and nominated members. It was noted that the consultation document is very unspecific about the nature and role of the proposed external members. Since they would be nominated, it was felt likely that they would further reinforce the dominance of the unelected members. There was felt to be a very real danger that such external members might become "creatures of the administrators". It was pointed out that the University already benefits from a steady inflow of external figures from the appointment as heads of Houses of ambassadors, administrators, civil servants, businessmen, barristers, politicians and such like. Since these distinguished figures are less involved in teaching, lecturing and academic research than most internally appointed Heads, they are often already well represented in the centre of University administration. It was doubted whether we needed a greater proportion of such valuable external advice on the Council. A large and distinguished university should, it was felt, be able to produce an ample supply of suitable members of the Council - with the advantage that they would have a detailed knowledge and long experience of the problems that the university faced.

The most frequently expressed concern was that, despite the explicit acknowledgement of the need for the Colleges to be appropriately involved in University affairs, the effect of the proposals would be to marginalize them. The consultation document pays no serious attention to future relations between the Colleges and the University. The proposed reduction of the representation of Heads of Houses was seen as a symptom of the neglect of the role of the Colleges. Instead of four Heads of Houses in a Council of twenty, it is proposed to have three Heads out of twenty-six members. It was felt that this proposal should be strenuously opposed.

2. The Vice-Chancellorship and the Pro-Vice Chancellors

Many agreed that the Vice-Chancellor's office is both overloaded and inadequately supported. Views differed on the proposal that the Vice-Chancellor should no longer chair the Council, but most of those who spoke felt that he should continue to do so. The need for the Vice-Chancellor to be supported by a team of Pro-Vice-Chancellors was widely recognised but serious doubts were expressed about the detailed arrangements that would be needed to make such a system work. One positive suggestion at the meeting which attracted strong support was that one of the new Pro-Vice-Chancellors should be appointed with the specific role of representing the Colleges.

3. The Regent House

Some Fellows expressed opposition to the proposal to increase to 50 the number of members of the Regent House needed to call for a ballot or a request for a discussion. It was, however, widely acknowledged that the University's procedures had been seriously abused in recent years and many felt that some increase in the required number was very necessary. Indeed there were many who felt that reform in this area was embarrassingly overdue and some who felt that an even larger increase in the number of those required to call for a ballot would be necessary to prevent mischievous ballot calling. It was felt that a discussion of specific measures to address and to curb current abuses would be welcome.

Serious concern was expressed over the proposal to change the composition of the Regent House. Some were against the increase in the number of those entitled to vote (from 3200 to over 5000) but greater concern was expressed over the distorting effect of giving the vote to many junior "un-established" staff (often doing a Ph.D. while working on a contract) who have little involvement with the running of the University. It was pointed out that their colleagues who were studying for a Ph.D. whilst being supported on studentships from Research Councils or the British Academy would not be similarly enfranchised under the present proposals. These proposals were felt to be likely to shift the balance of the Regent House even further in the direction of scientific and research staff who have little direct involvement in College affairs. Since the un-established workers are mainly scientists, the balance of Arts to Science would be further upset – an issue of no small importance in view of the recent Resource Allocation proposals and their wholly unacceptable impact on the funding of the Arts and Humanities.

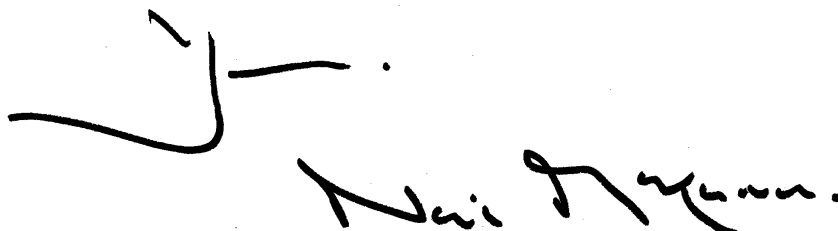
4. General

There were many other detailed points of criticism and a very widespread protest at how little time had been given to the Colleges to discuss these important matters.

The negative nature of many of the comments above does not mean that the need for reform was not accepted by many of those who discussed these proposals. Indeed the single fact that all the signatories to the proposals are male more than amply demonstrated to some that there are still many fundamental problems of proper democratic representation, which need urgently to be addressed.

The hope was expressed that suitably refined and improved proposals will be put before the University. I was asked to stress that as the proposals stand they are not acceptable to the Fellows of Caius. Without substantial changes they would be very unlikely to attract widespread support from this College.

I am very conscious that I have not been able to do justice to the many individual points of view expressed in personal letters to me on this matter. If you should wish to receive such individual views I would be very happy to seek the permission of those who wrote them to send them on to you.



Neil Gwynne.