

Flysheets for the Ballot on the Grace of the Regent House of 23 January 2008

Up to now, the University has been a democratic institution, in the sense that the Council (the principal executive and policy making body of the University) is largely composed of members who are directly elected and who, if they are to continue in office, must face the electorate at intervals: a necessity which imposes a measure of accountability. Other than the Vice-Chancellor, the unelected members of Council are the two external members (who are proposed by a Nominating Committee). We believe that if the academic membership of Council is to be further diluted by doubling the number of external members, there needs to be increased democratic accountability in the way by which those external members are appointed.

One way forward would be to elect the external members directly. An argument voiced against this is that it might prove difficult to persuade desirable persons to stand. Hence, as an alternative, the proposal contained within this Grace is that a majority of the Nominating Committee should be directly elected by the members of the Regent House, rather than appointed by Council.

A motivating principle behind this change is that we consider it inappropriate that the Council itself should have a significant say, even at one remove, in deciding who is a member of Council; if a body controls its own membership, this is the route to oligarchy. This is already recognised by the Statutes in that Council has no power to co-opt to its membership in the event of a vacancy. Further, our proposal has a pragmatic advantage too. External members proposed by an elected committee will be less likely, we believe, to precipitate embarrassing and harmful opposition (as recently happened in Oxford) should a significant body of opinion in the Regent House be opposed to that nomination.

At present the Nominating Committee consists of the Chancellor (or his deputy), the Vice-Chancellor, two members of the Council appointed by the Council, and four other members appointed by the Council. These last four are not members of the Council but are members of the Nomination Board for the Chancellor. The members of this Nomination Board are appointed by Grace on the nomination of the Council. The result is that the Nominating Committee is dominated by members of Council and persons selected by Council.

The reasoning behind our proposal for a different kind of Nominating Committee is as follows. In order to ensure that the Committee knows what is required of an external member the Vice-Chancellor, a current or past external member, and two of the elected members of the Council would be members of the Nominating Committee. The current or past external member would be Chairman and would be nominated by Proctors who, as observers at Council, could make an informed independent choice. The two members of Council, and a further four members of the Senate (i.e. members of the Regent House or of the University holding a degree of MA or above) would be elected by the Regent House. The result would be a nominating committee which would be well informed of the nature of the task it has to perform but which would be able to do so with a direct legitimacy.

In its Notice of 5 December 2007, Council suggested that a directly elected Nominating Committee “would risk reducing the independence and externality of those recommended for appointment”. With this we disagree. In our opinion, what would risk reducing the independence and externality of the University's governance would be if we change the constitution so that not two, but a block of four of the members of Council were nominated by a committee appointed by Council itself. It is for this reason that we propose that, henceforth, a majority of the Committee that chooses the external members should be directly elected by the Regent House. **We urge you to vote for the Grace.**

PTO to Sign

Please return to the Registry, signed and with your name in BLOCK CAPITALS, either by mail to The Old Schools, Cambridge CB2 1TN, or by fax to 01223 332332.

Deadline: 1pm on Thursday 14 February 2008.

Signature

Name in BLOCK CAPITALS