

Flysheet: Amendments to proposals establishing Parks College

The legislative proposal establishing Parks College is one of the most significant decisions that have come before Congregation in the last two decades. It both introduces major constitutional innovations and requires a huge commitment of the collegiate University resources.

It establishes a university society of comparable size with the larger colleges (meant to have about 500 students and 40 Official Fellows ‘in steady state’), which not only will not be a college or have a clear path towards becoming one, but, unlike the existing successful university societies, will only have only part-time use of its space, no on-site accommodation, and no independent library provision. Legitimate questions may be raised whether this constitutes a genuine collegiate experience either for academics or for students. The rights of appointment to fellowships of Parks College appear to be different from those in place for Kellogg College and St Cross College. Nor is there any clarity about the non-academic ‘Associate Fellows’, who need not be the employees of the University and will not be covered by the protections of Statute XII.

Resources committed to the new project will not be limited to £40 mln committed by Council to the project. It is proposed that the new society has exclusive use of 157 new units of graduate accommodation (at the time when other colleges are under pressure to expand their graduate provision and rely on University accommodation to do so), but that will only cover a third of its needs. Radcliffe Science Library looks set to lose a considerable number of reader seats when 500 students are added to its constituency, and when the latest annual report from the Bodleian Libraries already indicates the growth of physical reader visits to 1,989,678 in 2017/18 (up from 1,899,625 in 2013/14). There is no discussion of how the new foundation may compete for resources with the new Access and Participation Plan. There is a lack of clarity over the rights of the new society under the College Contribution Scheme 7 and the effect it may have on other colleges and societies which may be entitled to funding. The innovative EPSRC/Oxford Inorganic Chemistry for Future Manufacturing Centre for Doctoral Training, which has just received £10.4 mln of external funding, will need to relocate from its currently planned premises, which were part of its funding bid.

At the same time, the discussion of the proposals in the wider University has been minimal. The plans were developed by a special group, which has only reported to the Curators of the Bodleian and to Council at a relatively late stage. The full proposals were only published after the end of Hilary Term, and before Congregation could receive any reply to an important Question related to the plans and the procedures followed, let alone to supplementary questions that may follow it. Even the initial announcement was made out of term and to the press and alumni rather than to Congregation and colleges. There has been no consultation or discussion in Congregation on the full proposals, and we are asked to approve the legislative proposal and the resolution allocating space (which is an entirely different question) in one portmanteau meeting with the reply to the Question, with no time for deliberation.

At the same time, Council admits that it is still unclear whether it would be possible to admit any students for the academic year 2020/21 while providing them with an acceptable student experience, and we have not been given any justification for this truncated timeline. Given the seriousness of questions involved and in the light of the uncertainties surrounding the UK higher education sector at the moment (from Brexit to the Augar Review) we believe that Congregation should be given more time to discuss, and if necessary adjust, the new plans in detail before approving either the creation of the Society or the allocation of portions of the University's estate.

For this reason, we ask you to support the amendments.

Signatories:

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