

The Joint Grand Gresham Committee
The Provost and Chairmanship of Gresham College
From Daniel Hodson and Tom Hoffman

1 – Background

Sir Roderick Floud, after a very distinguished and successful tenure, has told the Council of Gresham College that he will retire when his current term as Provost expires in August 2014. Sir Roderick is also Chairman of the Council of the College in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of the College which state the Chairman will ‘normally’ be the Provost, although not ruling out splitting the two roles.

The College is of course an independent charity and therefore both the Provost and the Chairmanship are finally a matter for its Council. However the Council will undoubtedly recognise and weigh heavily the interest and views of its two major stakeholders and sponsors, the City of London and the Mercers’ Company. In that regard, whilst their duty in law as trustees is exclusively to act in the interest of the College, it is worth recording that, of the maximum of 15 trustees up to 8 are nominees of the City and the Company, 4 apiece.

In our respective capacities, we are therefore seeking this early opportunity to solicit the views of the City and Mercers’ Sides of the JGGC as representatives of the two main sponsors of the College in respect of two matters:

- The process for appointing a new Provost
- Whether or not the Chairmanship should be separate from the Provostship and if so from whence the incoming Chairman might be drawn

2 – The Provost

The internal process for the appointment of a new Provost would probably be based on a recommendation by the College’s Nomination Committee, endorsed or amended by the Council. The usual procedure – and there is no reason to believe this would not be continued – would be to create a ‘Provost Appointment Working Party’, properly balanced as to membership to represent all interests including both sponsors, Gresham professors and Council generally. The job of the Working Party would be to recommend, first, job description, remuneration and procedure for

appointment, and, once they were agreed, to implement the agreed selection procedure leading up to a proposed appointment. Ideally each of these three steps (Working Party creation, procedural discussions and appointment recommendation) would be reported back to the JGGC and respective City and Mercers' Sides, for comment and endorsement.

In this regard the membership of the Working Party would be critical. It is therefore our suggestion that there be six members, each from the Council, two City nominees, two Mercers' nominees, and two drawn from Gresham Professors and coopted membership.

3 - The Chairmanship

This would ultimately be a matter for the College Council. To split the role of the Provost and Chairman is permissible under the Memorandum and Articles of the College, although it would not be 'normal' in their terms. It would however be in accordance with modern governance and indeed best practice for higher education institutions.

If such a decision were made, then there are at least two options, being to choose the 'best person for the job' from all comers or to revert to the procedure which was in place until the appointment of Sir Roderick's predecessor as Provost, namely a convention whereby City and Mercers nominees held the post in turn and turn about for three years apiece. It is also worth mentioning at this point that Sir Roderick himself, following a recent suggestion arising not from him but from a member of the College's Nomination Committee, has indicated that he would be willing to consider staying on as Chairman alone if asked [although it might be unsettling for the new Provost to have his predecessor looking over his shoulder].

Furthermore it could well be the case, as with Sir Roderick originally, that the appointed Provost might be considered suitable, in all the circumstances, to fill both roles. This would argue for delaying the decision whether or not to separate the roles till after a Provost elect were selected, although arguably should not play a dominant role in his/her selection.

Again this might be a matter on which the Working Party might have a view, once more reporting back to the JGGC and respective Sides for comment and endorsement.

4 - Conclusion

Although the JGGC does not have direct decision making power over these appointments it does regularly receive reports from and discuss the affairs of Gresham College. We therefore suggest that each Side deliberate the matters set out

above separately at their respective meetings prior to the next JGGC on 11th October and then together at that meeting, in order to provide suggestions and guidance to the Council of the College, when it considers, no doubt on the recommendation of its Nominations Committee, the appropriate processes for the appointment of both Provost and Chairman.

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