



Lectures to University Administrative and Executive Staff
1983-84 Session

No. 7 - The Work of the Central Administration, and Staff
Administration in General

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I. Introduction to the Work of the Central Administration.

In our divided Registry system, Dean of Student Affairs deals with student non-academic affairs. Basically, the Director of Administration and Academic Registrar are Secretaries to Council and Senate respectively.

II - Matters related to Secretaryship to Council

Council Committees - Finance and General Purposes Committee,
Tenders Board, Non-Academic Appointments
and Promotions Committee (NASSAPAC).

Joint Council-Senate Committees - Honorary Degrees, Senior
Staff Disciplinary Committee.

Council concerned with staff matters in general, and although vacancies in academic posts are to be filled by Senate acting through a Committee, those selected are appointed on behalf of Council.

Following a division on functional grounds, not going by the parentage of Committees, the Senior Staff Training Committee, although a Senate Committee, is serviced by the Central Administration (Establishments Section). Thus, the Central Administration has four Sections, Council Matters and University Archives, and three concerned with staff matters, Senior Staff Establishments, Junior Staff Establishments and Housing and Passages.

III - General Administration

The Director of Administration is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the "general administration" of the University. The scope of this is defined in Schedules of Duties approved by the Vice-Chancellor.

Includes some "Administrative Committees" - VCAC and Minor Works, serviced by Council Matters as related to Council activities, Housing Allocation and Loans Committees, serviced by Housing and Passages Section. Most other Administrative Committees serviced elsewhere, on a functional basis.

IV - Schedules of Duties in General

See Ag. Director of Administration's Circular Ref. ADM/DA/GEN/2 of 25th November, 1981. Will be updated in Handbook of Administrative Procedures.

When preparing initial Schedules of Duties for all departments, they have to be framed by taking an overview of all Units (*Deus ex Machina*). Make a broad division of functions, and refine later as details are examined.

Then specifics can be filled in, and boundaries defined. Avoid duplication but do not leave gaps. Leave room for differences in "administrative styles", e.g. over extent of delegation or supervision.

Spell out cooperative links between Sections or Units - do so at both ends, but say where ultimate responsibility lies.

In divided Registry, certain overall functions remain that have to be 'placed' - Council Matters includes Archives, eventually for all official records, also Mail Services and external communications.

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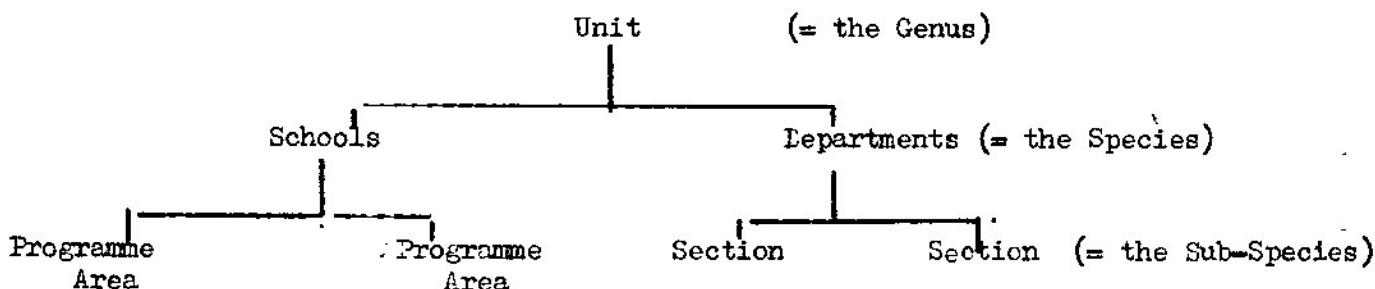


The Director of Administration is responsible for general administrative procedures; the overall coordination of the Administrative, Executive and Secretarial cadres, legal matters generally, the Almanac of Events and Committee lists and preparing a Handbook of Administrative Procedures. Some involve consultation, but somebody has to coordinate.

There are also "catch-all" provisions; in each Section an item "Any other duties that may be assigned", and under Council Matters, "General Administration Matters not covered elsewhere". Also the Director has to see that gaps or overlaps are sorted out as between Units. These are just contingency provisions, not so far invoked.

In our Schedule of Duties some "General Responsibilities of All Administrative and Service Departments" have been distilled out and prefaced to the Schedules, along with "Duties of Secretary to any Committee" and "Duties of Secretarial Staff in any Unit". A "Schedule of Duties of Schools Administration Officers" will soon join them.

Incidentally, the pattern of general organisation is as follows:



The expression "Units/Departments" therefore confuses levels and involves redundancy. One could say "Schools/Departments", "Units" is shorthand for that.

"Heads of Units" is shorthand for "Deans and Heads of Departments", and the expression "Heads of Units/Departments" again involves redundancy, and confuses levels.

V - Staff Administration in General: the position of "Common Cadres".

See Ag. Director of Administration's Circular Ref. ADM/DA/COM/16 of 26/11/81 and ADM/DA/GEN/2B of 27/11/81. Some cadres are spread over various Units. At junior levels the staff are fully allocated to the Units where they work, but with "reserve" powers to redeploy them, and there may be some central involvement in such matters as promotion and training, for example of junior accounts staff or drivers.

Experience shows that at senior levels some greater unification is necessary to maintain professional standards, flexibility of deployment and even treatment. However, excessive centralisation would amount to interference in other Units' affairs. To minimise problems, a pattern was early on agreed and laid down. Administrative and senior Executive and Secretarial Staff each form single cadres under the overall control of the Director of Administration, but for working purposes they come under the Head of Unit where they are situated at any time. That Head of Unit can direct them in day-to-day activities, and will deal with their routine conditions such as leave, advances or claims. The Director of Administration can give general professional direction, and is "Head of Unit" for longer-term career training and discipline. In this he will be guided as appropriate by reports and recommendations from the current Heads of Units. At appropriate points the Director of Administration consults with the Academic Registrar, Dean of Student Affairs, or other Heads of Units.

Similar principles apply to senior Accounts or Stores staff assigned outside the Bursary, and could apply/further categories as the University grows. The system may not always work perfectly, but it provides a framework within which the various interests concerned can be reasonably balanced.

A University exists as a Corporate body to pursue certain objectives, teaching, research and service. It has over the long run to justify itself and account for itself to society but in day-to-day affairs it has considerable autonomy.

Part of the accounting for itself must include showing that as far as possible it has acted reasonably and fairly towards its staff within its means. This does not entail an arithmetical uniformity, but rather that any differentiation is regulated and justified in terms of genuine reasons founded on the fulfilment of the University's objectives. The latter must always be the dominant concern, and not subordinated to any personal or sectional interests, nor must a University be allowed to degenerate into a mutual-benefit society - concerned more with its members own affairs than with producing results.

Some considerations that emerge in analysing this further are as follows. There is an enormous variety of contributions to be made to the operation of a University, varying between academic and non-academic personnel, between subject-areas among the academics, and even as between individuals. Somehow a framework has to be evolved that allows for this diversity while bringing out some common patterns of staff careers and development.

It also involves trying to identify the elements of the contributions expected of staff in different areas, and ways whereby those contributions may be assessed. Some elements are important enough to be deemed "essential", while others are useful but can be considered as plus values. Many of the important elements are qualitative: they may be identified in words, but assessment inevitably involves personal judgement, and how far the most important elements can be quantified is arguable. There is danger in over-emphasising some things because they are easily identifiable and quantifiable, at the expense of more important elements that are not. What matters is to assess how far persons contribute to achieving the University's objectives.

An important aspect of staff administration is to try to ensure compatibility between a range of factors:

- (a) The method of determining work loads and the establishment of posts.
- (b) The criteria for making appointments.
- (c) The duties given to staff.
- (d) Facilities for performing duties.
- (e) Access to training where needed.
- (f) Criteria for promotions.

It may not be feasible in practice to do this fully, and exogenous changes in circumstances (e.g. foreign exchange limitations affecting training courses) may dislocate a previous compatibility. However, this is a major area of concern in staff administration, and the different aspects must be related to each other.

The question of comparisons with other forms of employment sometimes comes to the fore. Various factors are relevant, including job evaluations, existing parities, expectations, economic and social pressures etc., and there are few clear-cut answers. Direct comparisons of doctors, engineers, administrators etc., whether as teachers or active professionals, in Universities with their counterparts elsewhere are of doubtful validity unless whole working contexts and whole packages of benefits are compared, not isolated elements. Even then significant differences in the nature of the work done may be hard to evaluate.

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It is even more difficult if - as is normally the case - all academics want to be treated alike and not distinguished by their subject areas, while other staff hold to certain perities within Universities rather than with staff outside. To build up a truly objective comparison, as distinct from making a case, can be very difficult, and it has limited point anyway. Some have chosen to work in Universities and others elsewhere, and there are only limited opportunities thereafter for mobility in many areas. The most valid comparison is at the point of entry - what career prospects as a whole are held out by one side or another? This is even more difficult to make than a comparison at a certain point in time.

I will end by saying that whenever such issues become live again, I hope that Universities will have regained the internal unity of their staff and can make their case as a united group, and that they will avoid the pitfall of conveying the impression they often have conveyed, of wanting the best of both worlds, with all the perks of the civil service, yet protesting how different they are.

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