

The conference of honorary faculty secretaries

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A conference of honorary secretaries of the Faculties of the College was held on 19 September 1974, at 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, and was attended by 28 secretaries.

The conference was welcomed by Dr J. A. R. Lawson, Chairman of Council, and Dr D. H. Irvine (Honorary Secretary of Council) was elected Chairman for the day.

There were three sessions: an initial plenary session, a session for small groups to discuss specified topics, and another plenary session to receive group reports and distil the ideas presented during the day.

Three topics dominated the discussion: the functions of faculty secretaries, communication between faculty secretaries and Council, and communication between faculty boards and the members in the faculties.

(1) Functions of faculty secretaries

The functions of secretaries were outlined in a discussion document prepared by Dr G. Lloyd and there was general agreement that the functions included: communication within the faculty, with Council, and with regional organisations and authorities such as local medical committees and regional postgraduate deans; preparation of minutes and agenda for board meetings, arranging elections, and the maintenance of a register of faculty members.

One of the problems discussed was that of adequate preparation of secretarial successors. It was agreed that the discussion document should be expanded into an informative booklet.

The increasing expenses incurred by secretaries were discussed at length and there were clearly differences in experience between faculties.

Clerical, duplicating, and distribution costs predominated and a number of solutions were explored, including more effective use of central resources and of resources available from associated organisations within the faculty.

Many faculty secretaries thought that their role, as well as that of their faculty, was changing. The development of departments of general practice and of special research units influenced, and in some instances, seemed to diminish, the role of the faculty, and that of the faculty secretary. Motivation was expressed towards identifying different roles to meet the new challenges of education, research, and practice organisation.

(2) Relationship between faculty boards and Council

A discussion document prepared by Dr D. H. Irvine was considered. It was generally agreed that the faculty representative is the key to good communication with Council. Guidance and preparation for the role of representative on Council had not been considered adequately in the past and action was desirable.

There should be more chances for the faculty representative to discuss items of importance with the executive of the faculty or the faculty board before meetings of Council. It was also recognised that an important role for the representative on Council was the preparation and presentation to the faculty of an adequate résumé of council meetings. The conference welcomed the knowledge that faculty boards should share the same rights as Council to confidential documents.

It was agreed that further consideration should be given to the occasional need for deputies to attend council meetings.

There was a general feeling among secretaries that they would welcome a greater opportunity to meet, in the faculty, with officers of Council.

It was agreed to recommend that the college examiners should see part of their role to be educational, concerned mainly with preparation for the examination, and that examiners should take an active part in this aspect of faculty organisation.

(3) Relationship between faculty boards and faculty members

It was recognised by the conference that good liaison with faculty members was an essential function of faculty boards. It was appreciated that the problems involved varied among faculties, whose membership ranges between 56 and 440.

Considerable discussion took place on the feasibility of dividing members of large faculties into smaller functional groups. The postgraduate centres were seen to be a possible pivot for this.

A discussion document prepared by the East Anglia Faculty outlined an arrangement, with appropriate representation, of sub groups within the faculty. Some faculty secretaries felt that they were inadequately informed of the special skills and interests of individual faculty members. The conference agreed that a data-base record of members could be a useful instrument for the identification, within faculties, of doctors with special interest in areas of clinical skill, in clinical medicine, research, education, and practice organisation.

Conclusion

There was general agreement that the conference had been useful, particularly in identifying common problems. The need was clearly seen for a further conference to develop the new ideas generated and to consolidate tasks which will, in the meanwhile, be undertaken by various working parties.

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