Transparency

Looked at from the garden or from St Andrews Place, particularly in the evening when the lights are on, the College acquires an air of transparency, revealing Sir Denys Lasdun’s architectural concept of the College interior as a series of communicating and interactive spaces to match its functions and activities. But, in Eurospeak jargon, do its activities appear to be transparent, communicative and interactive to those looking in from outside? In other words, is the College as open, candid and frank in its activities as Fellows and Members want it to be, and does it do enough to keep in touch with them and seek their views?

It seems that, at best, many fellows and even more Members see the College ‘through a glass, darkly’. For Fellows, the glass should not be all that dark, since between a quarter and a third of all 6,000 Fellows are involved in one way or another with some College activity (Commentary, January 1993). But this still leaves many Fellows and far too many Members with little if any contact with the College and some of its functions appear to them as mysterious as a Masonic rite. Perhaps the most opaque of them is the election of Members to the Fellowship; it is an important process, because all Fellows share in the governance of the College. To explain it, the Registrar has described the new improved procedure in some detail in the April issue of the Commentary.

Transparency—openness—communication and interaction are not only important in relation to the College’s own functions, they are also necessary when the College has to deal with sensitive issues such as the effects of health services reforms on standards of care, ethical aspects of resuscitation and of rationing health care, assessment of continuing medical education and other subjects that affect the standards of medical practice which the College is committed to uphold. To widen the areas for discussion and speed up communication between the College, its constituency and other professional and lay organisations, the Journal and Commentary will be published from January 1994 onwards, every two months, instead of quarterly as at present. In addition, there will be a newsletter for a wider audience which will make it possible for the College’s view on important matters to become known more quickly and more widely, and for Fellows and Members to express their views less formally than through the Journal or Commentary.

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