



John F. (Jack) Petch
Chair of the Governing Council

Memorandum to: Members of the Governing Council

From: John F. (Jack) Petch
Chair

Date: December 15, 2010

Re: Report on Chair's Consultations with Governors

Over the last several weeks, I have met with members of each estate as I would normally do each Fall and Spring. I took these conversations as an opportunity for us – as governors – to reflect on the October 28th Governing Council meeting and its disruption, and to consider what we might do to improve the conduct of our meetings. Many of you participated and I appreciate very much your taking the time and providing such thoughtful advice. The following is intended as a summary of some of the topics that were raised consistently.

Several themes emerged from our discussions. Primary among them was **the ongoing challenge of maintaining the delicate balance of hearing the voices both from members at the governance table and from other members of the University community and of completing the business for which governance is responsible.** Governors emphasized the value of non-members' input and their willingness to listen to these views. They also recognized, however, the obligation to ensure that members have sufficient time to conclude the items on their meetings' agendas in a set amount of time.

In the context of this over-arching theme, a number of topics arose consistently:

- **the importance of maintaining civil dialogue and an environment in which it can take place.** Governors suggested that members be reminded periodically of the *Principles of Good Governance* and the *Expectations and Attributes of Governors and Key Principles of Ethical Conduct* recently approved by the Governing Council – and the obligation of all governors to abide by them.
- **shared responsibility for civil conduct.** Governors reiterated the need to share responsibility for civil and orderly conduct of meetings, raising points of order as appropriate and keeping remarks on topic.
- **the behaviour of guests.** In the context of ensuring civil debate, governors emphasized consistently that not allowing members of the Governing Council to speak – by making excessive noise, for example – does not respect the principles of free speech. They expressed their disappointment and frustration with the guests' disregard for members' rights to free speech. As well, governors expressed their disappointment with some remarks directed to members and to the Chair that were, in their view, rude and insulting.

- **personal safety.** A number of governors indicated that they were concerned for their physical safety because of:
 - large groups standing so close behind them,
 - individuals' aggressive behaviours and
 - individuals blocking the Chamber's main exit.

Governors generally agreed that we should continue practice of "no standing" and re-state our practice that no signs or banners are permitted in the Chamber.

- **presence of security personnel** – In light of these behaviours, there was some (though not unanimous) sense among governors that non-uniformed campus police should be present. We agreed that they would not be in the Council Chamber itself, but would be available in the Board Room.
- **noise.** In addition to noting their concern about guests' noisy behaviour in the Council Chamber, governors generally agreed that loud external noise during meetings can be problematic. If external noise makes it difficult to have free and open speech consideration would be given to changing the location of the Governing Council meeting.
- **photographs.** Members commented on the use of cameras by guests and asked that the Governing Council's longstanding practice be communicated clearly –no photographs and no videos. There was general agreement that these rules should be posted at the entrance to the Chamber, along with the "no standing" rule.
- **consultations.** There was a general concern about the need to understand clearly the consultations that have occurred on matters coming to governance. In the interests of greater transparency, governors suggested that cover documentation should, as a matter of normal practice, include a summary of the consultation process – essentially, a list of the consultations that took place. This would allow the Executive Committee to evaluate whether an item was ready to proceed and would give individual governors assurance that appropriate opportunities for engagement of relevant parties had occurred.
- **external speakers.** In further discussion of external speakers, governors recognized, too, that there are opportunities for input into matters before they come to governance and that the administration has made and is making concerted efforts to strengthen such opportunities and the communication about them.
- **accessibility / accommodation matters.** In response to various questions, we reiterated our commitment to working with individuals seeking accommodation and, as part of that effort, consulting with AODA Advisor and Accessibility Services staff. It was noted that the success of providing accommodation rests, to a great extent, on open communication and collaboration between the requester and the party requesting the accommodation. It is a shared responsibility.

Earlier this year, the Secretary and I also met with representatives from the Students for Barrier-Free Access in order to understand their concerns and the initiatives in which they are engaged. We will be meeting with them again in the new year.

- **communications with student governors.** As a result of the discussion with student members and a range of issues related to communication, I propose more frequent meetings

with the Chair and student governors over the course of each year – likely in September, January, April and June.

Again, I would like to thank all of you who provided advice and observations and look forward to working with you in the months ahead.