In this lecture, I am going to discuss university government, and after computing science and the creative arts, after student flats and lakeside restaurants, this is a formidable subject. In my earlier lectures I have explained the plans that the University of Essex will start with, plans designed to meet the situation as we see it today. Some of our decisions cannot be reversed. We shall not be able to go back on our scheme for a compact university town. But ideas adopted in 1963 cannot be expected to meet exactly the needs of 1973 or 1983. Our policy will have to be reviewed and revised a the situation changes. We have to devise a pattern of government, therefore, that will enable us to be self-renewing, that will positively conduce to flexibility rather than discourage it. The subject of university government raises in an acute form the issue which has run through this whole series of lectures: the attempt in present-day circumstances to uphold the character of a university as a self-governing community of learning. British universities have always been free to manage their own affairs without interference or control from outside. But they have become more and more dependent upon state funds: in less than thirty years the state’s contribution to their recurrent income alone has risen from 35 per cent. to 70 per cent. At the same time they have become far more important as instruments to satisfy the nation’s needs not only in the education of its citizens but also in promoting its efficiency and increasing its wealth. For the first time in their history the right of British universities to govern themselves has to be reconciled with heavy reliance upon state funds and with the collaboration of each one of them in a coherent national programme. Academic self-government has to be earned by public responsibility and by efficiency.

The degree of autonomy enjoyed by British universities is exceptional. They are free to appoint and retain academic staff without reference to any outside body. They are free to determine their entrance requirements and select their own students; to formulate their courses of study and set their own degree standards. They are free to decide what subjects they shall offer and what research they will do. They are free to determine their size and their rate of growth. They are free above all to decide how they shall spend their income, even though, as I have said, most of it now comes from the state. In contrast, most public universities abroad are exposed to control in all these areas. By an administrative device peculiar to this country government money is channelled through a University Grants Committee many of whose members are themselves actively engaged in university teaching and research, and all of whom are people with an intimate knowledge of universities and in sympathy with their ideals. Universities receive the greater part of their recurrent allocations in the form of block grants that they can spend as they wish and they are not subject to the normal system of parliamentary control. Although the Comptroller and Auditor-General sees their published accounts he does not audit them nor have access to their books. The Robbins report strongly supports the buffer principle, that is, a committee interposed
between the universities and the government; independent of politics and free from ministerial direction. So the traditional autonomy of British universities seems for the time being to be assured. But it is a right which will be respected only as long as universities continue to meet their obligations. They must be governed in such a way that they remain sensitive to what society requires of them.

At Essex we shall adopt the two-tier structure of government which is common to all universities in England and Wales, apart from Oxford and Cambridge, with the upper tier bodies having a majority of lay members, people, that is, drawn from outside the university, and with the lower tier bodies exclusively academic. This type of structure has many merits. It is essentially democratic, with proposals about teaching and research initiated in the different fields of study by the teachers and researchers themselves and then passing upwards until they reach the governing body. It ensures that academic policy is firmly in the hands of those best qualified to determine it, the academics themselves. But it also ensures that academics are not solely responsible for the spending of substantial sums of taxpayers’ money. There has of course been criticism of this pattern of government, but it can be met, we believe, without discarding the basic two-tier structure which on the whole has worked well.

Our governing body will be a council, which will be responsible for the finances of the university, and ultimately, therefore, for those decisions of policy which have financial implications. We have tried to keep it to around thirty members, so that it does not need a steering committee. Like the councils of other universities, its most striking feature is that the lay members will have a majority, although in our case not a large one. We propose that five shall be nominees of the local authorities, and the rest drawn from a cross-section of leaders of the community: executives of industry, members of the professions, and outstanding individuals. Lay members represent the taxpayer upon whom, through Treasury, local authority, and other grants, the university depends for so much of its money. Their independent scrutiny and criticism are perhaps the best guarantee to the community at large that its money is being well spent. But they are not just watch-dogs for the public. They bring to the council an experience which complements that of university staff, and in subjects ranging from superannuation schemes to building techniques their specialized knowledge is extremely valuable. Being uncommitted, their judgment is useful in many other matters. But laymen are not only a community’s representatives in the university. They are also the university’s representatives in the community. By their high standing they bring to it, and in particular to a new university, valuable prestige. And fully alive to its purposes and knowing intimately its problems they can be its ablest interpreters. Laymen have a leading part to play in integrating a university with its region.

**Academic Freedom**

But it is in their strong academic representation that the councils of English universities differ from the governing bodies of, say, American universities. Universities are academic institutions, and in this country it has always been thought highly desirable that their staff, as well as having complete control of academic matters, should be represented on the governing body. In any case, with so many problems the academic and financial aspects are inseparable. Consider, for example, the appointment and retention of staff. Academic freedom means not only the
freedom of a university to govern itself, but also the freedom of an individual teacher
to express with impunity whatever views he may hold, social, religious, or political,
however unpopular, as long as he does not associate the university with them or allow
them to distort his teaching or his research. But staff are appointed and, if necessary,
dismissed by the council, and although it traditionally acts only on the
recommendation of the senate, the tradition is best safeguarded by strong academic
representation on the council itself. And academic staff can gain a good deal by
service on the council, and its important committees. They learn to take a broader
view than that of a department or school and see more clearly the financial
implications of academic decisions.

So the council will be the governing body and because its members will be busy men
we hope that it will be concerned with matters of consequence, not pettifogging
details. Leading industrialists will not be lured from their boardrooms to deliberate on
the cost of a coffee-cup! We shall also have a court with the power to appoint the
chancellor, pro-chancellors, and treasurer, and select representatives for the council. It
will be a large body, with probably some 300 or 400 people representing every part of
Essex as well as national bodies, like the Royal Society and the Federation of British
Industries. It will meet once a year and will receive and comment on a report from the
Vice-Chancellor and a statement of the university accounts. This annual meeting
gives a large number of people the chance to hear about the university’s activities, and
can consolidate the links with the region established by the lay members of council.

So much for the upper-tier bodies, the council and the court. The lower tier consists of
the exclusively academic bodies, with at their head a senate, and responsible to it the
boards of the various schools. The senate with the Vice-Chancellor as chairman and
with representatives of all subjects, the sciences, social sciences, and the humanities,
is the supreme academic body. It is responsible for admissions, courses of study,
degree standards, research, the nomination of staff and the welfare of students. So as
not to be overburdened by detail, it will be obliged to delegate a good deal to the
boards of schools and to departments. But it cannot delegate any matters of policy.
For the senate is the unifying body of the university. It must co-ordinate the
recommendations of different schools of study, make sure that in the whole range of
subjects the terms of appointment of members of staff and the conditions of
examination of students are comparable. And it must sharply correct any tendency of
schools to become self-contained or parochial. Similarly, although many of its
decisions will need the approval of council, it must itself be responsible for policy on
all academic matters. The senate should articulate the purposes of the whole academic
community.

**Rapid and Decisive Action**

It is important, therefore, that it should be a representative body, yet small enough to
take rapid and decisive action. Until recently the senates of most universities
consisted entirely of professors. By excluding readers and lecturers, not just from the
senate but from its many committees, universities often overburdened their professors,
and at the same time deprived themselves of the experience of other senior members,
and the ideas of many young members. And because professors kept their place on the
senate until they retired, universities were in danger of being run by a gerontocracy.
This has changed and lecturers do have some representation now. But because in
almost every university the professors are still *ex-officio* members, senates are becoming far too big. Already half of them have more than fifty members and two have 100. In a university of 10,000 students a senate which included all the professors and a fair representation of readers and lecturers would run to nearly 300. A body of this size would represent a ludicrously uneconomical use of some of the best brains in the country. We aim in Essex at a senate of thirty or so in the early years, rising to around fifty. Only the Vice-Chancellor, deans of schools, and chairmen of departments will be *ex-officio* members. The remaining members will be elected, professors as well as lecturers. And since deans of schools and chairmen of departments will hold office for a few years only, the membership of the senate will be continually changing, and room should be found for younger members of staff. A senate of this size will be able to work quickly and, we hope, effectively. I dare say that we shall discover some members of staff who, specialists in slogans and champions of hole-in-the-corner causes, may become regular winners of senate elections. But we shall take a chance on this, and hope that the academic staff will elect useful and sensible people.

**Choosing the Best Men**

But the heavy load of administration borne by most professors, and with it disproportionate power, depends not only upon their ex-officio place in the senate, but on the fact that so often there is only one professor in a department and he is its permanent head. Appointed, many of them, before the age of forty, they remain in charge until their retirement at sixty-seven. At sixty or sixty-five they may be first-class teachers, they may still be productive researchers, and in a small arts faculty they may even be effective heads, but few at this age will be the best men to run large scientific departments. The departments which we propose at Essex will have several professors, and their chairmen will be elected for only a limited period, probably three years, with the possibility of re-election for one or at most two further periods. This will ensure that a department is led by the person thought by its members best qualified to lead it. It will also make it easier for the professors who are not chairmen to be granted study leave for a spell of uninterrupted research. The deanship of a school will also rotate, but this is already the practice in most universities. It means that one man is not committed to heavy administrative duties for the whole of his career and, just as important, that a school is not committed for too long to one man or to the representative of one department. Each school will have a graduate as well as an undergraduate division, and, because we are anxious to prevent any divorce of undergraduate teaching from graduate teaching and research, both divisions will come under a single dean.

One unusual feature of Essex, at least as a formally constituted body, is what we shall call a general assembly. This will consist of all full—time members of the academic staff and such other persons as the senate may approve. It will meet not less than once a year to discuss anything relating to the University. From time to time matters may be referred to it by the council or senate and it may itself, if it wishes, send resolutions to them. It will be useful, we believe, both to sound out academic opinion on issues of importance and to give all members of staff a chance of hearing about and debating university policy.
Directing Student Activities
I must mention one further important link in this chain of command, the student himself. All student activities will be directed by a students’ council, with its president, vice-president, and other officers. This will organize such matters as debates, societies, sports and athletics, will allocate funds, and represent student opinion directly and informally to the Vice-Chancellor, and formally to the senate. The students will also be represented on the university court. All this is what happens, I believe, in any university. We should like to give students more say in university policy, particularly on student life, than is provided by the students’ council, and better co-ordinate the different efforts made to provide student facilities. We propose, therefore, to set up a student affairs committee of the senate, headed by a dean of students, and with members drawn both from the students and from the student advisers I referred to in an earlier lecture. The student affairs committee will be responsible through the senate for all aspects of student welfare: the residential and study accommodation, provision for clubs and societies, physical education and student health. Our students will be able to make their views felt, therefore, both through their own students’ council and through the student affairs committee of the senate. And the Dean of Students as a member of the senate by virtue of his office will represent their interests at the highest level of university policy making.

This then, is our pattern of government: a large court which meets once a year, a small council which will be the governing body, a relatively small senate with many elected members, rotating deanships of schools and chairmanships of departments, a general assembly, and a student affairs committee of the senate as well as a students’ council. Basically it is the two—tier structure of most universities in this country, but we have modified it in three important respects. First, we have made it more representative of all members of the academic staff, lecturers as well as professors. Democracy, we believe, far from being a brake on efficiency, can promote it. Second, we have streamlined it so that it is better suited, we think, to a big university. Third, we have legislated for change by stipulating that members shall keep their place on committees for limited periods only.

I want to refer here briefly to two related points. The first is the importance which we attach to research into our own functioning and to educational research generally. With the help of a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation we have set up a unit for research into higher education. The unit will be concerned first with the university’s own problems - of planning and organization. It will document its experiments in courses of study, in the use of discussion classes, in study-rooms, in fact the whole of its social and intellectual life. It will also study the impact of the university on its neighbourhood. I explained last week that the presence of the university would accelerate the growth of Colchester and Wivenhoe, and that eventually our university town would be integrated with both. The research unit will observe this development, and investigate the problems it throws up, so that from the very outset everything is done to ensure easy relations between town and gown. The research will also broaden out into more general problems of higher education, international as well as national: the social background of applicants to universities, student maturity and success, teaching methods, university building, the problems of recruitment of academic staff, national policy on university education, and so on. We hope that in collaboration with other educational research units we can tackle some of the perennial problems of higher education. We hope also that our research on ourselves may enable us to keep
pace with changing needs and circumstances. We are well aware that our research unit will uncover from time to time uncomfortable, even painful facts. Self-examination is never pleasant, but it can be salutary.

**Trained University Administrators**

The second point is the importance we attach to the university administrator. The academic staff must continue to take full responsibility for academic policy. But with the growth of universities in size and in complexity, they cannot be expected to do formal administrative jobs like preparing agenda papers, recording minutes, conflating reports, writing memoranda. Deans and heads of departments often spend half their time on work of this kind. They make heavy weather of it, they sometimes do it badly and, worse still, they get to like it. Many a professor, appointed for his distinction in research, has little time to engage in it. We shall go some way towards solving the problem by spreading the administrative load over the whole of the academic staff, not concentrating it on professors. But we intend also to follow the lead of one or two of the biggest universities in this country and build up under the registrar a strong secretariat, some of whom will work with deans of schools and, when they are big, with departments. We shall do everything in our power to remove from academic staff routine administrative work so as to leave them time for teaching and research, time also for really strategic thinking on policy. But we recognize also that universities now need trained administrators if they are to be efficiently run. All the different branches of university administration, whether estates and planning, or finance, or the academic branch, require nowadays specialized skills and techniques. And nationally there is a need also for more systematic and standardized records, on both students and staff. With its variety of interest, its responsibility, and its scope for promotion, university administration is a career, I believe, which will rapidly increase in importance. It is a sort of academic civil service.

**Need for Financial Independence**

Let me go back to the theme which underlies this lecture, academic freedom. I have explained how, even though it receives most of its funds from the government, a university enjoys a high degree of autonomy. But in the end its freedom is guaranteed only by funds of its own. However small these may be in relation to funds it receives from outside, they allow it to supplement the grants that are made from Treasury funds, to provide facilities which do not qualify for such grants, above all to follow its own lines of research wherever they lead. And here we come to the heart of the matter. Even in the natural sciences, where substantial research money is available, much of it comes in the form of grants or contracts for particular projects. It is tempting for a university without funds of its own to accept a research project proposed from outside even though it may adversely affect the balance of its own work. And such a university can initiate a research project only if it can find support from outside. The immediate needs of government and industry are likely to be met, but without funds of its own a university may have to neglect long-term research into basic scientific principles. But the position is worse in the social studies and in the humanities. Far less research money has been available in these fields, and since the immediate value of work being done is not always obvious, grants made have tended to go to projects which plainly met practical needs. Much of the deeper research has had to be done on a shoe-string. There is an urgent need, of course, for more research
money from outside, particularly for social studies and the humanities. But, in the last resort, academic independence depends on a degree of financial independence.

Essex, I hope, will never take its freedom for granted or miss an opportunity to build up endowment funds to guarantee it. They will have to come largely from industry, particularly from those firms which are most likely to gain from the university’s interests. The need for endowment funds, unfortunately, is not always appreciated, or even regarded as the best basis for an appeal. But this is a public relations job which universities must be prepared to do. I have repeatedly stressed in my earlier lectures the need for closer relations between universities in this country and industrial firms, and I would only add here that those who wish to attract funds from them must take industrialists into their confidence and explain their special needs. The private donor can also help. British universities tap hardly at all a source of large gifts in other countries, their own graduates or alumni. Like other universities we shall establish a body called convocation, consisting of our own graduates, and shall give it power to discuss any matter and report its views to the court, council, or senate. Through the convocation, and by other means, we hope to keep closely in touch with our own graduates. Men and women are, many of them, throughout their lives profoundly grateful to the university they studied at, and I think we might encourage them, or at any rate make it easier for them, to express their gratitude with donations.

I said in my first lecture that a university in the making lacks the dispensation of the armchair critic and that it has to transform its ideas into reality. The fundamental aims of a university are not in dispute, nor, I believe, is the response of British universities today in face of the social and economic needs of the country. They can be relied upon to satisfy them if they are given the necessary funds, and given them in time. They can be relied upon also to do everything in their power to preserve their essential character as academic communities of the highest standard, though with so many things against them we cannot be certain that they will succeed. But if there is no disagreement about ends, there is disagreement about the means to achieve them. This is why in this series of lectures I have said little about the function of a university and so much about the methods by which that function may be discharged. I have tried to get down to brass tacks. I hope that by a detailed exposition of the plans of Essex I may have given a sense not only of the exciting challenge of one university in the making but of what is at stake in the development of all the universities today.

What results our plans will have is another matter. Our first students will still be in positions of influence and responsibility in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. In those distant days, forty or fifty years ahead, their grandchildren may be at the University of Essex. They will know nothing of the bustle and bewilderment of the nineteen-sixties, nor even of the hopes and ideals which those associated with the university’s foundation cherished. They will judge it by the extent to which it meets the needs of their time, by its distinction as a university in their world. We should like them to feel that in our attempt at creating a new community of learning we had a measure of success.