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ELECTING PHARMACISTS

In its modernisation process, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Council has made some bold decisions in the face of condemnation from those who dislike the direction it is taking. But now it has chosen to bow to its critics and revert to using the so-called "first past the post" system in Council elections, after more than 25 years' experience of the single transferable vote (STV) system (see p545).

Having also turned down the idea of reserved places for specific fields of practice, the Council will need to keep its decision under review. STV may not be perfect, but it should not be rejected out of hand simply because, as one Council member said in debate, its advantages are outweighed by the strength of members' feelings. As the President pointed out, STV appears to be fairer to minority groups. It is broadly proportional, so that electoral groupings have a good chance of gaining representation roughly equivalent to their share of the vote. Particularly with the reduced number of pharmacists on the reformed Council, a less fair system may leave minority groups — even substantial minorities such as hospital pharmacists — with no representation at all.

STV has gained support in many fields. It is being favourably considered for local government elections in both Scotland and Wales and is already used widely in Northern Ireland. It has been adopted by various professional bodies and has even been embraced by allegedly stick-in-the-mud organisations such as the Church of England and major trade unions. With such endorsement, it cannot be all bad.

CHEATING STUDENTS

Pharmacy students are no better or worse than other undergraduates: some of them cheat. A study published this week (p529) and an accompanying Broad Spectrum article (p522) reveal that as many as 80 per cent indulge in one activity or another that the most high-minded academic might regard as cheating. However, since most students do not think that borrowing a friend's lecture notes with permission is cheating (and, we suspect, most pharmacists might see that as an acceptable practice) we must not run away with the idea that the next generation of pharmacists is dishonest.

Nevertheless, with ready access to information online, and with many courses now delivered in modular form without examination, there is scope for cutting corners to gain one's degree. It is important to teach students what corners must never be cut, in any circumstances, and why members of a health profession who carry out research, and care for patients who regard them highly, have a responsibility to be honest, to have integrity, and to be seen as such.