



DOWNING COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

Our Values

Scholarship – Curiosity – Community – Integrity – Kindness

These five qualities lie at the heart of our academic mission and our community vision. They are the bedrock of how we work together, what we look for, and who we want to be.

Scholarship

You'd expect this of course. We are a Cambridge College with a long history of outstanding teaching and learning. We start with the expectation that our students and those who teach them come to us because they enjoy their subjects, want to work at the highest level, and seek to fulfil their potential. We take our members and their studies seriously and we are here to help them to achieve their academic ambitions. We value deep thought and intellectual ambition that opens up new vistas of understanding. Profound change through research and learning is our reason for being. We prize rigour and precision, ingenuity and flexibility, creativity and imagination. We know that we all have much to learn from each other. Wisdom is not handed down at Downing, it is discovered.

Curiosity

Every journey worth making begins with an open and enquiring mind. Curiosity and a spirit of open, critical enquiry are fundamental to Downing's purpose of ongoing and outstanding intellectual discovery and development. For 200 years the College's motto "to seek truth" has captured the way in which we ask questions and pursue understanding through openness, encounter and exchange. Earnest yet playful, curiosity has always been at the heart of what we do. You cannot be at home in the world if you don't understand something of its nature. We look outwards as well as forwards to future generations in a spirit of excitement, enjoyment and engagement.

Community

We delight in difference and see diversity of all kinds as an opportunity and cause for celebration. Whoever you are, whatever your background, we all have a part to play in shaping our community both now and for the future. Communities thrive when they function as healthy ecosystems: open, adaptable and enmeshed with the wider environment. Our lively, global and pluralist community is built on the contribution of every member from the newest Fresher to the longest-serving member of the Fellowship or Housekeeping team and we are grateful for the positive contributions of our members academically, practically and culturally. Downing's extraordinary setting and facilities — including our open grounds and green spaces, Chapel, Theatre, Gallery and sports facilities — offer unique opportunities created by and contributed to by all of us. We are invested in the whole person and the value that each takes from Downing into the world.

Integrity

We believe that a world-class education brings both opportunities and responsibilities. We are committed to education with integrity, where our values align with our behaviours, and to continuing to create a global community of people equipped with a right sense of responsibility. We know that learning and development are life-long processes for all our members. We value honesty, self-knowledge, reflection, fair-mindedness, and the courage to

live our principles; these qualities sustain and enrich our academic and other endeavours. We have a point of view on what makes the world better and we act convincingly to bring that about

Kindness

Downing has long had a reputation as one of the most open of the Cambridge colleges. We are a hospitable community where the quality of our relationships matters. Whether in the warm welcome we offer new members, the care and commitment with which our students support each other, the nurturing quality of our teaching, or the generosity of our alumni in mentoring, we have a clear commitment to cultivating kindness. We see kindness as a fundamental virtue, a form of respect and integral to the academic progress and community we seek to build at Downing. It is a generosity and care that reaches out across generations and beyond our immediate networks to encompass strangers and those who will join this community in the decades to come.

Strategy and Priorities Framework

Current Reality

In a global context, our position is strong. Cambridge remains one of the top Universities in the world and as a constituent College we benefit from the brand and strong demand that drives quality students to our door. Even within a Cambridge context, Downing of course has some notable strengths including its reputation for friendliness and openness, a committed and supportive team of staff, its central location and beautiful site, as well as excellent accommodation and facilities which support a rich extra-curricular offering from student societies to the Chaplain's popular weekly student cafe. However, rather than resting on these laurels, the challenge is how to leverage the College's strengths and capabilities to face the considerable challenges we currently face.

Conversations with Fellows, as well as student and staff feedback, have thrown up some concerns, and a sense that we could be doing better on a number of fronts. In addition, the disruptions of the last two years have only emphasised the need to operate more coherently and effectively, as well as providing an opportunity for us to review our situation and activities in a clear-eyed way. Downing has emerged from two years of varying degrees of lockdown facing a number of issues which -while none of them pose an immediate crisis – will need to be tackled if the College is to move forward effectively in its core activities in the next 5-10 years.

In particular, we need to consider:

- Academic engagement from students
- Limited financial resources
- A relatively small Fellowship with unequal contribution, engagement and distribution of responsibility
- Perceived negative elements of our current culture (elitism, lack of diversity)

We believe that Downing can become a community where people's capabilities are more intentionally cultivated so that all members might contribute positively to the College community and to wider society:

- Students should be academically equipped and engaged while at the College, and leave prepared for employment, with well-developed skills and experience.
- Fellows must feel fully supported as they seek to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Staff should be enabled to build their careers and develop their skills.

Downing could be at the forefront in developing its members for their next step in its uniquely immersive environment.

Strategy Framework

The recent strategy review is illustrated by a proposed framework which reflects extensive input, consultation, discussion and debate across the College community, and analysis of a broad range of data. Our proposed direction involves a significant investment in human capital, an emphasis on academic focus, and help for students and other members of the community to develop their capabilities and skills. We must also consider internal and external perception of College culture around areas such as elitism, diversity (in its broadest sense) and tolerance.

Our strategy is authentic, distinctive (within Downing's contextual constraints), aspirational, clear and compelling, and will deliver positive and measurable impacts for all the College's key stakeholders: students, Fellows, staff and alumni, as well as the Cambridge community and the wider world. While Downing has many strengths, including a reputation for friendliness, we want to ensure that it is equally open and offers equality of opportunity and the best outcomes for all of its members.

Four Key Areas of Focus

(i) An engaging education

We are not primarily motivated by rankings on tables; for us, success comes as students fulfil their potential, and we want to place an explicit value on investing to increase student engagement in, and enjoyment of, their academic work. If we focus and build a reputation here, we believe excellence in our results will follow.

Exceptional teaching will be delivered locally by supervisors with a deep knowledge of their students. This requires growth of the Fellowship, and Teaching Fellows will be hired in key gap subjects. We will also provide: best-practice sharing of student-support roles (e.g. Director of Studies); clear and fair expectations of a Fellow; improved and harmonised Fellows' benefits across categories. Comprehensive and coherent resources will contribute to the development of students' core academic skills (e.g. essay writing; presentation; academic discussion); and more non-library based shared study spaces will be provided.

(ii) An equal community

We are offering a valuable asset to our students and must ensure that it is equally accessible to all, removing any barriers which are in our control. As new members join our community we will be clear on our expectations (around contribution and behaviour) as well as the provision and support on offer. We aspire to excellence (academic and otherwise) but reject unhelpful forms of elitism. We seek to make all welcome, irrespective of their background, and will consult on and welcome the view of every member of our community. This is Downing at its best: rigorous where it counts, but not intimidating or unwelcoming.

We will tailor the induction experience for all; optimise internal and external communications; seek to offer more accommodation to students on the domus; broaden student participation and consultation; and increase financial support for those most in need (e.g. Widening- Participation focused bursaries and studentships). We will welcome and support Foundation Year students. Our efforts will focus on building our local community and we will play our part in supporting a coherent University-led approach, without seeking to undermine or create unhelpful internal competition.

(iii) Resourceful wellbeing

We will focus on wellbeing as a key means to facilitate achievement, as well as to build resilience and resourcefulness across the community. We will enable our members to build their self-awareness and development in order to respond more effectively to an ever more complex and changing world.

This will require an enhanced and integrated wellbeing resource and infrastructure which is both robust and flexible enough to be responsive to changing needs: investing in resourcing students' academic and wider development, building a sustainable tutorial model, with appropriately broad participation, and ensuring that Tutors have all necessary resources, support and reward.

(iv) Integrated Learning

Downing aims to equip every member of the community, regardless of background or position, by offering engaging and enjoyable opportunities to grow their resilience, resourcefulness, skills and abilities, and to contribute meaningfully to the College and to the wider world. We will help our students to use the skills they are developing to contribute and thrive at Downing and beyond, and to integrate and apply those skills and experiences in supervisions and lectures as well as other College contexts. We will also offer integrated development opportunities to our staff and Fellows.

The student-facing component of this will include effectively enabling academic enrichment in combination with resourcefulness and resilience, and support for appropriate extra-curricular engagement.

Other areas

Alongside and on top of student-facing activity, we seek investment in Fellows' and staff development. Strategy will be underpinned by other necessary actions:

- Broadening our diversity efforts beyond racial and LGBTQ+ diversity to other key areas (e.g. socio-economic diversity)
- Improved internal and external communications
- Providing the physical space to achieve our goals
- A clear commitment to sustainability
- Diversifying and strengthening our income streams to support all these initiatives

