

The Ratified Minutes of  
THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE  
9th Week Michaelmas Term 2017  
Friday 8th December 2017  
Morris Room, 16:00

**Present:** **The President** (Ms Laali Vadlamani, *Trinity College*), **The President-Elect** (Mr Gui Cavalcanti, *Pembroke College*), **The Librarian** (Ms Sabriyah Sayeed, *Somerville College*), **The Treasurer** (Mr Stephen Horvath, *New College*), **The Treasurer-Elect** (Mr Daniel Wilkinson, *Oriel College*), **The Secretary** (Ms Molly Greenwood, *St. Hilda's College*), **The Elected Member**, (Mr Shanuk Mediwaka, *Lincoln College*), **The Elected Member** (Ms Genevieve Athis, *Christ Church College*), **The Elected Member** (Mr Adam Watson, *Hertford College*), **The Elected Member** (Mr Charles Wang, *Hertford College*), **The Returning Officer** (Mr Nebojša Jovanović, *St. Peter's College*), **The Bursar** (Ms Lindsay Warne)

**Attending:**

**Apologies:** **The Senior Librarian** (Mr Sean Power, *Oriel College*)

**Absent:** **The Librarian-Elect** (Ms Shivani Ananth, *St. Anne's College*), **The Elected Member** (Mr Charlie Cheesman, *St. Edmund Hall*), **The Elected Member** (Ms Izzy Risino, *St. Catherine's College*), **The Elected Member** (Mr Chris Garner, *St. Peter's College*), **The Senior Treasurer** (Mr Stephen Dixon, *Downing College, Cambridge*), **The Chair of the Debate Select Committee** (Mr Andrew Seow, *Lincoln College*), **The Chair of the Consultative Committee** (Mr Julian Kirk, *Magdalen College*)

**The President** opens this Ordinary Meeting of the Standing Committee at 16:06.

**Requests to Pass Absences from Previous Meetings**

There are no requests to pass absences from previous meetings.

**Matters Arising from Previous Minutes**

There are no matters arising from previous minutes.

**Ratification of Minutes**

The President moves that the Standing Committee ratify the minutes from the Ordinary Meeting of TSC in 8th Week of Michaelmas Term 2017.

*nem. con.*

The President moves that the Standing Committee ratify the *in camera* minutes from the Ordinary Meeting of TSC in 8th Week of Michaelmas Term 2017.

*nem. con.*

**The President**

**Business of the President:**

**The President** raises the issue of the breakfast budget.

**The President-Elect** asks **the Bursar** if the breakfast budget for the Hilary vacation is usually £100.

**The Bursar** confirms that it is.

The President moves that the Standing Committee pass the breakfast budget for the Hilary 2018 vacation with a spending cap of £100, in line with previous terms.

*nem. con.*

**The President** raises the issue of gender imbalance in the term card. She explains that during the vacation so far, the strategy to address the gender imbalance has gone well with invitations done for the debates at this point, and we will continue with the individual speaker invitations. She notes that term cards of the past have been unbalanced in terms of female speakers and that there are obvious reasons, for PR and our platform, to host more female speakers. She addresses the argument that men are supposedly on average more likely than women to accept an invitation, but counters this by explaining that research had been done to see whether this was true, or whether it was an issue with the Union's system for inviting speakers. She concludes that it is certainly a fault with the system and so to counteract this, each member of Committee has to ensure that 40% of their invitations are to women, and if this is not achieved in a given day, they must spend the following day inviting solely women. She notes that so far this has not lowered the quality of speakers invited, but that it has encouraged committee to proactively find the best speakers. She mentions that she wanted to bring this point to the Standing Committee to hear their views on this because she thinks that it is something they should discuss.

**The Treasurer** notes that it is interesting that the problem was so systematic and structural, and that the research shows that the severe disparity in previous term cards was not just due to a confirmation and response rate, or the debate process. He points out that even if we do not achieve an entirely even balance, 60/40 goes a long way to ensure better balance in the future.

**The President-Elect** notes that **the President** has implemented upgrades in the database that show the balance of male and female speakers that each Committee member has invited more conveniently. He comments that this improvement will go a long way in terms of checking invitations sent, since no one is against this policy in principle and so it is really about making it more easily enforced.

**The President** explains that previously, while you could log the gender of a speaker when they are created on the database, there was no way to see this information after the invitations are sent. (**The Treasurer** supports this by noting that this data could not be summarised), and so now there is a ticker that shows whether a speaker is male/female/non-binary and thus makes this information much clearer.

**Mr Watson** believes the implementation is going well.

**The Librarian** points out that the implementation is part of an initial process, and that when responses of the new Secretary's Committee to a Google form which requests speaker suggestions were read, they were predominantly male. She notes that it was striking at this initial stage.

**The President** points out that people hadn't done this on purpose, and after the initial committee meeting where the imbalance issue was addressed, some members of the Secretary's Committee brought up the imbalance and offered more female suggestions.

**The President-Elect** remarks how, now that more women are added to the speaker database, it is a self-enforcing system because instead of trying to think of female speaker suggestions themselves, future Committee will be able to scroll through the existing database and chose speakers based on that. He notes that this means each time more female speakers are added, there will be more female speakers to elect from the database in the future, which will also improve the overall balance of the database itself.

**The President** explains that even if this term card doesn't seem entirely balanced, invitations sent as follow-ups from previous terms must be taken into account because it is polite for the speaker to follow invitations for which they have expressed interest, and so it shouldn't be disheartening because we are going for long-term effects.

**The Librarian** asks whether this should be somehow enshrined in the rules.

**The President** suggests that we should see how it goes over the vacation.

**The Treasurer** argues that having a gender balance requirement in the rules could lead to a poor attitude to it, making it a minimal technical requirement which is less useful, and that having a requirement of forty percent in the rules could mean people focus on the overall numbers. He notes that while it is difficult to codify a sense of structural change, unless it was a slightly lower target, having this at 40% in the rules would lead to Committee members not taking it seriously.

**The President** says there is a risk people would see it as a target rather than an incentivised thing, and points out that we should not begin to take a stance on quotas, because this is a very politicised issue in its own right.

**The Treasurer** states that he does not believe that the Oxford Union should ideologically consider adopting a quota.

**The Bursar** argues that ensuring the gender balance should be culturally habitual, and not in the rules.

**The Treasurer** agrees with **the Bursar**.

**The President** notes that hopefully people would not wish to remove this idea because implementation has such obvious merits.

**The Bursar** comments that she supports the idea of addressing gender imbalance, but notes an issue arising with the balance being enshrined in the rules in that if there is a difference in acceptance rate for any reason, which she believes to happen quite often. She states that this is something that the Union could do little about.

**Mr Watson** notes that there is a risk when the Standing Order specifies nothing about extraordinary circumstances in the rule change, and gives the example that, were a Committee member to spend one day inviting male speakers assumedly with the intention to invite female speakers the next day, and then is taken ill and misses this second day, this would be an extraordinary circumstance.

**The President** comments that were an article regarding a rule change be published, it would be rude to female speakers who might then question if they had only been invited because of their gender.

**Mr Watson** comments that he agrees with the Treasurer's earlier point, that it should be encouraged and not in the rules.

**The Librarian** mentions that the changes will be seen on the speaker database for future acknowledgement, and so would become embedded in the structure of invitation.

**The Returning Officer** asks if it is possible to view the breakdown each day.

**The Treasurer** explains that the system tracks data cumulatively, but that he has been keeping a record: each day he subtracts the previous day's total and shades the data if worrying. He comments that it is not exact, but helpful since the daily number of invites varies, so an overall picture is more useful.

**The Returning Officer** agrees that a cultural change, rather than a rules change, is better in this instance.

**The President** summarises that the Union would not want female speakers to be invited solely because of gender, and that this has not been the result of addressing the imbalance.

#### Questions to the President:

There are no questions to the President.

#### **The Librarian**

##### Business of the Librarian

The Librarian has no business.

#### Questions to the Librarian

There are no questions to the Librarian.

#### **The Treasurer**

##### Business of the Treasurer

**The Treasurer** wishes to introduce a new clause, clause (j) to Standing Order B1, regarding press requests for comment. He explains that there are now an increasing number requests for comment on a range of issues such as events, contrasts with other societies, elections and questions about Union politics more widely from the student press such that this has become almost routine, and that it is potentially problematic for a President receive those requests, refuse a comment and thereby unilaterally take hostage of the Union's name. He mentions that while of course the President is in charge of the Union day to day, he believes that the Standing Committee should be able to have input regarding requests made to the President. He explains that the idea of this amendment is that if the President chooses not to give a comment, it is not that the Standing Committee can force a comment to be made, but it gives the opportunity for them to question the decision, and could pass a motion encouraging them to comment, which is a useful way to ensure

the Standing Committee can ensure that views expressed are those of the governing body of the Union. He notes that Presidents of the past have not only been director figures, but also political figures and that Standing Committee should be aware of how comments are responded to, or at least understand decisions made.

**The President** expands on this by saying she believes that it is good for any President to hear the Standing Committee's thoughts on how comments could have been made differently.

**The Librarian** notes that a President should want to hear their thoughts.

**The Bursar** notes that the proposed change says nothing about queries given to the Press Officer and so there is no accountability here. She explains that it has always been the case that the President and Press Officer are the only people able to respond, and so feels that it is unfair that only the President is held to account. She explains that if a very big speaker is due to come, which she notes has not happened within the memory of the current Committee, going through each press request individually at meetings of the Standing Committee would take a long time because there would be so many.

**The Treasurer** agrees that these are both fair points, but that the amendment refers to an Official of the Society and so is not to target the President but to expand the scope to include the President.

**The Bursar** argues that the Press Officer would need to be consulted also, as it would not be sufficient to simply ask the President how they responded, since the Press Officer is entitled to respond as well.

**The Treasurer** explains that the President acts on behalf of the Press Officer who is not always in attendance at meetings of the Standing Committee, and that press requests are always forwarded to the President or a Junior Officer where they might act outside the remit of the Press Officer in terms of knowledge.

**The President** notes that the Press Officer does not have the remit to make statements on behalf of the Union.

**The Returning Officer** notes they can only do so with the President's permission.

**The Bursar** notes that the name that refers to the Official in charge of Press has generally been 'Press Officer', and only recently has it included 'Director'. She suggests referring to them as the 'Press Officer' would be more generic.

**The Treasurer** says that he would be happy to accept this in the amendment.

**The President** explains that this would be confusing since the entire team are called Press Officers.

**Mr Watson** suggests the reference be to the most senior of the Press team.

**The Treasurer** comments that this makes the most sense for the rules. He addresses the Bursar's second point on the volume of requests, explaining that problems relating to big events could be solved by exempting requests for comment about speaker events from the jurisdiction of this amendment, because the phrasing of the proposed change means the President would probably need to report day-to-day running requests, not requests about speaker events. He explains he had consulted with the **Ex-President, Worcester College** about this who explained that he would describe the four categories of press request as: speaker interviews, event coverage, archival access

and comment. He expands by explaining that if it proves that the Standing Committee are getting bogged down reviewing the decisions of the President, then it could be the case that further amendment would be required, but he believes that for now this amendment is heading in the right direction.

**The President-Elect** points out a practical concern that if the President decides not to comment, then by reporting this to the Standing Committee, whose minutes are publicly available and accessible by student press, this could cause a discussion as to why the request was denied and thus would in itself be an implicit comment that could lead to unintended interpretations.

**The Treasurer** considers this an interesting point.

**The Returning Officer** notes that the President could allow under B1(b) for those who have received requests for comment to tell Standing Committee. He explains that he sees this as not the case that the President seeks permission, but rather informs on decisions made.

**The Treasurer** notes that he agrees, and that if the President reported denied press requests to Standing Committee, someone could reasonably ask why, but that we do not want to force comments by pushing for explanations. However he explains that in past terms it was sometimes the case that comments were not given when doing so could have been positive for the Union.

**The President-Elect** notes that student organisations particularly are not always seeking to clarify information, but to enhance their articles and so could potentially misconstrue certain comments, or the minutes of the Standing Committee.

**The Treasurer** says that he does not entirely agree with this and that in his experience most requests were for basic explanations and clarification.

**The Bursar** explains that there could be repetitional implications, as declining to comment is a comment within itself, but it is not possible to go *in camera* to discuss this.

**The Treasurer** suggests that if a President declines a comment and strongly believes that the comment or any clarification of their decision not to respond would be damaging, it could be said that the comment was liable to bring the Union into disrepute and thereby saying it would be against the rules.

**The Bursar** argues that this change shouldn't be in the rules because doing so causes other rules issues, and means that action is restricted in extraordinary circumstances, e.g. in disciplinary proceedings that, if reported on, could be an issue of reputation.

**Mr Watson** comments that he does not know the rules well enough, but points out that the Standing Committee is supposed to discuss controversial issues whether the President desires detailed discussion or not, which gives an opportunity for people to make comment within the meetings of Standing Committee which are minuted, and are thus able to make implicit comments.

**The Treasurer** explains that this is not a rule but a Standing Order, so supposes that were there to be a criminal allegation or serious controversial event, the President could waive a decision to discuss it. He says that, given the principle for doing this is in the interests of the Union, he trusts a waive by the President, the Standing Committee could discern whether this was for personal or political motive to the unreasonable agenda of the President themselves, or as having been done for a serious reason.

**Mr Watson** asks if there are provisions to go *in camera* for such controversial discussions.

**The Bursar** points out that this is impossible if you cannot go into *camera* under this amendment to discuss *in camera* issues.

**The Treasurer** responds to **Mr Watson** by saying that there aren't provisions, and then clarifies to **The Bursar** what he meant by this, namely that you cannot simply go into *camera* because you want to, yet under this amendment it is still possible to go *in camera* if an issue is raised that warrants it in accordance with the rules.

**The President-Elect** says that **the Bursar** raised an important point that other rules specify whether you can comment or not. He suggests this clause specify explicitly whether or not a President can waive discussion at the start of each meeting, should they choose to do so. He expresses concern that adding a waive into the rule could still look bad and evasive of the topic in a meeting about a controversial topic if the President decides to do so.

**The Treasurer** argues that he doesn't believe it would attract much level of scrutiny, in a similar way to when reporting on the membership drive is waived for a period.

**The Returning Officer** notes that the President would get unilateral powers with this, and that Standing Orders require a two thirds of Standing Committee present.

**The Treasurer** notes that in the past, unilateral powers have not worked and undermines the intent of the rule change.

**The Bursar** queries whether Standing Committee would want to know simply what requests are asked, or is it felt that the queries aren't properly answered.

**The Treasurer** notes that it is helpful to know what is asked and how requests are phrased, but also what responses are given in the case that members of Standing Committee are asked by members about an issue that they were not specifically involved in, and it would be helpful for the governing body to know about external comments.

**The President** believes she would find it helpful to hear others' opinions on comments anyway so that future comments could be improved, and notes that in the past disagreements about comments could not be discussed properly, nor were Standing Committee aware of what was being commented on and when.

**The Treasurer** suggests Standing Committee could discuss better delegation to the Press Officers in light of poor delegation in the past. He suggests a discussion by the Standing Committee of a potential new Press Officer position, or how a Junior Officer could help with this workload. He argues that if replying to press requests is a burdensome task, then the Standing Committee should be notified, so that they can consider how to delegate.

**Mr Watson** explains that he is wary of whether discussions about if comments should be given and what should be commented on should be public in case members of Standing Committee attempt to use this as a forum to score political points, revealing information by questioning a decision not to comment. He questions whether the rules allow anything to be said during meetings of the Standing Committee.

**The President-Elect** notes that members must be given speaking rights by the President to speak in meetings of the Standing Committee.

**Mr Watson** clarifies that he was referring to members of the Standing Committee using meetings as an opportunity to make implicit comments in a hypothetical situation.

**The Treasurer** argues that it is possible that Standing Committee cannot be stopped from saying anything, but have to ensure they do not bring the Society into disrepute with what they do say, according to Rule 71(a)(ii)(5). (**Mr Watson** interjects by mentioning that he wasn't aware of the specific provisions to waive.) He mentions that the strict *in camera* requirements should be upheld regardless of potential controversial discussions within meeting of the Standing Committee, and explains that if something controversial happened it might not only be the press who want to comment, but members of the Standing Committee who would want to discuss it.

**Mr Watson** questions whether informal comments to friends in the student press are included.

**The President** responds by saying that only formal questions for comment fall under this amendment.

**The Bursar** argues that no one except the President should be making comments at all, to friends or otherwise.

**The Treasurer** explains that if he is ever asked anything, he asks whether they are enquiring simply as a friend or whether they are requesting comment.

**The Bursar** notes that you cannot trust people to be enquiring as friends when comments are made.

**The President** argues that being on the Union's Committee comes with a certain responsibility, and as a result a Committee member should not want to bring the Society into disrepute.

**The Bursar** mentions that as far as the staff are concerned, they only ever gives out factual, public information.

**Ms Athis** notes that this amendment would hold the President to account to ensure that they represent the Union's views, not simply their own.

**Mr Mediwaka** notes that it would encourage the President to think more about comments that were made, especially since comments in the past have been released quite quickly and without thought.

**The Librarian** says that the whole governing body should be able to comment, as **The Treasurer** noted.

**The President** points out that the process would be there to remind people to think about the comments that are released.

**The Returning Officer** notes that it should be easy to gain the majority required in Standing Committee if a controversial topic is raised.

The Treasurer moves that the Standing Committee amend Standing Order B1 as follows, inserting clause (j), noting the friendly amendment made by Mr Watson that it be phrased 'the most senior Press Officer'.

Seconded by **The President-Elect**

The motion passes *nem. con.*



**The Bursar** questions why Standing Order B1(c) specifies that information regarding speaker invitations should only be confidential during the vacation, and argues such information should be confidential at all times.

**The President** supports this by saying that this is especially important for when there is rearranging and cancellation, information shouldn't be given out.

The Treasurer moves that the Standing Committee amend Standing Order B1(c) by striking the words 'during the vacation', and including the word 'ongoing' between 'any' and 'speaker'.

Seconded by **Mr Watson**.

*nem. con.*

Questions to the Treasurer

There are no questions to the Treasurer.

**The Secretary**

Business of the Secretary

The Secretary has no business.

Questions to the Secretary

There are no questions to the Secretary.

**Mr Shanuk Mediwaka**

Business of Mr Mediwaka

Mr Mediwaka has no business.

Questions to Mr Mediwaka

There are no questions to Mr Mediwaka.

**Ms Genevieve Athis**

Business of Ms Athis

Ms Athis has no business.

Questions to Ms Athis

There are no questions to Ms Athis.

**Mr Adam Watson**

Business of Mr Watson

Mr Watson has no business.

Questions to Mr Watson

There are no questions to Mr Watson.

**Mr Charles Wang**

Business of Mr Wang

Mr Wang has no business.

Questions to Mr Wang

There are no questions to Mr Wang.

**Mr Charlie Cheesman**

Business of Mr Cheesman

Mr Cheesman has no business.

Questions to Mr Cheesman

There are no questions to Mr Cheesman.

**Ms Izzy Risino**

Business of Ms Risino

Ms Risino has no business.

Questions to Ms Risino

There are no questions to Ms Risino.

**Mr Chris Garner**

Business of Mr Garner

Mr Garner has no business.

Questions to Mr Garner

There are no questions to Mr Garner.

**The President-Elect**

Business

The President-Elect has no business.

## Questions

There are no questions to the President-Elect.

## **The Librarian-Elect**

### Business of the Librarian-Elect

The Librarian-Elect has no business.

### Questions to the Librarian-Elect

There are no questions to the Librarian-Elect.

## **The Treasurer-Elect**

### Business of the Treasurer-Elect

The Treasurer-Elect has no business.

### Questions to the Treasurer-Elect

There are no questions to the Treasurer-Elect.

## **The Ex-Officio**

### Business to the Ex-Officio

The Ex-Officio have no business.

### Questions to the Ex-Officio

There are no questions to the Ex-Officio.

## **The Senior Librarian**

### Business of the The Senior Librarian

The Senior Librarian has no business.

### Questions to the The Senior Librarian

There are questions to the The Senior Librarian.

## **The Senior Treasurer**

### Business of the The Senior Treasurer

The Senior Treasurer has no business.

### Questions to The Senior Treasurer

There are no questions to The Senior Treasurer.

### **The Bursar**

#### **Business of The Bursar**

The Bursar has no business.

#### **Questions to The Bursar**

There are no questions to The Bursar.

### **The Returning Officer**

#### **Business of The Returning Officer**

The Returning Officer has no business.

#### **Questions to The Returning Officer**

There are no questions to The Returning Officer.

### **The Chair of the Consultative Committee**

#### **Business of The Chair of the Consultative Committee**

The Chair of the Consultative Committee has no business.

#### **Questions to The Chair of the Consultative Committee**

There are no questions to The Chair of the Consultative Committee.

### **The Access Officers**

#### **Business of The Access Officers**

The Access Officers have no business.

#### **Questions to The Access Officers**

There are no questions to The Access Officers.

### **The Chair of the Debate Selection Committee**

#### **Business of The Chair of the Debate Selection Committee**

The Chair of the Debate Selection Committee has no business.

#### **Questions to The Chair of the Debate Selection Committee**

There are no questions to The Chair of the Debate Selection Committee.

### **Changes to the Composition of this Committee**

The changes to the composition of this Committee are in accordance with the results of the Michaelmas 2017 election.

### **Any Other Business**

### **Date of Next Meeting**

- TBC

The President closes this Ordinary Meeting of the Standing Committee at 16:39.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Molly Greenwood', written in a cursive style.

**Molly Greenwood**  
*St. Hilda's College*  
Secretary