

## THE OXFORD UNION SOCIETY

### REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER TO STANDING COMMITTEE

#### HILARY TERM MMVII

#### 1. Introduction

The Returning Officer is required by Standing Order D1(f) to 'present a short report on the conduct of his duties to Standing Committee at some point after the end of the electoral process but before the end of his term of office'. This document constitutes such a report, and includes in its appendices a breakdown of electoral expenditure in accordance with the further requirements of D1(f).

#### 2. Trinity Term MMVI Main Elections

2.1. The Society's main elections for Michaelmas Term 2006 were held on Friday of 7<sup>th</sup> Week, and passed without major incident. There were no uncontested posts. The results of the elections – also available in the Rough Minute Book – are attached as an appendix to this report. There were no Election Tribunals.

2.2. As ever, there were a number of minor issues which arose during the course of the election, and deserve fuller discussion:

2.2.1. Press coverage of the Society proved, again, to be deeply unsatisfactory. Clearly there is little the Society can do to affect the coverage it receives, however individual members are encouraged to exercise greater discretion in their dealings with the press, lest they fall foul of Rule 54(c)(ii), or incite an election tribunal. It was particularly disappointing that a Presidential candidate considered it appropriate to acquiesce in a paper feature, in which he was presented as "The Unionite", which was released on election day.

2.2.2. Candidates for Junior Office are entitled to an interview to verify claims made in their manifesto submission, under Rule 35(b)(xvi). Candidates who do not attend meetings, despite being given the warning required, and even acknowledging receipt of such warning by email, should consider themselves extremely lucky to be offered an alternative time.

2.2.3. There were 42 candidates in the election. Despite this, over 70 nomination packs were required. Priced at the Society's advertised rate of photocopying, this represents a cost of over £85, at least £30 of which ultimately proved fruitless.

2.2.4. Attendance at candidates' meetings reached a record low in this term. Given the general inexperience of the majority of candidates for all positions, and Secretary's Committee in particular, attendance should be considered a vital part of the electoral process for any committed candidate. I therefore suggest raising the fine imposed for missing this meeting to £20. I was willing to

waive attendance for nearly any reasonable attempt to inform me of an unavailability to attend, and it is thus extremely disappointing that 15 candidates were unable to either attend or offer an explanation in advance.

- 2.2.5. Candidates should pay special attention to Rule 33(a)(i)(17) on election day. Order in the poll room is a persistent problem, and I advise my successor to attack this more proactively. In particular, although Rule 35(f) safeguards members' rights to inform people of the way in which they have voted, it only protects this right outside of the poll room. As such, any such activity within the poll room should be considered liable to a fine of not more than £25, or in more serious cases, as a breach of Rule 35(a)(i)(1).
- 2.2.6. In a similar vein, any member, save electoral officials and poll clerks, who chooses to enter the poll room more than once on election day, should be aware that they invite a fine under Rule 35(f).
- 2.2.7. There was a deeply regrettable error made when transcribing the results from the spreadsheet to an announcement format. As a result it was necessary to inform a candidate that he had not in fact been elected to Secretary's Committee, as was initially announced. Clearly such an error was an unintentional mistake, and warrants no further suggestions to future Returning Officers, save to maintain all possible efforts to eliminate such mistakes.

### 2.3. Election takings and expenditure

- 2.3.1. I have appended a full breakdown of all electoral takings and expenditure to this report.
- 2.3.2. Every Returning Officer's Report, at this stage, contains a suggestion that election fees be raised slightly in order to help finance the expensive, but necessary, electoral process. Such suggestions inevitably fall on deaf, partial, ears. Nevertheless, I feel that this matter remains extremely important and so will add my small weight to the argument. Nomination fees are set in Standing Order D2 (a), and as such can be changed by a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> vote of standing committee, or private business motion. In recognition of the considerable inflation of cost which has occurred since the last change in nomination fees, I thus propose the following change to S.O. D2 –

(a) *Nomination fee*: The following sums shall be paid to the Society by any candidate in the Society's Elections when handing in his nomination form:

For the Secretary's Committee: £15;  
 For the Standing Committee: £20;  
 For any Office save that of President-Elect: £35.00;  
 For the Office of President-Elect: £45.00.

In the most recent election, such a change would have generated an extra £125 for the Society, only costing each committee candidate a further £2.50, and £5 for candidates for Junior Office. It should also be noted that such changes keep the real price level (adjusted for inflation) below the level set at the last change to nomination fees.

### 3. Disciplinary Matters

- 3.1. I have discharged my disciplinary duties to the best of my ability. For the most part, this has consisted in bringing allegations of minor offences before Junior Disciplinary Committees.
- 3.2. During my time as Returning Officer, I have had to handle only one complaint which required the summoning of a Senior Disciplinary Committee.
  - 3.2.1. The Senior Disciplinary Committee featured the following members: Mr Matthew Taylor, St Benet's Hall, Ex-Returning Officer; Mr William Marshall, Hertford, Ex-Returning Officer; and, Mr Alan Bernard Hughes, Trinity, Ex-Standing Committee. I am grateful to all three of them for agreeing to sit on the Committee.
  - 3.2.2. The report issued by the Senior Disciplinary Committee was made available in accordance with Rule 71, and a copy is available for consultation in the Rough Minute Book. I am in the process of enacting their recommendations at the time of writing.
  - 3.2.3. Despite the amount of labour involved on all sides, total costs were kept to a minimum by the Committee, which expressed its concern to save the Society undue expenditure. At the time of writing, expenses claims have – remarkably – come to a total of under £10 (the cost of 3 coffees; itself only an expenditure as the bar was closed).
- 3.3.
  - 3.3.1. Having organised an SDC, and been made aware of quite how difficult it is to summon a panel of 3 long standing members, I suggest the Society takes even greater pains to maintain contact with experienced members who may be interested in serving on a disciplinary committee in the future. The membership database fulfils this requirement to an extent, but typically provides contact details for the parents of long standing members, at best. Given the lack of other sources of contact details, Returning Officers are routinely required to test the phone books of long standing resident members in order to summon panels. Such a situation relies far too much on the good will of some members, and also gives such members undue influence in the disciplinary process.

### 4. Other Elections

Elections for the position of Chairman of Consultative Committee, as well as for those posts vacant on Finance Committee and Wines and Spirits Committee, were held. In the case of Finance and Wines and Spirits Committee, there were insufficient applicants within the first deadline, and so supplementary elections are still being carried out, *mutatis mutandis*.

## **5. Appointment of Deputy Returning Officers**

There were only 12 applicants for the position of Deputy Returning Officer, and so all were initially appointed by Standing Committee, in addition to 2 further names, bringing the total to the required 14.

## **6. Other Matters**

### **6.1 OPBM Reports**

Eighteen members required to produce OPBM reports failed to do so by the required deadline. The vast majority of these were appointed officials, and in such cases it is merely disappointing that they were not appropriately warned of such requirements on appointment. Given that the appointment of Special Advisors and Guest Liaison Officers has become so routine, it is perhaps worth investigating the codification of these positions, with clearly delineated responsibilities and obligations. More worrying were the 4 OPBM reports received late by members of Standing Committee, including the President. Such reports represent an important method of ensuring accountability of officials in the Society. Indeed, this section of the Returning Officer's report has become largely standard, quickly ignored with the same mistakes to be made the following term. The five days notice of OPBM reports being required is extremely generous, as such the persistent deadline missing is hard to excuse. As such I concur with my predecessor, and suggest the fine for late submission be raised to £30, hopefully with the result that no fines need be levied.

## **7. Interpretations**

I have had cause to issue one formal interpretation of the Rules during my time as Returning Officer:

### **Regarding Rule 32(a)(v)-**

The Rule requires the President pass on objections to Deputy Returning Officers within 96 hours of the notification of their ratification by standing committee, and then allows Deputy Returning Officers to respond to the objections within 144 hours of said notification. The primary principle involved is thus that each stage is given 48 hours, and this is especially important in the case of responses to objections. Thus, in the event of the President failing to meet the initial deadline, Deputy Returning Officers should be given 48 hours from the time of receipt of objections to present their response, in order that they are not penalised by the President's error.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

In my time as Returning Officer I have become indebted to a number of individuals, and in particular, the hardworking Miss Madeleine Rudge, who gave generously of her time in the lead up to the election, and ably managed the poll room whilst I was detained in a tutorial. As ever the Union's stock of Ex-Returning Officers proved vital to almost every aspect of my duties, and in this respect I must reserve special thanks for Mr Francis Murphy.

Messrs Johnson and Grey provided excellent advice with regards disciplinary proceedings, whilst Mr Charlie Steel was invaluable as the count's S.T.V. expert. The Society's Deputy Returning Officers all acquitted themselves admirably, and so I must thank Mr Timothy Stafford, Mr James Drey, Mr Frank Hardee, Mr Jack Gunning, Mr Guy Levin, Mr Greg Stevens, Mr Cameron Russell, Mr Thomas Smith, Mr Brad Johnson, Mr Daniel Wilson and Mr Peter Surr. In addition, numerous Returning Officer's Assistants were of great help, and so I would like to thank Mr Alex Stafford, Mr Alex Priest, Miss Jo Joyce, Mr Tim Ayles, Mr Ed Mayne, Mr Mark Hamid, Mr Craig Aston and Mr Timothy Driscal.

Finally, I would like to express thanks to the Senior Officers and the Society's staff. In particular, the Senior Treasurer, the Steward, the Bursar, and Helen, who have all shown remarkable patience, and proven excellent sources of advice.

## 9. Conclusion

I have greatly enjoyed serving as Returning Officer of the Society, and will remain as a Deputy Returning Officer in order to assist my successor when he or she emerges from the conclave due to take place on Tuesday of 3<sup>rd</sup> Week. I am grateful to all those who have made this last term a pleasant experience.

Adam J. Marsh  
*Trinity College*  
**Returning Officer**

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2007 AD

**Appendix A: Results of the Society's Main Election Michaelmas Term MMVI****President** (for Trinity Term 2007)

- Elected: Alex Just 909 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Runner-Up: Will Blair 788 1<sup>st</sup> preferences

**Librarian** (for Hilary Term 2007)

- Elected: Luke Tryl 801 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Runner-Up: Matt Lacey 687 1<sup>st</sup> preferences

**Treasurer** (for Trinity Term 2007)

- Elected: Smruti Sriram 799 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Runner-Up: Ben Tansey 781 1<sup>st</sup> preferences

**Secretary** (for Trinity Term 2007)

- Elected: Emily Partington 886 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Runner-Up: Liliana Worth 586 1<sup>st</sup> preferences

**Standing Committee** for Hilary Term 2007:

- Elected 1<sup>st</sup>: Krishna Omkar 219 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Elected 2<sup>nd</sup>: Clare Hennessy 188 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Elected 3<sup>rd</sup>: Devika Khopkar 159 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Elected 4<sup>th</sup>: Dean Robson 154 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Elected 5<sup>th</sup>: Beccy Anderson 141 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- *Runner Up: Jessie Lund* 147 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Excluded 5<sup>th</sup>: Ian Wellby 151 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Excluded 4<sup>th</sup>: Mandy Tanner 144 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Excluded 3<sup>rd</sup>: Eube McKaiser 108 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Excluded 2<sup>nd</sup>: Sumaer Grewal 110 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Excluded 1<sup>st</sup>: Paul Kaliszewski 105 1<sup>st</sup> preferences

**Secretary's Committee** for Hilary Term 2007:

- Elected 1<sup>st</sup>: Beth Finch 125 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Elected 2<sup>nd</sup>: Livi Toye 119 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Elected 3<sup>rd</sup>: Riya Khilnani 94 1<sup>st</sup> preferences
- Elected 4<sup>th</sup>: Lindsay Bennett 94 1<sup>st</sup> preferences

• Elected 5 <sup>th</sup> : Guagua Bo	93 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Elected 6 <sup>th</sup> : Arthur Worsley	82 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Elected 7 <sup>th</sup> : Josh Roche	79 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Elected 8 <sup>th</sup> : Charlie Holt	66 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Elected 9 <sup>th</sup> : Manaas Jain	56 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• <i>Runner-Up: Lewis Turner</i>	74 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 13 <sup>th</sup> : Ben Hemingway	65 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 12 <sup>th</sup> : Edward Waldegrave	61 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 11 <sup>th</sup> : Daniel Susskind	59 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 10 <sup>th</sup> : Kitsom Symes	64 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 9 <sup>th</sup> : Mohammed Ahmed	61 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 8 <sup>th</sup> : Alex Canfor-Dumas	62 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 7 <sup>th</sup> : Jade O'Brien	49 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 6 <sup>th</sup> : Nick Waddell	48 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 5 <sup>th</sup> : Adam Ben-Yousef	48 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 4 <sup>th</sup> : Katie Parry	43 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 3 <sup>rd</sup> : Adam Barnes	47 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Simon Ralph	45 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences
• Excluded 1 <sup>st</sup> : Suzanne Ashman	40 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences

Adam J. Marsh  
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Returning Officer

**Appendix B: Returning Officer's Election Account – Trinity Term MMVI****EXPENDITURE**

Food and Drink	£183.03
Stationery	£88.24
Printing of Election Material	£1014.00
Miscellaneous Election Expenses	£42.34
SDC Expenses	£5.20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,332.81</b>

**INCOME**

Secretary's Committee Nominations	(£12.50)	£287.50
Standing Committee Nominations	(£17.50)	£192.50
Secretary Nominations	(£30)	£60
Treasurer-elect Nominations	(£30)	£60
Librarian Nominations	(£30)	£60
President-elect Nominations	(£40)	£80
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£740</b>

**GRAND TOTAL (expenditure – income):      £592.81**

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