

THE OXFORD UNION SOCIETY

REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER TO STANDING COMMITTEE

MICHAELMAS TERM MMVI

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 Trinity Term 2006 were held on Friday of 7th 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. Rule 35 clearly lays out the process for the submission and scrutiny of candidate manifestos and photographs. Manifesto content proved a greater source of contention than usual in the Trinity elections, and for this reason I think it would be helpful to make a few points:

2.2.1. The proper procedure for objections is that laid out in Rule 35(b). Despite this being pointed out on a number of occasions, some members appeared to think it acceptable to register verbal objections after all deadlines had passed. For future reference: telephonic lobbying by members who have failed to register objections in the manner set out by the Rules is unlikely to elicit a warm response from the Returning Officer.

2.2.2. Press coverage of the Society in the run-up to the elections was extremely unsatisfactory. While it is usual for the student press to attempt to extract some controversy from the main elections, the coverage in Trinity was particularly poor. Although there is little the Society can do to improve Oxford's student journalism, members are reminded of the Rules governing communications with the press – in particular, Rule 54(c)(ii).

2.2.3. Leniency was shown where possible with respect to those candidates who had difficulty submitting their manifestos and/or photographs in a manner consistent with the Rules' requirements. Nonetheless, candidates should not expect the Returning Officer to have time to alter photographs so as to ensure their compliance. Potential candidates in future elections are encouraged to acquaint themselves with Rule 35(e)(i).

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. Given the costs involved in running an election, it would perhaps be wise to consider raising the current nomination fees set out in Standing Order D2(a). Minor increases in fees for all posts would help offset the considerable – but necessary – electoral costs.

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 two complaints which required the attention of a Senior Disciplinary Committee. Both complaints were dealt with by the same Senior Disciplinary Committee, although it was ultimately necessary for the Committee to meet on two separate dates – 24th June 2006, and 7th October 2006.
 - 3.2.1. The Senior Disciplinary Committee originally featured the following members: Ms Katherine Preiskel, Merton, Ex-Librarian; Mr Leofranc Holford-Strevens, Christ Church, Ex-Standing Committee; and, Mr Alan Bernard Hughes, Trinity, Ex-Standing Committee. I am grateful to all three of them for agreeing to sit on the Committee, and for taking the time to issue two procedural orders pertaining to the complaints they were asked to consider.
 - 3.2.2. Due to unavoidable commitments, Ms Preiskel and Mr Hughes became unavailable after the Committee had been called. Cllr Sheridan Westlake, Brasenose & St Cross, Ex-CCC, Ex-Returning Officer, and Mr Graeme Halkerston, Lady Margaret Hall, Ex-President, stepped into the breach, with the latter consenting to act as Chairman. I am extremely grateful to both of them, as well as to Mr Holford-Strevens, for persisting through the course of what proved to be a very demanding process.
 - 3.2.3. The reports issued by the Senior Disciplinary Committee with respect to both complaints have been made available in accordance with the Committee's published wishes, and copies are available for consultation in the Rough Minute Book. I am in the process of enacting their recommendations at the time of writing.
 - 3.2.4. 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.

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 successfully held.

5. Appointment of Deputy Returning Officers

The new procedure for the appointment of Deputy Returning Officers – set out in Rule 32 – was tested for the first time. Notwithstanding the rather confused procedure specified by the Rule in its present form, the process went smoothly. No objections were registered with respect to any of the candidates, and it was only necessary for Standing Committee to add one name for the desired list of fourteen to be achieved.

6. Other Matters

6.1. The Returning Officer's Cupboard

During my term as Returning Officer, my cupboard was – for reasons which remain unknown – twice forced open. Although no theft was immediately apparent, it should be obvious that this kind of behaviour is against the Rules. I would encourage my successor to investigate more effective locking mechanisms for the cupboard, and remind members that 'theft of or deliberate damage to the Society's property' is explicitly defined as an offence under Rule 71(a)(i)(4). Anyone found engaging in such behaviour should be subjected to terrible penalties.

6.2. OPBM Reports

Four members of Standing Committee failed to submit valid OPBM reports within the advertised deadline. This was extremely disappointing, since such reports are an important part of ensuring accountability to the membership. Although all four offenders were fined, this negligence appears to be a recurring theme in Returning Officers' reports and so I recommend that Standing Order D1(a) be altered, and the current £10 fine replaced by a more robust £30.

6.3. Copies of the Rules

On several occasions I have – as required of me by Rule 32(e)(ii) – produced copies of the Rules, Standing Orders and Special Schedules of the Society. Almost without fail, these have disappeared within days of their being produced. This includes those copies clearly marked as restricted to the General Office. As well as generating an undue amount of work for the Returning Officer, this thievery deprives members of one of the means by which to consult the Rules of the Society. Absent the option of imposing the penalty for theft suggested by sharia law, I would encourage future Returning Officers to treat such acts as offences under Rule 71(a)(i)(4).

7. Interpretations

I have had cause to issue two formal interpretations of the Rules during my time as Returning Officer. These read as follows:

7.1. *Changes in Senior Disciplinary Committee composition*

The clause of Rule 71(g) referring to situations in which the Returning Officer is “unable to find sufficient members of the Shortlist who are willing and able to serve” shall also be considered to apply to those situations in which the Returning Officer is informed by members of a validly-constituted Senior Disciplinary Committee that they are no longer able to serve. So long as all members of the committee as originally constituted approve the measure, the places of those no longer able to serve shall be taken by persons on the new shortlist. The committee shall in all respects – save its membership – be considered the same as that originally summoned in accordance with Rule 71(d)(i).

7.2. *The System of “Random Selection” of Rule 32*

The system of “random selection” of applications for Deputy Returning Officer positions shall consist in the following, to take place in the presence of the Returning Officer and at least one of his Deputies at a meeting of Consultative Committee: after having been publicly written on separate pieces of paper of similar size, the names of those eligible shall be placed into a hat or similar receptacle (to be determined by the Returning Officer), shaken, and then removed – by the Returning Officer or one of his Deputies – until all available positions have been filled.

8. Acknowledgements

I would like to express special thanks to the hard-working, long-suffering Mr Adam Marsh, Deputy Returning Officer, and to the ever-helpful Mr Andrew Grey, Ex-Chairman of Consultative Committee, Ex-Library Committee, Ex-Finance Committee, Ex-Wines and Spirits Committee, Ex-Returning Officer, Former Acting President. I am also extremely grateful to Mr Daniel Johnson, Ex-Chairman of Consultative Committee, Ex-Returning Officer, Miss Joanne Joyce, Ex-Standing Committee, Ex-Returning Officer, and Mr Robert Vance, Deputy Returning Officer.

Abandoning the practice of listing all titles, I would also like to thank the following Deputy Returning Officers: Mr Alexander Young, Mr Edward Mayne, Mr Alexander Stafford, Mr Frank Hardee, Mr Max Lewis, Mr James Dray, Mr Thomas Shinner, Miss Madeleine Rudge, and Miss Camilla Dolan. Also of great help were the following Returning Officer’s Assistants: Mr Christopher Farmer, Mr Richard Tydeman, Mr Timothy Ayles, Mr Daniel Hayward, Mr Ollie Munn, Mr Dean Robson, and Mr Thomas Nunn. Mr Charlie Steel also deserves thanks for his invaluable help at a crucial moment.

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 3rd Week. I am grateful to all those who have made this last term a pleasant experience.

Francis L. Murphy
Trinity College
Returning Officer

Sunday 22nd October 2006 AD

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

- Elected: Theo Roos 612 1st preferences
- Runner-Up: Ed Mason 489 1st preferences
- Excluded 1st: Bim Afolami 478 1st preferences

Librarian (for Michaelmas Term 2006)

- Elected: Kate Spooner 731 1st preferences
- Runner-Up: Nabeel Bhanji 635 1st preferences

Treasurer (for Hilary Term 2007)

- Elected: Charlotte Fischer 690 1st preferences
- Runner-Up: Lana Khabarova 648 1st preferences

Secretary (for Michaelmas Term 2006)

- Elected: Will Blair 716 1st preferences
- Runner-Up: Claire Coutinho 607 1st preferences

Standing Committee for Michaelmas Term 2006:

- **Elected 1st: Luke Tryl** 248 1st preferences
- **Elected 2nd: Emily Partington** 158 1st preferences
- **Elected 3rd: Emmert Roberts** 157 1st preferences
- **Elected 4th: Sabina Puri** 152 1st preferences
- **Elected 5th: Ben Tansey** 151 1st preferences
- *Runner-Up: Matt Lacey* 138 1st preferences
- Excluded 4th: Abishek Advani 127 1st preferences
- Excluded 3rd: Chloe Mattison 101 1st preferences
- Excluded 2nd: Simon Latham 100 1st preferences
- Excluded 1st: Melissa Boulter 95 1st preferences

Secretary's Committee for Michaelmas Term 2006:

• Elected 1 st : Sourav Choudhury	139 1 st preferences
• Elected 2 nd : Luci Ingram	125 1 st preferences
• Elected 3 rd : Beccy Anderson	119 1 st preferences
• Elected 4 th : Jac Armstrong	102 1 st preferences
• Elected 5 th : Sam Ashton	97 1 st preferences
• Elected 6 th : Jakub Figurski	90 1 st preferences
• Elected 7 th : Ian Wellby	78 1 st preferences
• Elected 8 th : Kat Armitage	76 1 st preferences
• Elected 9 th : Sumaer Grewal	70 1 st preferences
• <i>Runner-Up: Hannah Glover</i>	80 1 st preferences
• Excluded 7 th : Jerome Uzoziri	71 1 st preferences
• Excluded 6 th : Devika Khopkar	69 1 st preferences
• Excluded 5 th : Kirandeep Cheema	62 1 st preferences
• Excluded 4 th : Emer Cassidy	61 1 st preferences
• Excluded 3 rd : Julianna Barnaby	56 1 st preferences
• Excluded 2 nd : Gareth Lond	53 1 st preferences
• Excluded 1 st : Cathy Thomas	40 1 st preferences

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2Appendix B: Returning Officer's Election Account – Trinity Term MMVI**EXPENDITURE**

Food and Drink	£256.15
Stationery	£112.49
Printing of Election Material	£964
Miscellaneous Election Expenses	£220.91
TOTAL	£1,553.55

INCOME

Secretary's Committee Nominations (£12.50)	£212.50
Standing Committee Nominations (£17.50)	£175
Secretary Nominations (£30)	£60
Treasurer-elect Nominations (£30)	£60
Librarian Nominations (£30)	£60
President-elect Nominations (£40)	£120
TOTAL	£687.50

GRAND TOTAL (expenditure – income): £866.05

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