The Constitution and Rules of The University of Exeter Debating Society

Last amended on: 5th March 2024

Amendment approved by a majority of the committee on: 5th March 2024

Amendment ratified by the Student’s Guild on: 7th March 2024

**1. Article 1** – Establishment of the Society.

1.1. The society shall be called ‘The University of Exeter Debating Society’, commonly

referred to as ‘The Debating Society’ or ‘DebSoc’ and hereafter referred to as ‘the

society’.

1.2. The society shall be registered with the University of Exeter Guild of Students

(hereafter ‘the Guild’) and is subservient to all rules and bylaws of the Guild.

1.3. This Constitution may be amended by a simple majority vote of the society’s

committee or a quorum of an Annual or Extraordinary General Meeting of the

society, as per Article 7 of this document. A secure petition of at least 25% of the

membership of the society or 40 of the society’s members, whichever is fewer, can

reverse any change made by the Committee to this constitution.

1.4. The society shall remain impartial on social and political issues.

2. **Article 2** – The Aims and Objectives of the society.

2.1. **Critical engagement with public discourse**. The society shall strive to ensure that

members have the ability engage with notable intellectual and public figures on their

area of expertise; as well as having the opportunity to converse with them.

2.2. **Exposure to a diversity of thought**. The society shall ensure that members are able

to argue for what they are passionate about; moreover, the society should act as a

central hub for criticism and argument on campus.

2.3. **Strong social engagement**. The society shall provide various and regular socials so

that the society offers everything needed to have a full university experience.

2.4. **Refinement of rhetorical ability**. The society shall facilitate the development of the

vital skills and confidence to thrive in the modern world and workplace.

2.5. **A broader philosophical, legal, and political education**. The society shall

encourage greater understanding of the civic and philosophical ideas which underpin

modern social discourse; so that members can potently navigate and engage with

anything concerning the human experience.

2.6. **Attendance at debating competitions**. The society shall ensure that members are

able to attend competitions regularly for both their own personal enjoyment and to

provide them with evidence of their skills to assist in their post-graduate employment

prospects.

3. **Article 3** – Membership

3.1. Full membership of the society shall be open to all student members of the Guild, in

accordance with the rules and bylaws of the Guild. All University of Exeter students

are eligible for Full Membership; this includes students on placement, studying

abroad, distance learners, and all University of Exeter students on Truro and Penryn

Campus.

3.2. Associate membership of the society shall be open to all associate members of the

Guild, in accordance with the rules and bylaws of the Guild.

3.3. All members must register for the society and pay a membership fee. The

membership fee will be set annually by the committee of the society.

3.4. The Guild will maintain and administer the membership records of the society.

3.5. The society's membership resets annually on the last day of July.

4. **Article 4** – The Committee

4.1. The society shall have a committee consisting of officers in the following mandatory

positions. These members shall be selected by election, as per the rules established

within Article 6 of this constitution.

4.1.1. President.

4.1.2. Treasurer.

4.1.3. Vice President.

4.2. The committee shall also be formed of officers in the following additional positions.

These members shall be selected by election, as per the rules established within

Article 6 of this constitution.

4.2.1. Intervarsity Convener.

4.2.2. Training Officer.

4.2.3. Competitions Officer.

4.2.4. Chairperson.

4.2.5. Deputy Chairperson.

4.2.6. Speaker Secretary.

4.2.7. Media Officer.

4.2.8. Publicity Officer.

4.2.9. Technical Officer.

4.2.10. Social Secretary.

4.2.11. Welfare Secretary

4.2.12. IV Secretary.

4.2.13. Freshers Representative.

4.3. All Committee Members must be Members of the Society. A person may only hold

one position on the Society's Committee. Up to two people may jointly nominate

themselves for, and hold, one Committee position; they shall share one vote on

Committee, though resignation or removal of one does not remove the other.

4.4. A Committee Member may resign their position by informing the President (or

another Committee Member if the individual resigning is the President) and notifying

the Guild's Activities Office.

4.5. All Committee Members are expected to fulfil their duties, as outlined in Article 5,

and to regularly attend society events and committee meetings. If they cannot fulfil

this obligation they are expected to resign.

4.6. All committee members shall be required to attend all training mandated by the

Guild.

4.7. All committee members shall complete the Student Committee Agreement, as

mandated by the Guild.

4.8. Any new roles to the committee of the society can only be added through the means

of a constitutional amendment, as stipulated in Section 1.3. of this constitution.

4.9. The committee shall meet regularly.

4.10. The committee shall manage all aspects of the society’s administration and

activity. The committee shall act, at all times, in the best interest of the members of

the society, with regard to the rules and regulations of the Guild.

4.11. The Council of Robes:

4.11.1. From this point onwards, all Presidents of the society will gain a seat on the “Council of Robes”.

4.11.2. This council is completely distinct from the society, and has absolutely no power, but is recognised by the Society.

4.11.3. This council can be contacted via email and can be consulted on all decisions related to “tomfoolery, chicanery and general buffoonery”.

4.11.4. Please inform the council if the “redacted one” escapes.

4.11.5. Let's see if activities actually read this

5. **Article 5** – Roles and Responsibilities of Committee Members.

5.1. The President:

5.1.1. Shall be ultimately responsible for the Society, its activity, and its

development;

5.1.2. Shall chair General Meetings of the Society and Society Committee Meetings (unless absent, when the President can delegate another to do so);

5.1.3. Shall be responsible for managing the Society’s relationship with the Guild and any external organisations and ensuring that the Society and its Members are represented in any relevant Guild processes;

5.1.4. Shall ensure the Society is operating in line with the Guild’s governing documents and compliance policies and processes; and,

5.1.5. Shall have overall responsibility for the promotion and development for the society, including by providing a weekly communication to the membership and leading the organistion of freshers week.

5.2. The Treasurer:

5.2.1. Shall be responsible for the financial operations of the Society, acting as both the Accountant and Chief Financial Officer;

5.2.2. Shall set and oversee the Society’s annual budget and present a financial report to all members at the annual General Meeting;

5.2.3. Shall aim to ensure that the Society is not running a deficit at any time;

5.2.4. Shall be responsible for Society's funding, grant and sponsorship applications;

5.2.5. Shall ensure that income, expenses and other outgoing payments are authorised in a timely manner; and,

5.2.6. Shall ensure that fundraising is organised where appropriate.

5.3. Vice President:

5.3.1. Shall deputise for the President, providing leadership and direction to the

other Committee roles where required;

5.3.2. Shall be responsible for booking any Guild or university rooms for the society;

5.3.3. Shall be responsible for keeping minutes of the meetings of the committee, and of general meetings of the society

5.3.4. Shall keep an up-to-date inventory of equipment owned by the society;

5.3.5. Shall be responsible be any risk assessments done by the society not assigned to others; and,

5.3.6. Shall support the other Committee roles to deliver their remit, by

providing oversight of the day-to-day operation of the committee and supporting them with administrative or bureaucratic responsibilities.

5.4. Welfare Secretary:

5.4.1. Shall be responsible for supporting the President with the welfare of The members of the society;

5.4.2. Shall attend welfare training provided by the Guild and be responsible for organising welfare training for other committee members;

5.4.3 Shall support the Intervarsity team with enforcement of the society’s equity policy; and, support the Social Secretaries with maintaining decorum at social events.

5.5. Chairperson:

5.5.1. Shall be responsible for organising frequent ‘show debates’ during Term Time, these debates shall consist of a panel of speakers judged to have expertise in the topic or authority to speak on said topic; may also organise individual speaker addresses, discussion panels or similar audience focused events;

5.5.2. Shall have a responsibility to ensure panels are balanced with regard to viewpoint;

5.5.3. Shall be responsible for ensuring the values of the society are upheld in these show debates;

5.5.4. Shall select the motions (topics) for debate, their choices should be presented to the committee who shall be given the opportunity to voice concerns. If a simple majority of the committee votes that they have concerns then a new motion shall be chosen and presented;

5.5.5 Shall be responsible for any risk assessments required for external speaker events;

5.5.6. Shall chair and moderate the debate, remaining personally impartial and ensuring that decorum and equity is maintained by all parties; and,

5.5.7. Shall ensure that the audience be given the opportunity to put questions to speakers at debates.

5.6. Deputy Chairperson(s):

5.6.1 Shall be responsible alongside the Chairs for booking speakers for show debates and other events;

5.6.2. Shall otherwise support the Chais with the organisation and execution of public show debates and other events, by suggesting motions for debate, and assisting with risk assessments and other organisational aspects; and,

5.9.2. Shall deputise for the Chair, including by moderating debates if required, remaining personally impartial and ensuring that decorum and equity is maintained by all parties.

5.7. Intervarsity Convener:

5.7.1. Shall have responsibility for organising and facilitating debating competitions held by the society including both internal competitions and those attended by other debating societies;

5.7.2. Shall ensure, alongside the Training and Competitions Officer, that the society retains a strong image on the competition circuit;

5.7.3. Shall support other members of the IV team to ensure the Society’s Intervarsity program provides good value for members;

5.7.4. Shall work with the Welfare Secretary to make and enforce an equity policy at competitions to prevent equity issues from arising; and,

5.7.5. Shall take the lead in running any additional workshops, e.g. pre-competition mid-week workshops, coordinating with other IV team members to do so.

5.8. Training Officer:

5.8.1. Shall ensure that the society provides an exemplary competitive debate programme by providing quality training through frequent workshops;

5.8.2. Shall provide impartial and sound judgement in giving feedback to speakers, wings and chairs;

5.8.3 Shall support other members of the IV team to ensure the Society’s Intervarsity program provides good value for members; and,

5.8.4. Shall work with the Competitions Officer and Intervarsity Convener to ensure that the training programme reflects the needs of the society’s competitions team.

5.9. Competitions Officer:

5.9.1. Shall ensure that the society maintains a strong presence on the competitive debate circuit by ensuring the society’s attendance at a wide variety of competitions;

5.9.2. Shall ensure that every member who wishes has a chance of competing (by speaking or judging) at a debate competition;

5.9.3. Shall ensure that the selection of teams and judges for competitions is based on merit;

5.9.4. Shall work with the Competitions Officer and Intervarsity Coordinator to ensure that the competitions attended reflect the ability of the current competitive debate team; and,

5.9.5. Shall support other members of the IV team to ensure the Society’s Intervarsity program provides good value for members;

5.10. Publicity Officer:

5.10.1. Shall ensure that society events are publicised in a timely manner;

5.10.2. Shall be responsible for the maintenance of any social media pages and other outlets related to the society (bar YouTube) including answering messages when appropriate; and,

5.10.3. Shall create publicity materials for all events that the society runs.

5.11 Media Officer

5.11.1 Shall deputise for the Publicity Officer in creating event publicity when personal circumstances prevent them from doing so;

5.11.2. Shall be responsible for the creation of physical promotional material, including for freshers week;

5.11.3. Shall be responsible for maintaining and updating the society’s website;

5.11.4. Shall be responsible for the creation and sale of society merchandise (commonly referred to as stash); and,

5.11.4. Shall be responsible for pursuing additional media and marketing opportunities.

5.12 Technical Officer

5.12.1. Shall be responsible for the maintenance and safeguarding of the society’s recording equipment;

5.12.2. Shall be responsible for the recording of Friday show debates and other speaker events as well as recording other videos as needed;

5.12.3. Shall be responsible for the prompt editing and uploading of said recordings, and

5.12.4 Shall be responsible for the maintenance and moderation of the YouTube channel, including responding to comments when appropriate.

5.13. Social Secretary(/ies):

5.13.1. Shall be responsible for organising various social events for the society,

which should be varied and may be debating related or not; and,

5.13.2. Shall be responsible for ensuring members remain safe and well during

social events.

5.14. Speaker Secretary(ies):

5.14.1. Shall be responsible for supporting the Chairperson(s) with the

organisation and execution of public (‘Show Debates’), by suggesting

motions for debate, booking speakers, and assisting with Risk Assessments

and other organisational aspects.

5.15. Intervarsity Secretary:

5.15.1. Shall be responsible for supporting the Intervarsity Captains with the

running of the society’s intervarsity programme, such as by providing

secretarial support for workshops and competitions.

5.16. Freshers’ Representative:

5.16.1. Shall be the representative of the first year and new society members on

Committee;

5.16.2. May be assigned other responsibilities by the committee in order

To help them prepare for further elected committee roles.

6. **Article 6** - Elections.

6.1. The society must hold elections, in which our members elect the group's committee

to a twelve (12) month term of office, at least once a year. By-elections may be held

throughout the year, when required, to fill any vacant positions for the remainder of

the year.

6.2. To run for election, an individual must be a student member of the society at the time

of the election and reasonably expect to be one when the term of office begins.

Associate members cannot run for election to the society's committee.

6.3. No committee members shall serve for longer than one year without re-election.

6.4. All, and only, current members of the Society (as established in Article 2) can vote in

its elections.

6.5. All elections shall be run using a voting system approved by the Guild, who are

also responsible for certifying the results.

6.6. All elections in an academic year are to be run by a Returning Officer, which will be

appointed by the Guild at the commencement of the new committee taking office.

Unless they plan to run for re-election, this will usually be the President.

6.7. For avoidance of doubt, the Returning Officer shall decide which positions should be

run at any given election. The Returning Officers decision on this matter must be

presented to the committee at least two weeks before voting opens in an election, the Returning

Officers decision can be overturned by a majority (50% plus one) of the committee.

Should a majority of the committee object, the Returning Officer should present a

new option to the committee within twenty four (24) hours.

6.8. The Returning Officer must run the election in a fair and impartial manner, within the

rules and regulations set out by the Guild. The Returning Officer should set out

Guidelines for the conduct of the election at the commencement of the election

period.

6.9. The Returning Officer must give all members notice of the election no later than two

weeks prior to opening of voting.

7. **Article 7** - Vote of No Confidence:

7.1. The society’s membership can remove an individual from the committee bypassing a

Vote of No Confidence.

7.2. Before a Vote of No Confidence may take place, it must be agreed to by either one

third (1/3) of the Society’s Committee, or through a secure petition of 25% or 40 of the

society's members (whichever is fewer) submitted to the Guild.

7.3. Before a Vote of No Confidence may take place, the Guild must be content that informal

resolutions have been attempted and that they cause of any directly relevant issues is not

due to any reasons that may be protected by law.

7.4. A Vote of No Confidence must be facilitated by the Guild.

7.5. A Vote of No Confidence shall pass by a simple majority of those members of the society

who cast a vote during a period decided by the Guild. If the Vote of No Confidence

passes, the Committee position is vacated and, if appropriate, a by-election held.

7.6. Should a Vote of No Confidence fail, the committee member in question cannot be

subjected to another Vote of No Confidence in that academic term.

8. **Article 8** - Meetings of the Society.

8.1. Committee Meetings:

8.1.1. The committee shall hold regular meetings.

8.1.2. Quoracy of Committee meetings shall be 50% of the committee plus one.

8.1.3. Any member of the society is entitled to attend any committee meeting,

unless it is a closed meeting

8.2. Annual General Meeting:

8.2.1. The society shall hold an AGM before the end of Term 3, during which the

following will take place:

8.2.1.1. Each committee member will deliver an outgoing report of the year;

8.2.1.2. The treasurer will present a report of the financial account; and,

8.2.1.3. Hustings for an upcoming election may be held.

8.2.2. All members must be given at least two weeks’ notice of this meeting.

8.3 Extraordinary General Meetings:

8.3.1 An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the may be requested by one third of the

committee or a secure petition of at least 25% of the membership of the society or 40 of the

society’s members, whichever is fewer.

8.3.2 There must be a notice period of at least 24 hours before the EGM and all members of the

society must be informed.

8.3.3 The Quoracy of an AGM or an EGM will be a simple majority of those present.

8.3.4 Accurate minutes must be kept of these meetings.

9. **Article 9** - Internal Speaker Approvals.

9.1. When deciding which speakers to invite to a show debate, the Chairperson(s) must

consider both the policies of the Guild and the law.

9.2. The Chairperson must consult on all potential invitations with the President of the society

prior to invitation, the President then has the authority to block the invitation of that

speaker.

9.3. When deciding on who to approve, the President will consider both the society’s

commitment to the advancement of debate and discourse and the society’s obligation to

the welfare of its members.

**Appendix A**- A Piece of Friendly Advice to Committee Members

Hello, it's us, the ghostly voice of your predecessors. If you’re reading this it either means you are a committed enough member of Debsoc to have looked this up on your own initiative (in which case thank you) or you have been sent this by the current President in advance of a long committee meeting about constitution changes and elections (in which case commiserations).

Either way, we don’t want to take up too much of this document telling stories or sharing advice. If you think that would be helpful or have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to previous Presidents (or other committee members), we are always happy to help. But here we really just want to give one fairly simple and universal message.

Don’t stress, you are doing great.

If when reading this you already feel that, brilliant. You should feel that way, you are doing an incredibly difficult job for relatively little reward. But if you aren’t feeling great or know another committee member who isn’t this message is for you.

It might be that your membership or attendance is down, an event hasn’t been organised or you are arguing with a fellow committee member. It might even be that you’ve ended up in Exeposé (inevitably with Debsoc, not for good reasons), your annual elections have gotten weirdly serious or protesters have shown up at your show debate. In any of these cases, you might be feeling anxious, angry, embarrassed, scared or all of the above. If this is you, we’d like to remind you of a few things:

1. **It doesn’t matter as much as you think it does**. If something goes wrong in Debsoc, no one is going to die and if they are someone else with a lot more expertise (and who is actually being paid) should really be dealing with it. Or as one of our esteemed committee members would put it “its not that deep”.

2. **It will be behind you soon.** Things change, people move on and everyone forgets. In a year you will be in an actual job laughing about the committee role you took way too seriously. If right now something feels like the end of the world please remember, it probably isn’t. Learn from your mistakes and you’ll be past it soon with a great life lesson to show for it.

3. **You aren’t alone.** You have a whole committee around you and plenty of other mechanisms to access support. If you need help, advice or just someone to talk to don’t feel afraid to ask. And if you can’t find anyone else, reach out to us your predecessors, whatever you are dealing with, trust me we can relate.

4. **You are doing great.** Running any society is hard. Running a society with Debsoc’s size, history and complexity is insane. Committee roles in this society are quite often effectively part (and sometimes full) time jobs that we do for free alongside full-time degrees. The fact you are doing this job is insanely impressive and it's important you remember that.

5. **Your mistakes are not the worst (they aren’t even close.** Every year I am aware of recent society history has had some kind of crisis and most have multiple. All the examples listed in the paragraphs above are things I have personally witnessed or dealt with. You are not alone and you shouldn’t feel that way. And the one thing that all those past committee members have one thing in common, they are all fine now. And you will be too. And whatever mistake you have made, rest assured someone else has made a bigger one. If you don’t believe me take a trip to the university archives or have a Google of the society, unless the Forum is on fire or you’ve started a war, you are doing fine by comparison.

None of this is to say you shouldn’t take things seriously, of course you should. But in our experience committee members of Debsoc tend not to have that problem and often have an opposite one. So we thought it important to put a message here from people who know what they are talking about. Its one we would have liked to have been told at times and we want to be here permanently on the record for any Debsoc committee member who doesn’t feel like they are doing a good job. Cause so long as you are being honest and kind and working hard, you absolutely are.

So don’t stress, you are doing great.

-The Debsoc Committee, 2023-24

**Appendix B-** Former Committee Roles

Below are details of former committee roles that were removed and the year in which they were removed. These are provided to give future committees more information with which they can make decisions. This is not an exhaustive list and does not include other minor changes made to other roles.

5.11. Communications Officer (removed 2024, split with Media and Technical Officers):

5.11.1. Shall be responsible for the society’s recruitment and retention of

members, by developing a strategy with the President and Publicity

Secretary(/ies);

5.11.2. Shall provide strategic oversight of the Publicity Secretary(ies),

developing a Social Media strategy and ensuring that the society’s events

are well publicised to its members;

5.11.3. Shall work with the Social Secretaries to support the organisation of

the Ball, if required;

5.11.4. Shall be responsible for the provision of society merchandise;

5.11.5. Shall be responsible for ensuring that the society’s public debates,

when recorded, are published online in a timely manner.

5.4. General Secretary (removed 2024, combined with VP):

5.4.1. Shall be the principal officer responsible for communication with the

Guild regarding activities run by the society;

5.4.2. Shall keep an up-to-date inventory of equipment owned by the society;

5.4.3. Shall be responsible for response to any external mail sent to the

society;

5.4.4. Shall be responsible for booking any Guild or university rooms for the

society; and,

5.4.5. Shall be responsible for keeping minutes of the meetings of the

committee, and of general meetings of the society.

5.5. Intervarsity Coordinator (removed 2024, changed to IV Convener):

5.5.1. Shall support the Training Officer where required, including by deputising for the training officer at workshops;

5.5.2. Shall have primary responsibility for organising and facilitating debate competitions held by the society;

5.5.3. Shall be responsible, alongside the Training and Competitions Officer, for the finances of the Intervarsity Team and for choosing which competitions to attend;

5.5.4. Shall ensure that the society retains a strong image on the competition circuit; and,

5.5.5. Shall work with the Welfare Secretary to make and enforce an equity policy to prevent equity issues from arising.