



the DURHAM UNION

STANDING COMMITTEE: MONDAY 10TH MARCH 2025

In Attendance:

Charles Aldous – President

Oliver Dawson – Treasurer

Oliver Lycett – Secretary

Maddy Frank – Social Secretary

Robbie Bono – Equalities Officer

Joshua Doherty – Custodian

Reece Short – President-elect

Callum Oxley – President-elect (Michaelmas 2025)

Haya Chaudhri – Debating Treasurer

Ryan Wilmot-Simmons – Returning Officer

Molly Purcell – Ball Chair

Jerry Li – President Emeritus

Apologies

Severino Bonvini – Director of Debating

Anna Beskhmel'nitskaya – Publicity Officer

The meeting began at 16:11, the Secretary is taking the minutes.



Item One: Deputy Social Secretary Amendment

Co-written by the Social Secretary and Molly Purcell. Ms Purcell outlined the framework of the amendment, replacing the position of Ball Chair with a Deputy Social Secretary. She explained how this change would make the remits of each positions more clear and practicable. Ms Purcell made clear the need for the organiser of the ball to have more autonomy, before noting how the Ball Chair acted as a *de facto* Deputy Social Secretary anyway – taking on tasks beyond the remit of the ball.

The Social Secretary seconded Ms Purcell's comments, making clear the practical reasons to create the position of Deputy Social Secretary as a replacement of the Ball Chair. She then emphasised the unique processes of the Society in how it organises balls, and the need for more clarity in this area.

The President Emeritus commented on the anomalous nature of the Ball Chair, advocating for it to remain this way. He argued that it allows for the steady planning of balls well before the time of the event itself. He noted the advantages of the appointments process in this case, as a way of bringing in extra talent to the Society's executive. The process opens up the position to far more applicants.

The President-elect noted the creative element of the appointments process, with each candidate pitching their vision for the ball as their manifesto. He then emphasised the continuity element, and the relative advantages.

The Social Secretary noted the need to clarify the practicable remit of the position. The Treasurer commented on the existence of many appointed positions in the Society, and noted the importance of the Social Secretary and President having a strong influence over the Ball Chair and how the ball materialises.

The President Emeritus acknowledged the different scales and processes implemented by colleges in the organisation of their balls. He presented the position of Ball Chair as a means of following through with a cohesive and efficient vision for the ball. He accepted the need for some tweaks to modify and improve the process.

The Equalities Officer spoke in favour of the amendment. The committee discussed previous working relationships between Presidents and Social Secretaries, and records of inefficiency. The committee further discussed the role of a Deputy Social Secretary, who could assist the Social Secretary across a wider remit.



The Treasurer returned to the importance of an appointments process for the role, to properly vet candidates and their visions for the ball. A number of the members present agreed.

The Social Secretary re-emphasised her focus on looking at how the role could better support wider social functions, and deputise when needed.

The Treasurer reaffirmed the point that the appointments process is of great importance, in enabling the selection of the most capable candidate. The President Emeritus echoed these sentiments, arguing that the current framework should be given more time and experience.

The Secretary raised the appointments process as a key defining feature of the discussion. Ms Purcell advocated the Deputy Social Secretary role as a means of better reflecting the actual functions of the role. The Social Secretary reiterated this.

The discussion on the matter closed, with further debate taking place during the upcoming General Committee meeting.

Item Two: Members Code of Conduct

The Equalities Officer outlined the two main purposes of the draft: to give the Complaints Panel clear tools; to show to external stakeholders our commitment to realising a positive culture.

The President Emeritus noted criticisms of the Code in its current written form, and advocated a more streamlined edition. The committee discussed the fine wording of the amendment. The committee addressed the full scope of the Code of Conduct, discussing the best format to ensure that members feel safe, included, and aware of the standards expected of them.

In line with the Oxford Union Society, the President-elect suggested – under the main membership clauses of the Constitution – we state a commitment to free speech and debate.

It was agreed that the first line of the Code would be amended to proscribe only physical violence. Further conversations will be taking place later this week.

The meeting was concluded at 17.19.