

# Manchester Debating Union Constitution

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## Scope of the Constitution

The Constitution defines the aims and decision-making processes of the Manchester Debating Union. The terms bind all members of the Union, as do any policies or decisions determined under its provisions. Any interpretation of the Constitution shall be consistent with the Mission Statement.

## Mission Statement

The Manchester Debating Union is a place where all the students of Manchester are welcome to engage in free speech, debate, and merriment. We aim to produce competitive debaters of high calibre while ensuring that membership in the Union is a pleasurable experience for all. We also aim to be a positive, non-politically affiliated force within Manchester, fostering partnerships with both the University as a whole and the wider community.

Furthermore, we strive to provide access to competition entry, both in the United Kingdom and further afield, for students to participate in competitive debating against other academic institutions. This is for member development and to cement important contacts in world debating. We also aim to convene our own competitions.

We may affiliate with external debating bodies and individuals. This may include, among others, the Northern and Midlands Debating Alliance, the European Universities Debating Championship Council, and World Universities Debating Championship Council and—potentially—external bodies sponsoring debating in Manchester. Affiliation to bodies mentioned above facilitates the flow of ideas between institutions and ensures we remain at the forefront of debating knowledge and training at all levels—a key benefit for all students in Manchester.

## 1. Identity

### 1.1. Title

- 1.1.1. The title of this society shall be the 'Manchester Debating Union'. It may also be called the 'MDU' or, herein, the 'Union'.
- 1.1.2. The term 'Constitution' herein shall mean the Constitution of the Manchester Debating Union as from time to time in force.

## 2. Membership

### 2.1. Eligibility

- 2.1.1. All matriculated University of Manchester students are eligible for membership.
- 2.1.2. Subject to provisions determined from time to time by the Executive:
  - 2.1.2.1. A matriculated individual in a Manchester-based higher-educational institution is eligible for membership; this includes, among others, the Manchester Metropolitan University and Royal Northern College of Music.
  - 2.1.2.2. A matriculated individual in a higher-educational institution not based, though currently inhabiting, in Manchester is eligible for membership; this includes, among others, the Open University.
  - 2.1.2.3. Membership may be conditional upon paying a membership fee, and different classes of membership upon payment of different fees.

### 2.2. Termination of Membership

- 2.2.1. Members may resign their membership by writing to the Secretary.
- 2.2.2. The Union may sanction members for misconduct based on evidence collected, considering the seriousness, Inclusions Policy, prior warnings, and any extenuating circumstances; sanctions include, among other things, informal or written warnings, or expulsion from the Union.

### 2.3. Informal Membership

- 2.3.1. The Executive may create classes of non-voting membership; they may determine the rights and obligations of any such members, and the conditions for admission to and termination of membership of any such class of members.
- 2.3.2. Other references in this Constitution to 'members' and 'membership' do not apply to non-voting members.

## 3. The Executive

### 3.1. Function of the Executive

- 3.1.1. The purpose of the Executive is to advance the Mission Statement.
- 3.1.2. The Executive shall manage the Union's affairs in all matters; the Executive will decide any matter not covered by this Constitution in a meeting herein referred to as an 'Executive Meeting'. Subject to the Constitution, the Executive may manage its affairs and conduct itself informally as it sees fit.
- 3.1.3. An Executive member may call an Executive Meeting by writing to the Secretary.
- 3.1.4. Any proposal ratified by a simple majority of the Executive becomes the provision of the Union.
- 3.1.5. The Executive may make decisions outside Executive Meetings, provided the Secretary records decisions and the Executive ratifies decisions by a simple majority.
- 3.1.6. The Executive shall bequeath handover documents and memoranda with the aim of a smooth transition to the Executive Elect—per 4.1 and 4.2—before their resignation to distribute accrued advice.
- 3.1.7. The Executive comprises the President (oft denoted 'Chair'), Secretary, Treasurer, and Inclusions Officer; no individual may hold multiple Executive positions at a time, and only one individual may hold an Executive position at a time.
- 3.1.8. Executive positions shall be elected per 4.1 and 4.2 for terms not exceeding one year.
- 3.1.9. At all times, the Executive must:
  - 3.1.9.1. Apply due care and skill as it is reasonable in the execution of their duties;
  - 3.1.9.2. Accept no payment or benefit for doing, or not doing, something through their duties. However, the Union may adopt policies providing for reasonable reimbursement of members, including Executive members, for expenses incurred in conjunction with carrying out responsibilities according to the Mission Statement, such as travel expenses;
  - 3.1.9.3. Through their duties, work to advance the Mission Statement;
  - 3.1.9.4. Avoid conflict of interest, and declare if they have one to the Union at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.1.10. If a member resigns from the Executive, the Executive can either:

- 3.1.10.1. For no more than ten weeks, appoint a member to take on that role temporarily.
- 3.1.10.2. Trigger a by-election per 4.1 and 4.2.
- 3.1.11. Executive members may only be dismissed by a Motion of No Confidence that shall relate to the fulfilment of their role only, which includes, among other things, maladministration, not attending Executive Meetings, and abusing conflicts of interest.
  - 3.1.11.1. The Motion of No Confidence must have a proposer and a seconder, who may be any two Union members.
  - 3.1.11.2. After the proposal, the Executive shall call a General Meeting, in which members shall have equal opportunity to speak for and against the motion.
  - 3.1.11.3. No more than seven days after the GM, in an Executive Meeting, the motion shall be decided by a two-thirds majority in a secret ballot, where at least half of the Executive—rounded up—is present.
  - 3.1.11.4. If there is a tie, the motion will not be carried. A successful Motion of No Confidence triggers a by-election per 4.1 and 4.2.

## 3.2. Duties of Executive positions

- 3.2.1. The duties of the President are to:
  - 3.2.1.1. Oversee the Union as to advance the Mission Statement;
  - 3.2.1.2. Ensure that the Union's rules and Constitution are followed;
  - 3.2.1.3. Manage the Executive and Union Affiliates;
  - 3.2.1.4. Chair the Union, the Executive, and any GMs;
  - 3.2.1.5. Report on the state of the Union to the AGM.
- 3.2.2. The duties of the Treasurer are to:
  - 3.2.2.1. Administer the Union's finances as required by its activities;
  - 3.2.2.2. Ensure the probity of the Society's finances;
  - 3.2.2.3. Provide regular financial reports to the Union.
  - 3.2.2.4. Produce the annual financial report to be presented at the Annual General Meeting.
- 3.2.3. The duties of the Secretary are to:
  - 3.2.3.1. Manage all general administration;
  - 3.2.3.2. Act as the primary link between the Society and the Students' Union, should the Union be affiliated with the Students' Union;
  - 3.2.3.3. Minute all Executive Meetings, and circulate them to the Executive;
  - 3.2.3.4. Minute all GMs, and circulate these to members.
- 3.2.4. The duties of the Inclusions Officer are to:

- 3.2.4.1. Maintain provisions to better the inclusion of under-represented parts of the student community;
- 3.2.4.2. Interpret and enforce the Inclusions Policy;
- 3.2.4.3. Act as the primary meditative and punitive organ of the Union regarding matters of equity.
- 3.2.5. The duties of the Director of Communications are to:
  - 3.2.5.1. Design and execute communications strategies to reach and influence relevant audiences, including through events, briefings, media outreach, and other strategies;
  - 3.2.5.2. Secure media coverage for, among other things, the Union's events, material, and Executive;
  - 3.2.5.3. Work with the Executive, Affiliates, and Union members to hone the Union brand and ensure consistent implementation.

### 3.3. Affiliates

- 3.3.1. The Executive may approve classes of non-voting Affiliates with rights, privileges, obligations, and titles established by the Union. Non-voting Affiliates may be individuals, businesses, and other organisations that seek to support the Mission Statement.
  - 3.3.1.1. 'Non-voting' under 3.3 refers to the inability to vote in Executive Meetings, not the right to vote in General Meetings. Should a voting member of the Union become an Affiliate, their right to vote as a member in GMs remains. Should the Executive make an Informal Member—defined in 2.3—an Affiliate, it follows that they would lack the right to vote both in GMs and Executive Meetings.
- 3.3.2. The Executive has the authority to admit any individual or organisation as an affiliate, recognise representatives of Affiliates, and make determinations as to affiliates' rights, privileges, obligations, and titles. The terms of any such delegations must be recorded in the minutes. At the discretion of the Executive, affiliates may be given endorsement, recognition, or mediate coverage insofar as it is pursuant to the Mission Statement, for example, sponsorship in return for monetary support of the Union.
- 3.3.3. The Executive may, from time to time, classify Affiliates as 'Active' or 'Passive':
  - 3.3.3.1. Active Affiliates work actively with the Executive pursuant to the Mission Statement. This may include, among other things, individuals in Manchester who volunteer to aid the Union in providing workshops to members.

- 3.3.3.2. Passive Affiliates support the Union in pursuing its Mission Statement, though they do not take an active role. This includes, among others, businesses that subsidise the Union in return for media promotion.
- 3.3.4. The Executive may delegate responsibilities to Active Affiliates, and, if they do, they shall determine the terms and conditions on which the delegation is made. The Executive may—at any time—alter those terms and conditions or revoke the delegation. These responsibilities may not be Executive responsibilities delineated in 3.2.

## 4. Elections and Votes

### 4.1. Executive Position Elections

- 4.1.1. Elections must be held at a General Meeting per 5.1, before resignation per 4.1.7.
- 4.1.2. There shall be at least fourteen days' notice for Executive elections, which shall include the positions for election and how individuals might nominate themselves.
- 4.1.3. The electoral process may be subject to provisions determined from time to time by the Executive, consistent with the Constitution, such that:
  - 4.1.3.1. Candidates may not attempt campaigns activity which others could not also reasonably do, should the Executive permit campaigning;
  - 4.1.3.2. Candidates may not deface or interfere with other candidates' publicity, should the Executive permit publicity;
  - 4.1.3.3. The Union must explicitly prohibit individuals from compromising or seeking to compromise election integrity which includes, among other things, impeding the free exercise of votes, entryism, threatening conduct or harassment, bribery, and use of Union resources to advance the election of a specific candidate—sanctions for electoral malpractice may include, among other things, expulsion from the Union per 2.2.
- 4.1.4. Votes shall be counted in a Single Transferable Vote system with secret ballots. Positions must be elected per the order: President, Treasurer, Secretary, Inclusions Officer, Director of Communications.
- 4.1.5. Re-open nominations shall be an option for every position.
- 4.1.6. Individuals elected to Executive positions are herein denoted 'Executive Elect'.



- 4.1.7. The incumbent Executive must resign by the end of the academic year and bequeath control to the Executive Elect.

## 4.2. Executive Position Eligibility

- 4.2.1. Candidates must be present at the election.
- 4.2.2. Candidates must have contributed to Union development before the General Meeting; this includes, among other things, regularly attending training, volunteering in Union events, or competing for the Union.
- 4.2.3. Any Presidential candidate must previously have held a role in the Executive or as an Active Affiliate.

## 4.3. Constitutional Amendments

- 4.3.1. Changes to the Constitution, in whole or in part, shall be ratified through a vote held at a General Meeting per 5.1.
- 4.3.2. A motion to change the Constitution must have a proposer and a seconder, who must be any two Union members.
- 4.3.3. The Union shall have at least fourteen days' notice of constitutional votes, which must include the proposed changes to the Constitution.
- 4.3.4. Members shall have equal opportunity to speak for and against the motion.
- 4.3.5. The motion may only be ratified by secret ballot and two-thirds majority vote.

# 5. General Meetings

## 5.1. Procedure

- 5.1.1. A General Meeting of the Union is a meeting of its membership as a whole.
- 5.1.2. At least fourteen days' notice of a General Meeting must be given to all the members of the Union.
- 5.1.3. The Union may hold General Meetings in-person, online, or in a hybrid format.
- 5.1.4. The President will preside at General Meetings, and the Secretary will keep records, which must contain the number of members, names of Executive members present, and minutes, including ratified decisions.
- 5.1.5. Only members in attendance shall be allocated one binding vote; no other individuals shall be entitled to a vote.

- 5.1.6. The Executive shall jointly count votes unless there is a conflict of interest; the Executive member with a conflict of interest shall be replaced by another Executive member, whom the replaced member must ratify.
- 5.1.7. Conflict of interest shall be defined as:
  - 5.1.7.1. Being a candidate for a position in which one is counting the votes;
  - 5.1.7.2. Being a 'connected person' to a candidate for a position in which one is counting the votes;
  - 5.1.7.3. Being a proposer or seconder of an amendment in which one is counting the votes.
- 5.1.8. Herein, a 'connected person' to an individual means:
  - 5.1.8.1. A child, parent, grandchild, grandparent, or sibling of the individual;
  - 5.1.8.2. A spouse or civil partner of the individual;
  - 5.1.8.3. A person is carrying on business in partnership with the individual.

## 5.2. Annual General Meeting

- 5.2.1. The Executive shall hold an Annual General Meeting, herein denoted the 'AGM', once each academic year.
- 5.2.2. The AGM may pertain to elections and constitutional changes per 4.
- 5.2.3. The President and Treasurer will report at the AGM on the Union's activities over the past year and its current financial status.
- 5.2.4. Any general meeting that is not an AGM shall be known as an Extraordinary General Meeting.

## 6. Finances

### 6.1. Financial Policy

- 6.1.1. It shall be the duty of the Treasurer to ensure sensible and reasonable use of Union funds in all circumstances and probity of Union finances.
- 6.1.2. The payment of debts incurred through proper Union activities shall be the duty of the Executive and, if necessary, their successors in office.
- 6.1.3. The Union shall never purchase goods or services directly from Executive members or engage in loaning money to the Union by Executive members.
- 6.1.4. Union funds shall only be according to the Mission Statement; members may only receive direct or indirect payment as reimbursement for legitimate expenses.

## 7. Inclusions

### 7.1. Inclusions Policy

- 7.1.1. The Union shall take necessary steps to ensure equity and inclusivity and make Union debates and events equitable.
- 7.1.2. The Executive shall maintain and distribute an Inclusions Policy which details provisions according to 3.2.4 and the Mission Statement, that shall be granted Constitutional power.
- 7.1.3. Changes to the Inclusions Policy must follow the procedure described above to Constitutional changes per 4.3.
- 7.1.4. The Inclusions Officer has the power to interpret the Inclusions Policy; the Executive can overrule the interpretation of the Inclusions Policy by a simple majority.

## 8. Miscellaneous

### 8.1. Distribution

- 8.1.1. The Union shall distribute the Constitution, Inclusions Policy, and other material described above detailing Union administration as accessibly as reasonable and upon request.

### 8.2. Severability

- 8.2.1. All provisions stand independently of each other, meaning if one is void or unenforceable, the rest of the constitutional provisions still stand. Any such provisions shall be ineffective only to the extent that they are unenforceable or void.
- 8.2.2. 8.2.1 gives the Union flexibility to cohere with new—or reinterpretation of existing—provisions placed upon it and unexpected events that prevent the fulfilment of the Constitution without having to amend the Constitution.

### 8.3. Disputes

- 8.3.1. If a dispute arises between members of the Union about the validity or propriety of anything done by the members under this constitution, and the dispute cannot be resolved by agreement, the parties to the dispute

must first try in good faith to settle the dispute by mediation before resorting to litigation.

## 8.4. Liability

- 8.4.1. The views expressed at any activity organised by the Union or the views expressed by any member of the Union at any competition do not necessarily reflect the views of the Union.
- 8.4.2. The views expressed by members of the Union during debate-related activities do not necessarily reflect the actual views of the speaker.

## 8.5. Effect

- 8.5.1. The Union hereby annuls all prior Constitutions and provisions of the Union.
- 8.5.2. This Constitution shall enter into effect immediately upon adoption.

## Appendix: Inclusions Policy

The Manchester Debating Union, herein referred to as the 'Union', commits to ensuring that our events are inclusive to all regardless of identity. We aim to make debates fair and impartial so that no one is mistreated or feels unsafe because of who they are or how they present.

Our Inclusions Officer advises on matters of equity and inclusion. They are to run and maintain projects to improve the inclusion of parts of the student community who are currently under-represented in debating. Their role is overwhelmingly to act as a mediation mechanism rather than a punitive one.

The Inclusions Policy inherits the power of the Union Constitution, which details the procedure for amending the document. For disputes regarding the interpretation or remit of the Inclusions Policy, please ultimately refer to the Union Constitution.

## Pronoun Policy

The Union operates a preferred gender pronoun policy to make sure people of all different gender identities feel welcome. The policy is the same for every competition our members participate in, from local to international competitions.

Before a debate starts, all participants will be asked to state their preferred gender pronouns (for example, he/him, she/her, they/them, et cetera). Participants are free to decline to answer or state 'no preference'.

Misgendering is often an honest mistake. If you misgender someone, please seek to rectify your mistake as soon as possible. If you feel misgendered, you can communicate this to the person who caused it.

## Participation in debates

We will force no one to speak, listen, or participate in a debate. Kindly note that the motions set in training and at competitions can always be argued in rational and non-offensive ways, and discriminatory arguments or sweeping generalisations are not considered persuasive.

Kindly note that speakers may argue positions from which they disagree.

## Privacy

The Union will not record speeches unless participants give their consent. It is highly unusual for speeches in training sessions to be recorded. It is common for certain rounds of a competition to be recorded and uploaded, contingent on the speaker's consent.

Likewise, it is not acceptable for anyone (for example, speaker, judge, audience member, et cetera) to record any part of the debate without receiving explicit consent from the individual(s).

## Equity

We aim to ensure participants avoid comments, gestures, or any behaviour that can be seen as attempting to exclude an individual from meaningfully taking part in the Union or may threaten their safety. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Intimidating or threatening behaviour towards any individual, such as yelling, harassing, threatening, stalking, and acting physically or verbally aggressively. This includes using recreational drugs to excess, pushing others to do so, or making derogatory comments about those who abstain from alcohol or other substances;
2. Attacks against an individual's identity, person-hood, or a framework of beliefs. This includes but is not limited to derogatory remarks about an individual's race, class, gender, sexual orientation, mental health, language status, religious affiliation or lack thereof, and political ideology. This is still true even if you believe (or even think you know) that they do not apply to an individual who is in attendance. In a debate, arguments referring to different groups do not inherently constitute equity violations, and it is understandable that, in debate, generalisations may be made. Keep in mind that sweeping generalisations might make an argument unpersuasive. This might constitute an equity violation only where the remarks are derogatory;
3. Use of inflammatory or triggering language, particularly in debates where discussion of sensitive and difficult subjects such as mental health, rape, violence, abortion, or abuse might be necessary. Kindly note that there is a distinction between passionate, emotive language and triggering language, but we urge you to err on caution when in doubt. Arguments referring to such sensitive subjects do not automatically constitute equity violations and can be helpful persuasive mechanisms in certain debates;

4. Unsolicited sexual advances and attention, or behaviour that contributes to a sexualised environment. Please be mindful of power dynamics in any situation and whether an individual may feel coerced into consenting or not objecting to invasive or threatening behaviour. Please adopt a stance of positive (not presumed) consent that may be withdrawn at any time;
5. Unwelcome physical contact which includes, among other things, touching a person without permission, such as sensitive areas such as their hair, pregnant stomach, mobility device (for example, wheelchair, scooter, et cetera), or tattoos;
6. Attempts to belittle the Inclusions Policy or parts of it will also violate the Inclusions Policy.

## How are mistakes resolved?

The first step to consider is to speak to the individual who has upset you. Debating can be a high-stress activity, and all of us have, at some point in time or the other, said or done things that we have later regretted. The individual may not have intended to cause hurt or offence, or may not have realised why their behaviour upset you, and talking might help.

If you are the person who has said something that might be an equity issue, please self-correct and apologise.

If you do not feel comfortable discussing it with the individual in question, or if you do not feel it was resolved sufficiently once you have discussed it, please approach a member of the committee or the Inclusions Officer. We will treat all discussions and complaints with a high level of confidentiality. Where it is necessary, information might be shared with third parties, but only once the party involved has been informed.