

leave the Opposition no room for debate and are clearly illegitimate. Defining absolute words literally may prevent a reasonable debate, and they can therefore be read down.

- (d) When defining the words in the motion so as (i) to allow the obvious meaning to be debated or (ii) (when there is no obvious meaning) to give effect to a possible meaning which would allow for a reasonable debate, the Proposition must ensure that the definition is one the ordinary intelligent person would accept.

These requirements are summarised in clauses 6.2 and 6.3 of the Judging Schedule of the Rules of the World Schools Debating Championships. They are further elaborated upon below.

(a) Is there a clear issue to be debated?

Teams at the World Schools Championships are expected to debate the topic set ('the motion'). The Proposition team advances arguments supporting the motion and the Opposition team opposes it. Team members may not necessarily agree with the side of the motion they are arguing, but their task is to try to persuade the audience that their side of the motion is to be preferred.

It may seem obvious, but in order to prove their side of the motion, *teams must debate the motion*—not a subset or some bizarre or unusual variant of it.

'Squirreling' is banned at the World Schools Championships. The Judging Schedule to the Rules notes that 'squirreling is the distortion of the definition to enable a team to argue a pre-prepared argument that it wishes to debate regardless of the motion actually set'. Squirreling does not attempt to find a reasonable definition of the motion as a whole; it just asserts some sort of 'link' between the words of the motion and the case the Proposition wishes to run.

An example of squirreling is defining 'This House would legalise performance-enhancing drugs in sport' to mean that marijuana should be legalised (asserting a link by saying sport is fun; life is fun; and soft drugs enhance people's ability to have fun in the sport of life). This sort of debating quickly becomes artificial and pedantic.

Debates work best when everyone understands what is going to be debated. Both teams can go away and prepare their cases, knowing they will be talking about the same subject. The audience and adjudicators can predict the broad subject matter that will be debated.

The sorts of motions set at the World Schools Championships lend themselves to this occurring. Typical motions might include 'This House believes that we should break unjust laws in democracies' and 'This House believes that the media serves us well.' Both motions raise specific issues. One involves the merits of civil disobedience (one side will talk about the dangers of majority oppression; the other about ways of seeking to change the law without needing to break it); the second requires analysis of the positive and negative attributes of the media today.

The organisers of World Schools Championships avoid setting vague or metaphorical motions such as 'This House believes there is light at the end of the tunnel' or 'This House believes life is a bowl of cherries'. Such motions lack a clear or obvious issue. They give the Proposition enormous scope to say 'this is what the topic is about', without the Opposition or audience having been able to predict this. They place a heavy burden on the Opposition, which is forced to prepare any number of cases on the off chance that one of them may prove relevant and can end up having to face the Proposition effectively unprepared. Such motions invite the Proposition to try to catch the Opposition out by putting the most unexpected spin possible on the motion.