

debate, or proposing particular models or criteria to judge it by, the Proposition must ensure such parameters, models or criteria are themselves reasonable. They must be ones that the ordinary intelligent person would accept as applicable to the debate.

(a) Parameters for Debate

On occasion there may be an implicit context to a debate, which gives the Proposition reasonable grounds to set parameters or boundaries to what is included.

The motion 'This House believes that gay couples should be allowed to adopt children' was debated as one of the prepared rounds at the 2001 World Schools Championships in Johannesburg. While normally general motions at a world competition must be taken as applicable to the whole world, doing so in this instance would have allowed the Opposition to argue that gay adoption should not proceed because there were many countries that outlawed homosexuality and persecuted gay men and women. The implicit context of the motion did not include situations where gay couples were not allowed to exist. The issue to be debated was the merits of gay couples adopting children, and this was an issue that could only arise in societies where gay relationships were not illegal. Proposition teams were thus entitled to confine the debate to such societies. Such parameters were reasonable in view of the implicit context of the motion.

The Proposition's ability to set reasonable parameters to a debate does not provide a licence to restrict the motion arbitrarily.

'This House believes that private schools should be subsidised by the state' could not be defined as relating only to private schools in the United States. This would be altering the motion to read 'This House believes that private schools in the United States should be subsidised by the state', which is not what has been set. No matter that the Proposition knows a lot about American private schools or believes state subsidies to be particularly controversial there as a result of 'school voucher' proposals. While the motion may implicitly be limited to areas of the world where there are private schools, there is nothing to limit it to the United States given there are well-known examples of private schools in Britain, Australia and many other countries which could be used.

Motions that state general principles can normally be debated as such. 'This House believes that low taxes are preferable to extensive government services', debated at the 2002 World Schools Championships in Singapore, poses the issue of the extent to which society or the consumer should pay for services such as health care, education and public transport. The motion can be debated with reference to examples from all these areas and from a variety of different countries. Restricting the debate to just one country or to just health care would amount to rewriting the motion without cause. The Proposition would be attempting through its definition (rather than its debating) to gain an advantage over the Opposition, by making many of its examples redundant.

While the Proposition may on some occasions be required to set parameters to a debate, this will normally have been done by the person setting the motion. When there is a genuine ambiguity that needs to be resolved or an implicit context that needs to be stated for the debate to proceed, the Proposition must remember its over-arching responsibility to debate the issue posed: what the ordinary intelligent person would expect, not a subset thereof.