

The Grand Final motion at the 1995 World Schools Debating Championships in Cardiff, 'This House believes that the United Nations has failed', similarly called for a judgement debate. The Opposition expected the criteria for whether the United Nations had 'failed' would be whether it had lived up to its objectives (promoting peace, economic prosperity, human rights) and had prepared examples of UN peace-keeping operations, economic and social development programmes, human rights committees and the like. The Proposition said that failure, in terms of an institution, was whether it was doing as well as it should be, and the UN was performing more poorly than it should after fifty years of existence due to its failure to adapt or evolve to meet changing circumstances during that time (thus a Security Council that did not reflect the modern world; executive officers not appointed on merit; bloated bureaucracies impeding effective delivery of programmes; inadequate and politicised processes).

The Opposition expected the Proposition team would be arguing the UN was not meeting its objectives, whereas the Proposition in fact argued the UN was not meeting its objectives *as well as it should* (demonstrating institutionally poorer performance than would have been the case had it changed its structures and processes over the last fifty years). The Proposition also took on the examples raised by the Opposition, arguing that they only further demonstrated the problems of the UN (peace-keeping operations had been blighted by politicised processes and unwieldy bureaucracies; the UN had in fact been irrelevant in terms of the major steps taken to promote peace in the world, human rights declarations were not enforced, and so on). The Proposition won the debate by having set up criteria for judging 'failure' more carefully (and such criteria being reasonable in terms of the motion).

3. THE OPPOSITION'S OPTIONS

Presuming the Proposition's definition is satisfactory, the First Speaker of the Opposition will not argue the definition, but will proceed immediately to dealing with the Proposition's arguments. There is no need to say that the Opposition accepts the definition; this is presumed unless the First Speaker of the Opposition challenges it.

If the Opposition is unhappy with the Proposition's definition, it has several options:

(a) Accept and Debate

The first option is to accept it anyway. If the Proposition's definition leads in to the expected issue and allows the Opposition to put forward the arguments and examples it was intending, there is no point to arguing over the precise words the Proposition has used. Some inexperienced debaters do exactly this. The words used by the Proposition differ from those they have written down, so they 'clear up' the definition by using different words with much the same meaning or that still result in essentially the same debate. The Opposition gains no marks talking about the definition unless it has to. Trifling objections are counter-productive. The best advice is to move into the debate and take on the Proposition's arguments.

Much more serious is an unreasonable definition by the Proposition that, if accepted, will result in a different debate to the one the Opposition expected. One option is for the Opposition, despite quite understandable annoyance, to accept the definition anyway. The rationale for doing this is to avoid a 'definition debate', where the focus of the debate becomes the meaning of the words in the motion. In such debates, interaction and clash between the two teams concentrates on whose definition is