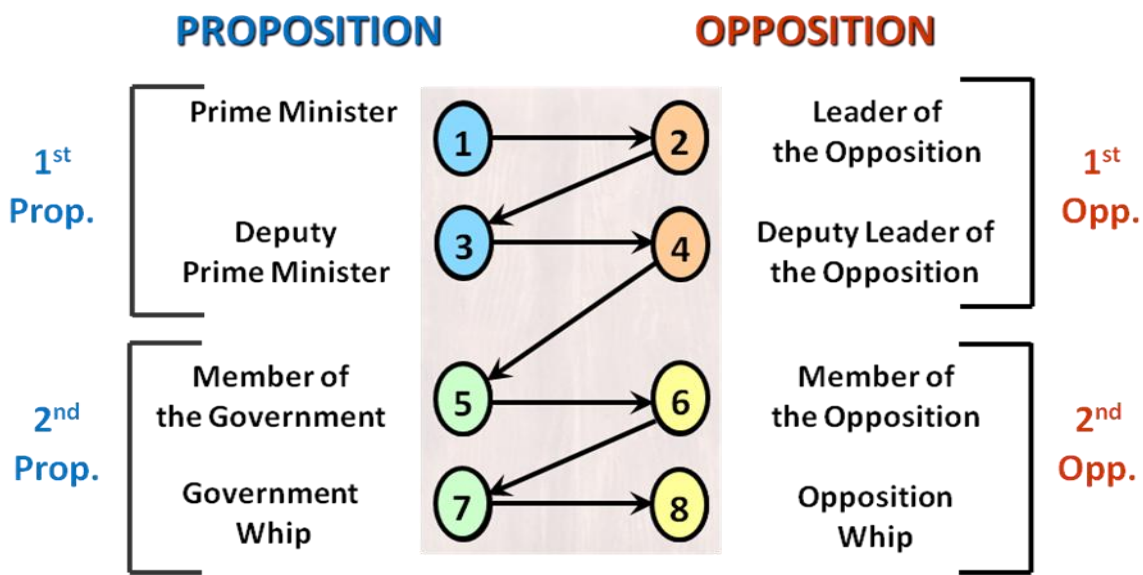# SUMMARY OF THE FOUR-TEAM BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE FORMAT

BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING – AN OVERVIEW

In the British Parliamentary Debating format there are four (4) teams in each round (match) - two teams representing the Government, and two the Opposition. Each team consists of two members with an allotted seven (7) minutes given to each speaker. The Government supports the motion (the given topic or subject being debated), and the Opposition opposes it. As is graphically represented below, the teams are also divided into the Opening and Closing halves of the 'House' (an imaginary House of Parliament akin to the British House of Common in which the debate tasks place).

Fig. 1.1 – Diagram Illustrating the Arrangement of Members in the House and the Sequence in which Speeches are Delivered

ROLES OF GOVERNMENT/PROPOSITION AND OPPOSITION

Government/Proposition

In supporting the motion, the Government/Proposition carries out the following functions:

- Defining the motion;

- Constructing a positive case in favour of the motion;

- Providing substantive materials and arguments in support of the case;

- Responding to any challenges made to the case made by the Opposition.

Opposition

In negating/opposing the motion, the Opposition carries out the following functions:

- Responding to the Government's definition;

- Constructing a case in opposition to the motion;

- Providing substantive material and arguments in support of the opposition case;

- Responding to the arguments delivered by the Government.

SPEAKER ROLES AND SPEECH SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Each speaker has a role and each speech has a purpose. The descriptions of speaker roles and speech purposes listed are suggestive and are not exhaustive or exclusive.

Prime Minister

The primary role of First Proposition team, initiated in this speech, is to establish the foundation for a meaningful debate on the motion.

The Prime Minister's responsibilities may include some or all of the following:

1) to offer a reasonable interpretation of the motion;

2) to present a case supporting that interpretation;

3) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Government's stance.

Leader of the Opposition

The primary roles of the First Opposition team, initiated in this speech, are to confront the First Government's case and to establish the First Opposition's strategy for opposing this case.

The Leader of the Opposition's responsibilities may include some or all of the following:

1) to directly or indirectly refute part or all of the government's case;

2) to make at least one argument that demonstrates why the First Opposition team opposes the motion as interpreted by the Prime Minister;

3) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Opposition's stance.

The Leader of the Opposition may also challenge the interpretation of the government's case if it is unreasonable, that is, if it completely misinterprets the motion or severely inhibits meaningful debate.

Deputy Prime Minister

The Deputy Prime Minister's responsibilities may include some or all of the following:

1) to reestablish the First Proposition's case by confronting any refutation presented by the Leader of the Opposition;

2) to refute some or all of the arguments presented by the Leader of the Opposition;

3) to further develop the case presented by the Prime Minister;

4) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Government's stance.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition's responsibilities may include some or all of the following:

1) to continue refutation initiated by the Leader of the Opposition;

2) to reestablish the Leader of Opposition's arguments against the motion;

3) to initiate a new argument against the motion as interpreted by the First Proposition team;

4) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Opposition's stance.

Member of the Government

The primary roles of the Second Proposition team, initiated in this speech, are to support the First Proposition team while simultaneously moving the proposition position in a new and positive direction.

The responsibilities of the Member of the Government may include some or all of the following:

1) to briefly support the case developed by the First Proposition team;

2) to introduce a different argument, sometimes called a "case extension" which is consistent with yet different from the case introduced by the First Proposition team;

3) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Government's stance.

Member of the Opposition

The primary roles of the Second Opposition team, initiated in this speech, are to support the First Opposition team while simultaneously moving the opposition position in a new and positive direction.

The responsibilities of the Member of the Opposition may include some or all of the following:

1) to briefly support one or more arguments introduced by the First Opposition team;

2) to introduce direct and/or indirect refutation to the case extension presented by the Member of Government;

3) to introduce some new argument, compatible with, but different from that of the First Opposition Team;

4) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Opposition's stance.

Government Whip

The responsibilities of the Government Whip may include some or all of the following:

1) to support any new arguments introduced by the Member of the Government;

2) to reply to any new arguments introduced by the Member of the Opposition;

3) to summarize the debate from the perspective of the Proposition Teams, especially from that of the Second Proposition team;

4) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Government's stance.

The Government Whip should not introduce new arguments into the debate.

Opposition Whip

The responsibilities of the Opposition Whip may include some or all of the following:

1) to support any new arguments introduced by the Member of the Opposition;

2) to reply to any new arguments introduced by the Member of the Government;

3) to summarize the debate from the perspective of the Proposition Teams, especially from that of the Second Opposition team;

4) to employ other strategies deemed necessary in advancing the Opposition's stance.