

ASSOCIATION DES SECRETAIRES  
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**CONTRIBUTION**

by

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to the General Debate on

**“Correcting the parliamentary record of debates”**

**Geneva Session**  
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## **Correcting the parliamentary record of debates**

Contribution by Liam LAURENCE SMYTH CB, Clerk of Legislation, House of Commons

### Written ministerial corrections

When factual mistakes are discovered in an answer to a question or another statement in the House, Ministers may submit written ministerial corrections for publication in the House papers and online. The Government's own Ministerial Code requires Ministers to correct any inadvertent errors at the earliest opportunity.

Such corrections are required to be free-standing and should not be used to provide new information, however closely related to the original proceeding. Nor should they be used to rehearse the arguments which may have given rise to the original erroneous answer.

### Visibility and accessibility of corrections

In 2023 the House of Commons Procedure Committee reviewed the process of ministerial corrections to the Official Report.

Cross-referenced hyperlinks in the Official Report allow readers to switch easily between original contributions and their subsequent correction. The House of Commons Procedure Committee recommended that cross-referenced hyperlinks provided in the Official Report should be improved through replacing the existing code with wording clearly stating that the link directs the reader to a correction.

The Procedure Committee recommended that cross-referenced hyperlinks currently used in the ministerial corrections system should also be added to corrections made through points of order and other oral contributions.

### Procedural opportunities for challenge

The procedural mechanisms of the House provide numerous avenues through which Members can challenge the accuracy of contributions. A thorough understanding of these mechanisms can assist Members in challenging the accuracy of contributions. The Procedure Committee did not consider the introduction of new procedural mechanisms to be necessary and instead encouraged Members to take advantage of existing mechanisms available to them.

### Broadening the scope of the corrections system

The Procedure Committee has proposed that backbenchers should also be able to make written corrections to the record by extending the existing ministerial corrections system. Corrections by backbenchers would feature on corrections pages generated by the Official Report and would be cross-referenced for maximum transparency. They should also be required to adhere to the same standards as set in the ministerial corrections system, including not being provided to continue an argument or present new information and should be vetted by the Table Office.

The new system of allowing non-Ministerial Members of the House of Commons is due to be introduced soon. We look forward to informing ASGP colleagues at a future meeting about how this has worked in practice.