



Thinking of organising a school or local event as part of the Great Education Debate?

Helpful ideas and practical hints

What is the Great Education Debate?

The Great Education Debate is a national conversation about the future of schools and colleges and the education we provide. Its aim is to enable ordinary stakeholders to share views about what sort of education we are looking for. It is intended to be a 'bottom-up' grassroots movement because some people feel that too much is decided from the top down, and has been for a long time. This is about re-empowering ordinary people with an interest in schools and colleges.

Because it is intended to be a grassroots national discussion, it is really important that local communities feel engaged with the debate. That is why we welcome your interest in organising an event.

Here are some questions and answers to get you started.

Who should my local debate be for?

That is up to you. It is probably best to focus on one group initially, and this could be an existing forum, such as a school or student council, a group of school or college staff, a group of parents, perhaps a PTA, a debating society and so on. These groups may already exist and meet, so organising a debate or discussion for one of those meetings should be quite easy. If you are more confident of wider interest then advertise a special event in advance for example on your website or school newsletter.

How long should it be?

An hour is a good period of time. That should give you about 45 minutes of quality discussion time.

How could it be structured?

There are several ways of doing it, and which one you choose will depend on your context and preferences. Here are three options you might like to consider:

- One option is to have someone who makes a presentation from the front on your chosen topic, which should be no longer than 10-12 minutes. That person could be an 'expert', including a teacher or headteacher, or a visiting speaker, or someone interested in the topic who has prepared a stimulating presentation. They are free to state their personal views, as long as they don't mind if questioners later disagree! You could follow that with a short period of five minutes or so for people to share their ideas with their neighbours, and then take comments and questions. This format will work best with a more confident and knowledgeable audience.
- A second option is to get two individuals or two pairs to prepare 'for and against' arguments and set these out to the audience. This needs a 'motion' to be in favour or against. Ideas for motions are below. If you have a 'motion', you can either have an audience vote at the start and again at the end, to see if people have changed their minds, or just at the end, or not at all.

- A third option is to have a panel of 'experts' and questions from the audience. This is a 'Question Time' style discussion. For this, you need a good chair that can manage the questions and make sure everyone gets a fair say, and you need panellists who have relevant knowledge or experience and who disagree with each other on some key issues. For example, you might want to check that there was at least one supporter and one opponent of current government policy on the panel. These could be parents, teachers, governors or students. It is a good idea for the chair to know that there are definitely going to be some questions, especially to start with, so this requires a little preparation. It is better if the 'experts' don't know the questions in advance.

Ideas for 'motions' for debate

The first stage of the debate addresses three main questions. These are to do with the purpose of education, especially whether it is to do with getting qualifications and or has wider purposes; whether learning specified knowledge and facts is more or less important than acquiring skills such as team work, analysis, ability to discuss, and so on; and whether for secondary school qualifications it is better to have everything decided in an end of course, formal examination, or whether it is better to include coursework, practical exams and so on. These example motions capture some of these controversies, but there are many other ways of doing so.

- The main purpose of schools is to equip students with good grades so they can maximise their earning potential in later life. Nothing else matters much.
- The main purpose of school is to produce happy and sociable young people, regardless of the qualifications they get. The most important aspects of school are pastoral care and extra curricular activities.
- Over recent years, we have placed too much emphasis on courses which are too easy and which don't require the development of important factual knowledge. We need to get back to learning important facts in all the main subjects.
- Traditional examinations are an unfair way to assess many students because learning to pass exams is not a skill that is needed in the workplace, and because exams disadvantage students who find it difficult to work under pressure.
- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are further disadvantaged if all examinations are long, formal, end-of-course exams, because they are less used to working in this way.
- Coursework should be completely abolished. Apart from the problem of cheating, including using the internet, some coursework is also done by parents for their children.

How do I make sure that people participate?

There is nothing more embarrassing than an audience that won't say anything! It is quite normal for people to be a little shy at first, and here are some ways to overcome that:

- Ask the audience to introduce themselves to their neighbours and give them five minutes to come up with a possible contribution in pairs.
- Speak to two or three people in advance and given them a question to ask or a point to make, to get the discussion started.
- If you know that you have people in the audience who won't be too embarrassed to be asked, put them on the spot and ask them for their view on a particular issue.
- If the discussion is drying up, ask people to raise their hand if they agree or disagree with a particular point, then pick a few and ask them to say why they voted the way they did.



- How do I feed our event into the national conversation?
- It is really important that your group's ideas feed into what is being said more widely. Here are some ways of doing so – either the organiser can do these or you can appoint a person who is willing to do the feedback. Don't think that it is necessary to agree on everything before you feedback. If you do, fine, but if you don't, then tell it as it is!
- Send a short summary with some 'for and against' points made. This could be an email to info@greateducationdebate.org.uk
- Take a photograph of your event and email it to the same place.
- Go to the website www.greateducationdebate.org.uk and log in, then make a comment on each whichever one of the areas you have been discussion.
- If you use Twitter, or know someone who does, send a tweet capturing your group's thoughts in 140 characters and include the #GEDebate and/or the handle @GreatEdDebate.
- Write a blog and email/send the link to info@greateducationdebate.org.uk or tweet it with the hashtag and handle as above.
- Record a verbal summary, put it on YouTube, and send us the link as above.
- If you prefer old-fashioned methods, then write us a letter, put a stamp on it and post it to us at:

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JOIN THE GREAT DEBATE.

Here's how you can get involved:



Host a debate in your school or college and capture everyone's views by film or by taking notes and email to: info@greateducationdebate.org.uk



Join us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GreatEducationDebate



Join the discussion and post your views on www.greateducationdebate.org.uk where you can also download a resource pack



Tweet us @GreatEdDebate and also use the hashtag #GEDebate

