

One of the great strengths of debating is that it requires very few resources to run; debating is, as it were, a cheap date. The one resource it does require, however, is teachers' time which, as anyone who has ever worked in a school knows, is by far the most scarce resource. (A friend of mine recently retrained in mid life as an English teacher after years as a freelance journalist and composer. I asked him what was the most important thing he'd learnt in his first year. 'How to make a cup of tea faster,' he said.)

I hope by now, though, that you will have been persuaded that it is worth investing that time in debating. You should be able to ask for (and count on) support from senior leadership, perhaps even in granting you extra time. Debating is an increasingly valued activity in schools, for all the reasons I outlined in Chapter One. It has always been popular in the independent sector; a very welcome development in recent years has been its growth in the maintained sector. It aligns very well with the mandatory promotion in schools of British Values, particularly democracy and respect for the beliefs of others.

## So, how to run your debating club?

Have an initial meeting where you test the level of interest, where you can scope what you can offer. Ideally, you want different clubs for different age levels. As a minimum, you should have one for Years 7 - 9 and one for Years 10 - 13; if you have capacity for more divisions, even better! Of course, this means more investment of precious staff time. If you can, recruit a colleague to run one of the clubs. Alternatively (and in many ways better) is to delegate the running of the Year 7 - 9 club to a Year 12 or 13 student. In my own school, I have for many years had a formal role of 'Debating Captains', a team of Year 12 and 13 students appointed to train younger students, along with other duties. In my experience, older students are flattered and highly motivated by being given this responsibility, which gives them valuable leadership experience (and looks great on UCAS ...). I have also found that older students are far more effective role models than teachers; when I am interviewing applicants to be Debating Captains and ask them how they came to be interested in debating, they invariably mention the inspirational impact of the Year 12 or 13 student who mentored them when they were younger.

Then, you need to book a room and a time. Make sure you have a regular time and venue that can be identified with debating. The lunch break is the traditional time for extra-curricular activities. It does ensure that students are all on site, though the time can also

**Debating  
is a  
cheap  
date**

be quite pinched; you will be lucky to get more than half an hour. Scheduling the club for after school will give you more time, though may also make it harder to get students to stay. Some schools have particular periods of the week ring fenced for extension / enrichment activities, and you may be able to bag one of these slots. Whenever you schedule it, make sure it happens every week; once you lose the momentum, it can be hard to regain. Be prepared for a certain amount of horse trading in the staff room over clashes with sports, music and drama. As in any negotiation (particularly with people you have to see every day), you need to be willing to make some compromises; however, don't be afraid to stand your ground when you think it is important.

## What to do in that time?

I would suggest alternating sessions between instruction and practice. For instruction, use this book! Get all students to buy a copy (or buy it for them, if you have a generous budget).

Students need to know how debating works; take them through Chapters 2, 4 and 8 of this book. They need to know the basic skills of debating; take them through Chapter 3 of this book. They need to know how to build a case, how to mount an opposition, and how to spot, avoid and challenge bad arguments; take them through Chapters 5, 6 and 7. They need to know some of the big ideas and big issues, and some facts about the world; take them through Chapters 9 and 10. Study the model debate in Chapter 13 with them. Do the exercises I suggest at the end of each chapter. Obviously, adapt all this material to the age and experience level of your students, and find your own ways to use the material.

However, as every teacher knows, the best way to learn about how to do something is by doing it. As soon as possible, get the students debating. Also as soon as possible, set up some kind of competitive structure.

Students are highly motivated by competition, and it gives them much more investment in the activity. If the club runs at lunchtime, the best format for a competition is likely to be Mace (see Chapter 2), if necessary with shorter speeches, say five or even three minutes, to save time. If you have a whole hour, for example with an after school slot, BP can work well, though students do need to be quite confident to tackle this more demanding format. For either of these formats, you will need teams of two. Get students to choose their own teams (unless there are particularly difficult

**For  
instruction,  
use this  
book!**