

on the House of Commons. A fun game is looking at all the photos on the walls and trying to spot current and past politicians when they were students. A lot of people you have heard of will be there.

The disadvantage of undergraduate-run competitions is that they are ... run by undergraduates. Some years they work very hard and do an absolutely brilliant job. Some years, however, reminders are not sent out, emails go missing or are not replied to, judges turn up an hour late, attempts are made to organise a debate at very short notice with no understanding of the procedures schools have to go through. Undergraduates do not have the experience of how schools and children work that teachers have; nor do they necessarily have the administrative skills that are a vital part of any teacher's toolkit. Another disadvantage of undergraduate-led competitions is that there is much less of the 'institutional memory' that schools have, given that no one stays more than three years. There is also a slight sense with Oxford and Cambridge Union that members see schools competitions as a lesser priority than their main work of schmoozing high profile speakers at the Union in the hope of being equally famous themselves one day and / or scheming and conspiring to be the next President of the Union.

Having said all that, the undergraduates who run these competitions are phenomenally gifted debaters, who are used to competing at a very high level. This means that they have a huge amount of expertise, and their feedback to students will be, though challenging, very valuable for them.

Other university competitions

Many other university debating societies run debating competitions, though these are likely to be one day events on a weekend, without the national reach of the Oxford and Cambridge Union. They provide a more intense experience for students, which can be very stimulating for them (though it does mean you giving up part of your weekend to accompany them). Given that the whole event happens in one place on one day, the administration is a little more straightforward. The format will usually be BP and short prep, and the students taking part are likely to be Years 12 and 13. Search up your local universities' debating societies for details.

Noisy Classroom

The Noisy Classroom (www.noisyclassroom.com) is a relatively new entrant to the debating scene, set up in 2011. In association with PiXL, they run a national competition called 'Up for Debate'

**It is quite
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Union**

for students in maintained schools. It is aimed mainly at Year 9 students, though Years 7 and 8 are also welcome. Only PiXL schools can take part; ask senior leadership if yours is a PiXL school. There is a charge for this competition, but it does include CPD for teachers and access to online resources. Noisy Classroom also run a competition for primary school students, which is free of charge, though at the time of writing this is only available in London. They have many resources for teachers on their website free of charge.

Do it yourself ...

It's worth considering setting up your own competition with schools in your area. While this does involve some administrative work, it has a lot of advantages. You don't have to pay a fee, you can run it how you like, and you can use it as a way to build links with local schools and other debating teachers.

If you're not sure which schools are in your area, the sports department's fixture list is a good starting point. If your school is already part of a network of schools such as an academy trust, use that network. If you teach at a maintained school, contact your local independent school (particularly if, like many independent schools, they already have an established debating tradition) and suggest collaborating with them; they may well be pleased to have the opportunity for some outreach work to provide evidence of public benefit, which they need to support their charitable status. If you teach at an independent school, contact your local maintained schools to set up the same arrangement in reverse. An independent-maintained partnership scheme can also extend to the independent school sending older students to train younger students at the maintained school; this can be very rewarding for both parties.

You can run the competition as one off, one day event, most likely at the end of the summer term after exams, with a leader board running through the day and winners announced at the end. Alternatively, you can set up a leader board system running over several evenings during the year, taking turns to host events.

Don't be afraid to launch these ventures, but don't be over ambitious either. It's always a good idea with competitions - with any new venture - to start small and then build up slowly. Test the water with some one off 'friendly' debates, and then start with a small number of schools. Four is plenty, and a nice number for a leader board competition, allowing students lots of debating

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