



# THE GREAT DEBATE

2026

**RULES AND  
GUIDANCE**



Based on the idea of  
a Balloon Debate,  
this is a competition  
aimed at students  
in years 10 - 13  
nationwide.

### The rules:

1. The competition is open to students who will be in Years 10 and 13.
2. Entrants will have to create a 5 minute speech on the set question:  
**How important are personal and public records as evidence for explaining the story, or stories, of your local area?**  
Students must demonstrate research as well as historical arguments.
3. Entrants may be penalised if their speech exceeds the 5 minute limit.
4. Judges may ask one or two post-presentation questions.
5. The judges' decision will be final.

### Judging guidelines

The judges will assess the speeches on the following criteria:

- a) The quality of the entrant's argument – its structure, clarity and power to persuade.
- b) The entrant's use of historical argument and detail.
- c) The links between their chosen topic and its wider historical context.
- d) The way in which the speech is presented.

## Content:

1. If there is any inaccuracy regarding content, then this will be penalised. It is important that there should be historical accuracy. Please make sure you do your research and allow time to write and practise your speech.
2. The main point is that there is an argument. The key thing is whether the judges are convinced by your argument.
3. Entrants are encouraged to consider all periods of history when deciding their argument, and to pick a subject matter of personal interest to them. How they wish to tackle the question is ultimately their choice.
4. To answer the question set this year we would encourage students to explore their own family histories, their local areas or to concentrate on a key historical event that they think affects them or the world they live in. Subjects to consider might be the actions of a grandparent, the traditional employment of an area, or a societal change e.g. the industrial revolution. In fact, they can provide any reason as to 'Why does History matter to me' as long as it is well researched, well-reasoned and well presented. Students do not use props or slides of any kind.
5. Research for the topic could include: newspaper archives, local archives, speaking with older relatives or people in their community; and local museums.
6. The key thing will be for their argument to be convincing. Participants should take care to keep a focus on the question, and address counterarguments or 'bigger picture' considerations that might be raised.

## Timing:

1. The rules have stipulated that the speech should be for 5 minutes, therefore the judges might note when the 5 minutes are up and not judge the speech from there.
2. Please find time to practise and be aware of the time limit so reduce what you say to the 5 minute barrier.
3. Anything beyond 5 minutes will be ignored.

