



CONCERN WORLDWIDE
POST-PRIMARY
DEBATES
HANDBOOK

CONCERN
worldwide



Irish Aid

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

Meet the Concern Debates team:



AMELIA DEEHAN

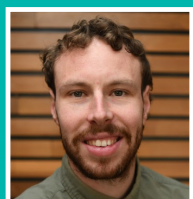
Looks after schools in Northern Ireland and works on our Primary Debates programme



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Looks after schools in Meath, Louth, Clare, Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Offaly, Laois, Westmeath, Longford, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan



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Rules and Regulations:



- Each school may only enter one team of senior cycle or GCSE/A Level students in the competition. By registering for the Concern Debates Programme, you have agreed to the terms and conditions and code of conduct set out by Concern, please view the code of conduct [on our website](#). You can also view our safeguarding statement [on our website](#).
- By entering the programme, you are agreeing to complete all three of the debates assigned in the league phase. It is not acceptable to drop out halfway through the competition or forfeit your final debate if you have already lost your other debates, as this has a knock-on effect on your opponent's experience and may hamper their progress.
- Students must submit consent forms debates before they may begin to debate, this includes timekeepers and chairpersons. Please find a link to our online consent form at www.concern.net/debates-student-consent-form. Please note: ticking the box for photo consent is essential, as the debates are recorded. Teachers must email debates@concern.net with a list of names of all students taking part so Concern staff can ensure all consent forms are submitted.
- Teachers, students and supporters must be respectful during the Concern Debates Programme. Respectful language must be used during the debates and during interactions with other schools. Sarcasm and disrespect will be penalised on the marking sheet by adjudicators.
- Unless a student requires a laptop or tablet for learning difficulties, no form of technology should be used during the debate. If a laptop is needed, we ask teachers to discreetly flag this with the other teacher via email before the debate.
- Use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, is not permitted for writing speeches.
- Debaters are encouraged to pass notes to each other throughout the debate, however, receiving notes/help from anyone outside of the four speakers is not permitted.
- Teachers and students must respect the decision of the volunteer adjudicators.
- Debates must be completed in the given time frame.

Concern Debates: The Basics

Debates Team Panel:

- A debates team is made up of four students, however, we recommend having a panel of six or more to help with research, preparations and substitutions.
- Your debates team members can be changed for any given round, either because students are taking turns or because a team member is sick.

Debates Format:

- The Concern Debates are made up of a League Phase and Knockout Phase.
- The League Phase runs from October to December with each participating school having three debates.
- The Knockout Phase begins in January and runs through to the All-Island Final in May.
- Each speaker is given 4 minutes and 30 seconds to speak. The team captain speaks twice, once to introduce the team and the arguments they will be making and again at the end, to sum up the points that have been made and refute those of their opponents.

- Both teams must have a timekeeper. The timekeeper only needs to time their OWN team, as it is too difficult to time the other team due to lag on Zoom. The timekeepers must ring the bell at 3 minutes and again at 4 minutes 15 seconds and complete the timekeeping sheet. The timekeepers must announce any penalties **on the recording** when asked by the chair in the closing comments. Please find the timekeeper's sheet [on our website](#) and the role of the timekeeper [on our website](#).
- Only the proposition team must provide a chairperson. This role can be filled by either a student or a teacher. Please find a sample of the chairperson's speech [on our website](#).

Student Training Workshops (in-person 10am-3.30pm, up to 5 students per school):

- 18th of September – Dublin
- 23rd of September – Galway
- 25th of September – Online
- 2nd of October – Derry
- 3rd of October – Belfast
- 8th of October – Kilkenny
- 9th of October – Limerick

League Phase Round 1:	1 st of October – 17 th of October 2025
League Phase Round 2:	22 nd of October – 13 th of November 2025
League Phase Round 3:	19 th of November – 5 th of December 2025
Knockout Round 1 (Top 64 Schools):	7 th of January - 23 rd of January 2026
Knockout Round 2 (Top 32 Schools):	28 th of January – 11 th of February 2026
Knockout Round 3 (Top 16 Schools):	23 rd of February – 27 th of February 2026
Quarter Finals:	19 th of March – 25 th of March 2026
Semi Finals:	15 th of April 2026
All-Island Final:	7 th of May 2026

End of League Phase Workshops (in-person 10am-3.30pm, up to 6 students per school):

- 26th February, 10th of March, 12th of March, 22nd of April, 23rd of April – Locations TBD

Debates Motions:

- All motions are set by Concern and aim to be balanced, fair and topical. Each motion will be announced by the Concern Debates team via email.
- The motions will cover topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals and global justice issues (hunger, poverty, gender equality, conflict, climate change etc.)

Preparing for the Debate:

- The Concern Debates team will decide the school pairings, sides of the motion and fixtures for each debate.
- When you receive the timeframe from Concern, the teachers should consult with each other to confirm a suitable date and time. The Concern Debates team will provide teachers with the contact information of each of their opposing teams.

- Once a debate has been confirmed, the proposition teacher must reach out to the Concern Debates team at debates@concern.net to inform them of the chosen date and time.
- It is the responsibility of the proposition teacher to set up the Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meets call, however, both teachers should record the debate in case of any technical issues. The proposition teacher must upload the recording to our Debates Platform. Please see a detailed guide on how to do this [on our website](#).

Debates Points:

- All points are calculated based on the marking sheet and the difference in overall scores between the two teams.
- The Concern Debates team will notify teachers of how many points the debaters received but will not send them the marking sheet with the raw scores.
- Results will be sent to each school as soon as possible after the video has been uploaded to the Debates Platform, usually this is within a week, subject to adjudicator availability.

How to set up the room for an online debate



Unanimous plus win	6 points	When the team wins by over 20 marks on the marking sheet
Unanimous win	5 points	When the team wins by 11-19 marks on the marking sheet
Majority win	4 points	When the team wins by 1-10 marks on the marking sheet
Bye win	3 points	When the debate cannot take place due to the other school forfeiting
Minority loss	2 point	When the team loses by less than 10 marks on the marking sheet
Unanimous loss	1 points	This means the team lost by more than 11 marks on the marking sheet

The BYE System

If your opponent drops out of the competition or forfeits a debate, the Concern Debates team will try to find another school to set your team up against (e.g. if another school has experienced the same issue). If there is no other school available, your team will receive 3 points and can move on to their next debate.

Why is a BYE worth 3 points?

A BYE is worth 3 points because it means schools must win both of their other debates in order to progress into the Knockout Stage. This system means they are not penalised because of their opponent's forfeit, nor do they have an unfair advantage over other schools.

Awards and Prizes:

- All Concern Debates schools will receive an electronic Certificate of Participation from Concern.
- Schools that reach the quarter and semi-finals are presented with medals at the All-Island Final in May.
- Both finalist schools receive trophies at the All-Island Final in May as well as an educational visit.

Discussion guidance for debates

After a debate, teachers can encourage students to discuss the following questions with their opponents. It's important to remember that the goal isn't just to "win"—it's to develop as thinkers, listeners, and communicators. These questions are a way to recognise the strengths in each other's arguments, reflect on what you've learned, and show respect for the time and effort both sides put in.

- What's one thing the other side said that made you pause or think in a new way?
- What idea from the other team do you feel would be interesting to explore further?
- Did this conversation change how you see the issue—even a little bit?
- Did you notice any common ground, even if you disagreed on conclusions?
- What's one thing the other side did well in making their case?
- What's one question you still have after hearing both sides?

Contact Concern:

You can access the debates section of the Concern website at <https://www.concern.net/schools-and-youth/debates>. Here you'll find all the relevant forms and resources along with research tips and the league table.

You can also follow us on Twitter/X and Instagram to see the latest updates to the programme:



Twitter/X:
@concerndebates



Instagram:
@concernactive

You can also find our podcast on all of the league phase motions at <https://soundcloud.com/concern-worldwide>.

If you have any questions or queries, you can email us at debates@concern.net



Understanding the Marking Sheet

Speaker One	Speaker Two	Speaker Three	Speaker Four	TOTALS	A. Content	Speaker One	Speaker Two	Speaker Three	Speaker Four	TOTALS
10	10	10	10	40		10	10	10	10	40
				0						0
5	5	5	5	20		5	5	5	5	20
				0	Knowledge and Understanding of the subject					0
5	5	5	5	20	Relevance to the motion	5	5	5	5	20
				0	Use and variety of sources					0
5	5	5	5	20		5	5	5	5	20
				0						0

The marking sheet is divided into four key areas:

- Content
- Debating skills
- Captains' duties
- Teamwork

You can find a copy of the marking sheet [on our website](#).

1. Marks for content

You get marks for content under three headings:

Knowledge and understanding of the subject:

Adjudicators are looking for evidence that you know what the debate is about – that you understand the motion and have researched all aspects of the subject. You should be comfortable with what you are saying and should understand any acronyms or technical terms.

If you are going to tackle a piece of refutation or rebuttal from the other team, you should be able to show that you understood it. You might be able to show you understand the subject and both sides of the debate by pre-empting points the other team are likely to make in their speeches.

You need to prove that you really know your speech inside and out and aren't just reading out something someone else prepared earlier (even if you are a substitute!)

Relevance to the motion:

Marks are awarded for the relevance of a speaker's contribution, i.e. you will lose marks if you deviate from the motion. Stick to your argument and make sure you are linking your examples back to the point you are trying to prove. If you go off on a tangent, remember to come back!

Stories, quotes and jokes are encouraged, as long as they enhance your argument. The onus is on the speaker to prove how the point they are making is relevant. Disrespectful comments will lose the team marks.

Use and variety of sources:

Students should be to quote or mention a wide range of sources in their arguments. When researching make sure you take a note of where you found a fact – which book, website or newspaper was it in? If you find articles on news websites, such as RTE, try to go back to the original source of anything quoted in the article. Always be sure to cite the year too so the adjudicator knows you are using up to date sources!

2. Marks for debating skills

You get marks for debating skills under three headings:

Refutation and rebuttal (R&R):

What separates debating from public speaking is the art of refutation and rebuttal. Essentially, a debate is a conversation between two groups that disagree, with each group trying to convince the adjudicator that their position is most compelling.

To refute an argument is to produce evidence (facts and figures, backed by a source) in order to prove it untrue (e.g. 'our opponents claim that child labour affects only a few thousand children around the world, but the latest ILO report states the figure is 218 million')

To rebut an argument is to discredit it by offering an alternative and stronger argument (e.g. 'our opponents have argued that it is the fault of

	Speaker Two	Speaker Three	Speaker Four	
	10	10	10	30
				0
10	10	10	10	40
				0
5	5	5	5	20
				0

B. Debating Skills

Refutation and Rebuttal
Ability to persuade, communicate and engage
Logical and well constructed argument

	Speaker Two	Speaker Three	Speaker Four	
	10	10	10	30
				0
10	10	10	10	40
				0
5	5	5	5	20
				0

the everyday consumer, but I disagree, it is the responsibility of the government to solve this problem, and I will tell you why...')

There are 10 marks available for R&R for speakers two, three and four. The captain receives marks for R&R in their closing speech. Captains do NOT need to have any R&R in their opening speech: they will not receive marks for it so save it for the closing speech!

When assigning the marks allocated for R&R, adjudicators are encouraged to allocate a maximum of three marks for each example of R&R used by each speaker. If it is a particularly good refutation or rebuttal, the speaker is given three marks. If, on the other hand, it is more of a contradiction than a refutation or rebuttal or it is not backed by a source, only one or two marks are given. A speaker who makes three to four good uses of refutation or rebuttal can expect maximum marks.



Quality is the key, rather than quantity. A good point that is well delivered and challenges the main point of a previous speaker is more significant than a number of throwaway criticisms.

You can find our refutation and rebuttal guide [on our website](#).

Ability to persuade, communicate and engage:

Persuade Debaters should leave the audience in no doubt that their side of the motion is the right one; they should be passionate and assured.

Communicate Students should be articulate, speak slowly, clearly and audibly. They should know their speech inside out.

Engage Debaters should use body language, eye contact and vary their tone to keep the audience captivated. Passion, humour, and emotion will be rewarded in this category! Jokes can get a good response but make sure they are appropriate, fair to your opponents and on topic. Inappropriate sarcasm will result in marks being docked.

Logical and well-constructed argument:

Like any essay or speech, it helps if you have a beginning, middle and end to your argument. Introduce what you are going to say, make three or four clear points, then conclude by briefly reminding us of what you have said. Don't just read out interesting quotes or facts, show us how they prove your point.

Opening Speech		C. Captains' Duties	Opening Speech	
10	10		10	10
	0			0
5	5		5	5
	0	Definition of the motion or response to definition		0
Closing Speech		Outline of team's arguments	Closing Speech	
10	10	Summary and defense of team's arguments	10	10
	0			0
10	10		10	10
	0			0
Closing Speech		Rebuttal of other team's arguments	Closing Speech	

3. Marks for captains' duties

The captain gets marked in the same way as all other team members under content and debating skills (except for refutation and rebuttal). The captain also receives marks for their unique captains' duties. There are 35 marks in total going here, so it is important to get it right!

Opening speeches:

The proposing captain is marked on their definition of the motion, outlining their team's arguments and presenting their own argument.

The captain of the opposing team is marked for **responding to the motion** defined by the proposition (and suggesting an alternative definition if they have one), outlining their team's arguments and presenting their own argument.

Closing speeches:

In their closing speeches, each captain is marked on their summation of their team's arguments and rebuttals, and refutation or rebuttal of their own. The captain of the opposition is called first this time, followed by the captain of the proposition who is the final speaker of the debate.

No new material should be introduced in the summation, even if it shows brilliant research or understanding! Adjudicators will disregard any new information or argument introduced by captains in their closing speeches, unless it is clearly in the form of a refutation or rebuttal.

4. Marks for teamwork

Display of teamwork during the debate is worth 10 marks.

Debaters need to show that they worked as a team in preparing for the debate. It should be obvious to the adjudicators how you divided up the subject, and it may be an idea to use a 'team line' (this can be a catchphrase or quote that all speakers repeat at some stage in their speeches). Debaters should also be familiar with each other's speeches, share research and useful statistics and refer to each other if relevant.

Do not be afraid of passing notes to each other (quietly!) during the debate – this will show that you are working together to come up with points of refutation and rebuttal. There should be no notes passed from outside the four speakers.

Please see our detailed marking sheet guide [on our website](#).

D. Team Work			D. Team Work	
10	10		10	10
	0			0
	0	Display of team work during the debate		0
	0	Subtotal		0
	-	Less time penalties		-
	0	TOTAL		0

Top Tips for Students

Tip 1

Aim to speak for no less than 4 minutes and no more than 4 minutes and 30 seconds. Marks are deducted for going over time.

Tip 2

Don't make your speech too short. There are no marks docked for speaking under time; however, it can make adjudicators think that you are not well prepared or have rushed through it which will cost you marks in other areas of the marking sheet.

Tip 3

Practise reading your speech out loud, either at home or in school with your team, and be sure to time it. People generally take longer to read something out loud than in their heads. You will also need to build in extra time for refutation and rebuttal.

Tip 4

Don't read your speech directly off the page. Look up at the camera/audience as much as possible to keep your speech engaging.

Tip 5

Remember to speak slowly, adjudicators can't mark the content if they can't hear it properly.

Tip 6

Always quote the sources for all your facts and figures. Try to use sources that are up to date so that you're not quoting facts from 10 years ago!

Tip 7

Be sure to have additional, relevant information and statistics that might be used for rebuttal on the day. Try to predict what the other team will say and keep some statistics that could be used to counter their arguments.

Tip 8

Check out Concern's guide on **how to structure your speech**.

Where to start your research:



- You can find our podcast episodes on all of the league phase motions at <https://soundcloud.com/concern-worldwide>
- You can also check out our Trello board where we post useful research links for the League Phase motions [on our website](#)
- Our resources page for students can be found [on our website](#)
- You can find our glossary of useful terms [on our website](#).

Different types of research you can use:

- Surveys within your school, community, family or friends (useful for motions that address our responsibilities and attitudes)
- Books, encyclopaedia, newspapers, journals, periodicals and magazines can be a great source of statistics and quotations
- Carrying out interviews with politicians, ambassadors, councillors, local businesspeople or teachers
- Documentaries, current affairs and news programmes can contain some strong information and statistics
- Contacting NGOs or government departments
- Searching websites such as <https://sdgs.un.org/goals#implementation> www.developmenteducation.ie www.globalissues.org <https://data.worldbank.org/> <https://www.wfp.org/> and of course www.concern.net
- Podcasts, informative videos and other multimedia can all be found in abundance online!

Helpful Guideline for Teachers



All students must fill out online consent forms at www.concern.net/debates-student-consent-form and teachers must email debates@concern.net with a list of names of the students participating.

- Ensure you have enough students to cover the four speakers needed, as well as substitutes in case any students are sick or away. You will also need a student to act as a timekeeper for each debate and one as chairperson when your team is proposing the motion.
- All team members (including timekeepers and chairpersons) need consent forms. All students must fill out online consent forms at www.concern.net/debates-student-consent-form and teachers must email debates@concern.net with a list of names of the students participating.
- If you cannot find a time/date that suits both schools for your debate, please contact the Concern Debates team as soon as possible.
- Please follow our [Room Set Up Guide](#) for each debate.
- Please ensure that you are registered on the Debates Platform. You can find a detailed guide [on our website](#) on how to register and upload a video.
- Do a technical check to ensure you can hear and see the opposing team before you start to record the debate. If possible, plug the laptop into an ethernet cable to ensure stable internet connection. Do not record on tablets or iPads.
- We ask both the proposing and opposing teams to record the debate, in case of any technical issues, but it is the responsibility of the proposition to upload the video promptly onto the Debates Platform the day after the debate.
- The opposition school is asked to retain a copy of the debate recording until the results have been awarded.
- You can find all materials and resources for teachers [on our website](#).
- You can find a detailed guide of all the steps a teacher must take before and after a debate [on our website](#).
- If you cannot upload your video to the Debates Platform, please get in touch with debates@concern.net
- If you receive your results and feedback sheet from the Concern Debates team but you are unclear on the feedback or on where your team can improve, please email the Concern Debates team at debates@concern.net



Please ensure that you are registered on the Debates Platform. You can find a detailed guide [on our website](#) on how to register and upload a video.

When you are the proposition school, you are responsible for:



- Agreeing the date and time for the debate with the opposing school debates mentor. Concern will provide you with the relevant contact details when we email you the fixture lists.
- Confirming this date with the Concern Debates team by emailing debates@concern.net
- Setting up the online meeting, over Zoom, MS Teams or any other online platform you are comfortable using
- Providing a chairperson for the debate, please refer to our [sample chairperson speech](#) on our website.
- Providing a timekeeper for the debate, who will complete the [timekeeper's sheet](#) and announce any penalties for your school when asked by the chair in the closing comments, after the debate has concluded. The opposing school will have their own timekeeper who will announce any penalties for their team.
- Recording the debate and retaining a copy of the debate until you have received the results.
- Uploading the recording of the debate onto the Concern Debates Platform. For information on using this platform please see our [Debates Platform guide](#) on our website

When you are the opposition school, you are responsible for:



- Responding promptly to the proposing school debates mentor to agree the date and time for the debate with the opposing school debates mentor.
- Recording the debate, as a back-up in case of technical issues. Please retain this recording until you have received your results.
- Providing a timekeeper for the debate, who will complete the [timekeeper's sheet](#) and announce any penalties for your school when asked by the chair in the closing comments, after the debate has concluded. The proposing school will have their own timekeeper who will announce any penalties for their team.



Want to support your local schools?
Become a Concern Debates adjudicator!
Email debates@concern.net or go to
www.concern.net/schools-and-youth/debates/adjudicators to sign up!

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ENDING
EXTREME POVERTY
WHATEVER
IT TAKES