

Donald Dewar Memorial Debating Tournament 2025/2026

Handbook for Schools



1.01 Introduction

Team Debate has developed a handbook for all coaches involved in this year's tournament. The purpose of the handbook is to provide more information about each stage of the tournament to ensure the tournament runs as smoothly as possible. It also provides information about what to do in the event of bad weather and teams failing to appear etc. We hope this handbook provides a useful reference throughout the tournament and prepares you for what to expect. Coaches should also read the Tournament Guidelines, which will be emailed to you in conjunction with this handbook.

If you have any questions please contact debate@lawscot.org.uk

When contacting please use 'Debate // School name ' in subject line to easily identify your team.

Good luck in the tournament!

1.02 The Tournament Schedule

The Donald Dewar Debating Tournament runs from November until June, with the applications for entry starting in September. The first round will take place in November with the second round commencing in January. The semifinals will take place in March and the grand Final is normally held in June in Edinburgh.

First round - A maximum of 64 teams will start the tournament in the first round, with 16 heats consisting of four teams in each heat. The heats will take place on two separate evenings across Scotland. At each heat the judges will choose the **two** highest performing teams to progress to the second round. The motion and side the teams will be competing on (prop or opp) will be confirmed to all teams at least two weeks prior to the debate via email.

Second round - 32 teams will take part in the second round. There will be 8 heats with four teams competing in each heat. At each heat the judges will choose **two** teams to progress to the semi finals. The motion and side the teams will be competing on (prop or opp) will be confirmed to all teams two weeks prior to the debate via email.

Semi-final -16 teams will take part in the semi-finals, which consists of four heats, each made up of four teams. In the semi-final the motion is unseen and the teams will hear the motion one hour before they are competing (they will know in advance if they are prop or opp). They can use that hour to prepare their arguments but no textbooks, computers, phones and books can be used to research the motion and coaches are not permitted to assist their teams. Judges will select **one** team to progress to the grand final.

Final - Four teams will take part in the national final which is likely to be in early June 2025, though the actual date will be confirmed as soon as possible. As with the first and second round the motion and side the teams will be competing on (prop or opp) will be confirmed to all teams at least two weeks prior to the debate via email.



1st Round	Heats take place on 13th & 20th November 2025 – <i>teams will only compete on one night</i> (IN PERSON)
2nd Round	Heats take place on 15th & 22nd January 2026 – <i>teams will only compete on one night</i> (IN PERSON)
Semi Finals	Heats take place on 5th March 2026 (IN PERSON)
National Final	June 2026 (venue TBC)

At the final, there will be one winning team, one runner-up team and two finalists. The first prize is £1,000 and the Tournament award, which is retained by the winning school. A second prize of £250 is awarded to the runner-up team and all finalists receive a Plate and a book token to commemorate their success.

1.03 Structure of Individual Debates

The debate will take the following format:

Section	Time Allowed	
Chair's Introduction	5 minutes <i>(approx.)</i>	←
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First Proposition speaker	6 minutes	Repeat for 2 nd debate
First Opposition speaker	6 minutes	
Second Proposition speaker	6 minutes	
Second Opposition speaker	6 minutes	
Floor Debate	10 minutes <i>(approx.)</i>	
Opposition reply speech	3 minutes	
Proposition reply speech	3 minutes	
Adjudication Time	10-15 minutes <i>(approx.)</i>	
Delivery of Adjudication Results	5 minutes	



The Chair should maintain control of the debate throughout. **The Chair should be a member of the teaching or coaching staff** of one of the schools present, they should not be a school pupil.

The Chair should be addressed as 'Mr/Madam Chair' or 'Mr/Madam Speaker'.

Timekeeping

The method of signalling timing for speakers is at the discretion of the host. Examples include a bell or an oral signal such as "one minute".

A time signal will be given:

- **At the end of the first minute of each speech**, that first minute having been protected from interruption
- **One minute from the end of each speech**, that final minute being protected from interruption
- **A double signal, at the end of the six minutes**
- A double signal each 30 seconds thereafter until the chair intervenes to ask the speaker to conclude

Reply speakers have three minutes and will be given a signal when they have one minute remaining, they cannot be interrupted at any stage of the reply speech.

In addition, speakers may wish to use their own stopwatch during the course of the debate, this is perfectly acceptable practice

1.04 The First Round

The scheduled date for round 1: Thursday 13 and 20 November 2025.

Once you have indicated your availability in your submission please ensure you keep those dates free. We will aim to confirm your date(s) at least two weeks prior to the event.

Details of the first round

You will be contacted via email with details of the heats. Please check this email to see what heat you are competing in, and details of the heat. The email will detail the date, motion, and whether your team is opposing or proposing the motion. It is essential you confirm your attendance on receipt of this email.

The first-round heat

Four teams will take part in each first round heat, and the judges will select **two teams from each heat to progress in the tournament**. These two teams will be the teams that were deemed the best by the judges, regardless of whether they were in the same debate. Details of the motion and the sides of the argument the teams are competing on will be emailed two weeks in advance of the heat.

The audience are encouraged to take part in the two floor debates, and a prize will be awarded by the judges for the best floor prize speaker over the course of the evening.

Host schools are required to ensure the provision of a chair and a time-keeper. If the heat is in person there is guidance on how the room should be set up. Further information about hosting the debate is available in the tournament guidelines, which will have been emailed to you in a separate document.

In cases of bad weather, teams failing to appear, a later arrival, please see below. If you require to pull out of the competition in advance of the heat please see below.

Judges are asked to base their decision on the guidelines set out in the tournament handbook and ensure feedback will assist teams to progress in the future. We are most grateful to our judges who volunteer their time to attend the heats and their decision is final.

Good luck in the first round!!

2.01 The Second Round

If your team(s) has made it through to the second round – congratulations! The second round takes place in early 2026 and the dates are as follows:

Thursday 15 and 22 January 2025.

Please register by 6.45pm to ensure a prompt start.

Please keep these dates free. If your team has made it through to the second round, please continue to keep these dates free and we will contact you at least two weeks before each heat to confirm details of the second round heat.

Hosting the second round

Once again, for the second round we would be most grateful if as many schools as possible could make themselves available to host if you can!

Team Debate will allocate host schools. An email will be sent to all proposed host schools in late December / early January with the details of the proposed heats. We would be grateful if all schools that indicated they could host could check their emails, and if selected, could confirm you are still able to host as soon as possible by responding to the email or calling to confirm – debate@lawscot.org.uk. This allows us to notify all teams of the draw details as soon as possible.

Once all host schools are confirmed, all schools will be contacted with the arrangements of when and where they will be competing. Thank you to all host schools for their cooperation with this!

Details of the second round

You will be contacted in late December / early January via email with details of the heats. Please check this email to see what heat you are competing in, and details of the heat. The email will detail the date and venue of the heat, the motion, and whether your team is opposing or proposing the motion.



Approximately 3 days prior to each heat we will email draft Order Papers to the competing teams. This will indicate the order the teams are competing in. Please advise us at that stage if you wish to make changes to the speakers.

Final order papers will be issued via email on the day of the debate.

The second round heat

Four teams will take place in each second round heat, and the judges will select **two teams from each heat to progress in the tournament**. Details of the motion and the sides of the argument the teams are competing on will be emailed two weeks in advance of the heat.

The audience are encouraged to take part in the two floor debates, and a prize will be awarded by the judges for the best floor prize speaker over the course of the evening

Host teams are required to ensure the room is set up for the heat and to provide a chair and a time keeper. Further information about hosting the debate is available in the tournament guidelines, which will have been emailed to you in a separate document.

In cases of bad weather, teams failing to appear, a later arrival, please see below If you require to pull out of the competition in advance of the heat please see below.

Judges are asked to base their decision on the guidelines set out in the tournament handbook and ensure feedback will assist teams to progress in the future. We are most grateful to our judges for attending the heats and their decision is final.

Good luck in the second round!

2.02 The Semi Final

If your team(s) has made it through to the semi-finals – congratulations! You are down to the final 16 teams in Scotland. The semi-finals take place in March each year and the dates is:

Thursday 5 March 2026.

You were asked to indicate your availability for the semi-finals when completing the original form. Please keep these dates free.

You will be contacted in February via email with details of the semi-finals. Please check your email to see what heat you are competing in. The email will provide details of the date, venue of the heat and whether your team is proposing or opposing the motion. **The motion for the semi-finals is unseen so teams will not be given details until the evening of their heat.**

Please note if you have two teams in the draw they may be competing on separate nights so remember details for both your teams.

Approximately 3 days prior to each heat we will email draft Order Papers to the competing teams. This will indicate the order the teams are competing in. Please advise us at that stage if you wish to make changes to the speakers. Final order papers will be issued via email on the day of the debate.

The semi final

Four teams will compete in each semi final heat, and the judges will select one team from each heat to progress to the National Final.

The motion is un-seen and the teams will hear the motion one hour before they are competing (they will know in advance if they are prop or opp). They can use that hour to prepare their arguments but no textbooks, computers, phones and books can be used to research the motion and coaches are not permitted to assist their teams.

The first two teams competing are asked to arrive by 5.45pm and the motion will be announced at 6pm. The Host School is asked to ensure each team can prepare for the debate in their own room out of earshot of the debating room.

The debate coach of the host school will be asked to provide a mobile telephone number and the motion will be sent by text message just before 6pm for announcement to the first debate teams. The host school is then required to ensure the motion is communicated to the two teams at 6pm and allow them 1 hour exactly to prepare for their debate in their respective rooms.

The judges and second teams are asked to arrive by 6.45pm. The same process as outlined above will then be carried out for the teams competing in the second debate, and they will go into the rooms as the first two teams exit their rooms. The teams competing in the second debate will have one hour exactly to research the motion.

If the motion is announced later than planned e.g. 7.10pm, then the teams will start at 8.10pm to ensure they have the full hour to prepare.

Normally, the first debate should take place at 7pm and the second debate should start at 8pm.

The audience are encouraged to take part in the two floor debates, and a prize will be awarded by the judges for the best floor prize speaker over the course of the evening.

Host teams are required to ensure the room is set up for the heat and to provide a chair and a time keeper. Further information about hosting the debate is available in the tournament guidelines, which will have been emailed to you in a separate document.

In cases of bad weather, teams failing to appear, a later arrival, please see below. If you require to pull out of the competition in advance of the heat, please see below.

Judges are asked to base their decision on the guidelines set out in the tournament handbook and ensure feedback will assist teams to progress in the future. We are most grateful to our judges for attending the heats and their decision is final.

Good luck in the semi-final!!

2.03 The National Final

At this stage, we do not have a confirmed date or venue for the grand final, although this is expected to take place in the first half of June in Edinburgh, and will likely fall on the Thursday evening. In recent years we have been fortunate to hold the National Final in the Debating Chamber of the Scottish Parliament, The National Galleries of Scotland and Edinburgh Napier University.

Four teams will take part in the National Final, and all pupils from the previous heats will be invited to come along to the Final and take part in the floor debate.

The teams will be informed of the motion a minimum of two weeks before the final and be allocated a side of the debate. First prize is £1,000 and the Tournament award, which is retained by the winning school. A prize of £250 will be awarded to the runner-up team. All finalists receive individual Plates and book tokens to commemorate their success. The floor prize winner will receive a prize of £50 book token. Further details about the final and the timings will be emailed to the teams involved nearer the time.

3.01 Information about the tournament

Bad Weather

As the second round heats take place over winter, there is always the possibility of weather affecting travel conditions. As far as possible we do wish to ensure heats take place on the allocated nights but safety is of course our primary concern. In case of bad weather, please adhere to the following guide:

- If you are hosting the heat please phone email debate@lawscot.org.uk on the day of the heat (before 3pm) to advise of weather conditions.
- A decision as to whether to run the heat will be taken at the discretion of the Society. We will consider the conditions, and distances teams have to travel when deciding whether to proceed or whether to run the heat virtually.
- In the event of a change, all schools will be contacted before 5pm on the day of the heat via email, and phone if required. **Please do check your emails and phones on the day of the event.**
- If the heat needs to be cancelled, we will strive to offer alternative dates to reschedule the heat. All teams are asked to be as flexible as possible when rescheduling. It is intended the venue and timings will remain the same. If a team is unable to manage the alternative date, unfortunately they may not be able to be included in the draw. If two or more teams can not manage the alternative dates Team Debate will work to find further possible dates but this can not be guaranteed.

Withdrawing from the tournament

We understand how busy the school term can get, and of course prelims, Christmas concerts and university open days can often clash with the night of a heat. We would ask all coaches to bear in mind that the Debating Tournament is oversubscribed and if we receive notice of a team having to cancel early enough, we can usually ensure another team can be included as a replacement. However, if the notice period is less than 10 days, it becomes unlikely that we can accommodate a new team. **We would be most grateful, therefore, if you could intimate to us as early as possible if your team is unable to compete so we can ask a reserve team to take your place.**

Late arrival

The Order Paper will state when the debate is to start, and for the first and second round, this is normally 7pm. We ask all judges and teams to arrive by 6.45pm so the debate itself can start at 7pm.

- If a team is late to arrive, we would ask that all teams wait until 7.15pm. After that time, a decision must be reached as to how to proceed.
- If the two teams competing in the first debate have arrived then start the debate as planned as soon as possible.

- If one of the teams competing in the first debate is not there by 7.15pm but all other teams are present we would ask that the two teams due to compete in the second debate change so they are now competing first.
- If you are travelling to the Debate and think you are likely to be late, we would ask you attempt to contact the host school to advise them of this, and your likely arrival time.

If one or more judges are late, again please wait until 7.15pm and then start the debate with the present judging panel. If the Presiding Judge is late or does not arrive, the remaining panel will require to decide between them who will act as Presiding judge. If only one judge is present that judge will take on the role of Presiding Judge. If in the unlikely event no judges arrive by 7.30pm at the latest, the debate will be cancelled and rescheduled for a later date.

Teams failing to appear

We do ask that all teams confirm attendance and inform us in advance if they have to withdraw from the tournament. However, despite this there may be instances in which teams fail to arrive at the heat. As stated above, please allow all teams a grace period of 15 minutes to arrive. If a team fails to appear however, please follow these general guidelines:

- If 3 of the 4 teams have arrived then ensure debate 1 consists of a Prop and Opp
- If the two teams competing in the first debate have arrived then start the debate as planned as soon as possible.
- If one of the teams competing in the first debate is not there by 7.15pm but all other teams are present please follow these steps:
- If a Prop team has failed to arrive, we would ask the present Prop team to compete twice. The first time the team debates will be judged competitively, the second time it will be non competitive but we expect the same level of performance to ensure fairness for all teams.
- If an Opp team has failed to arrive we would ask the present Opp team to compete again. The first time the team debate will be judged competitively, the second time it will be non competitive but we expect the same level of performance to ensure fairness for all teams.

In the **first round**, if two teams fail to arrive the two remaining teams will automatically go through to the second round. If the remaining teams are prop and opp, the teams and judges can decide between them whether to have a non-competitive debate and receive feedback from the judges to assist with future rounds. We would encourage teams and judges to do this where possible.

In the **second round** in the extremely unlikely case of two teams failing to arrive please follow these steps:

- If the two teams present are on different sides of the debate please continue with a non-competitive debate and receive feedback from the judges.
- If the two teams present are on the same side of the debate, we would suggest the debate be rescheduled to allow for one of the teams to prepare an argument for the other side of the debate. If, however one team is happy to swap sides and the debate can run that night as planned that would be great.

Attending heats

We encourage all schools to invite an audience to attend the heats, in particular pupils from debating teams to participate in the floor debates. If you wish to bring an audience to your team's heat please email debate@lawscot.org.uk with an indication of the number of people attending, so we can inform the host school, and ensure this number can be accommodated. Even in the virtual heats it would be great to have an audience! A lively audience certainly adds to the atmosphere of the debate and we encourage as many as possible to attend!

Thank you all for your cooperation in helping to make this tournament a success. Checking and responding to emails will ensure the smooth running of the tournament. If you have any queries email debate@lawscot.org.uk using 'Debate // school name' as subject line to easily identify your school.