

Your guide to hosting a standing debate



Thank you for joining the **Big Education Conversation!**
This guide has all the information you need to include a **standing debate** as
part of your Big Education Conversation.

This guide was written and designed by the **Big Education Conversation** Project Council.

WHAT is a standing debate?

A standing debate is a great way to get your Big Education Conversation started. It gets people active, engaged and shows that this conversation welcomes a range of views.

HOW to hold a standing debate?

The host begins by **posing a statement** (e.g. "exams are a fair way to assess student learning").

- Next, participants are invited to **express their view** on the topic by moving to a point on an imaginary spectrum across the room (e.g. to the left, for strongly disagree, and to the right for strongly agree).
- The host asks participants to **elaborate on their point of view** by asking why they chose a particular position on the spectrum.

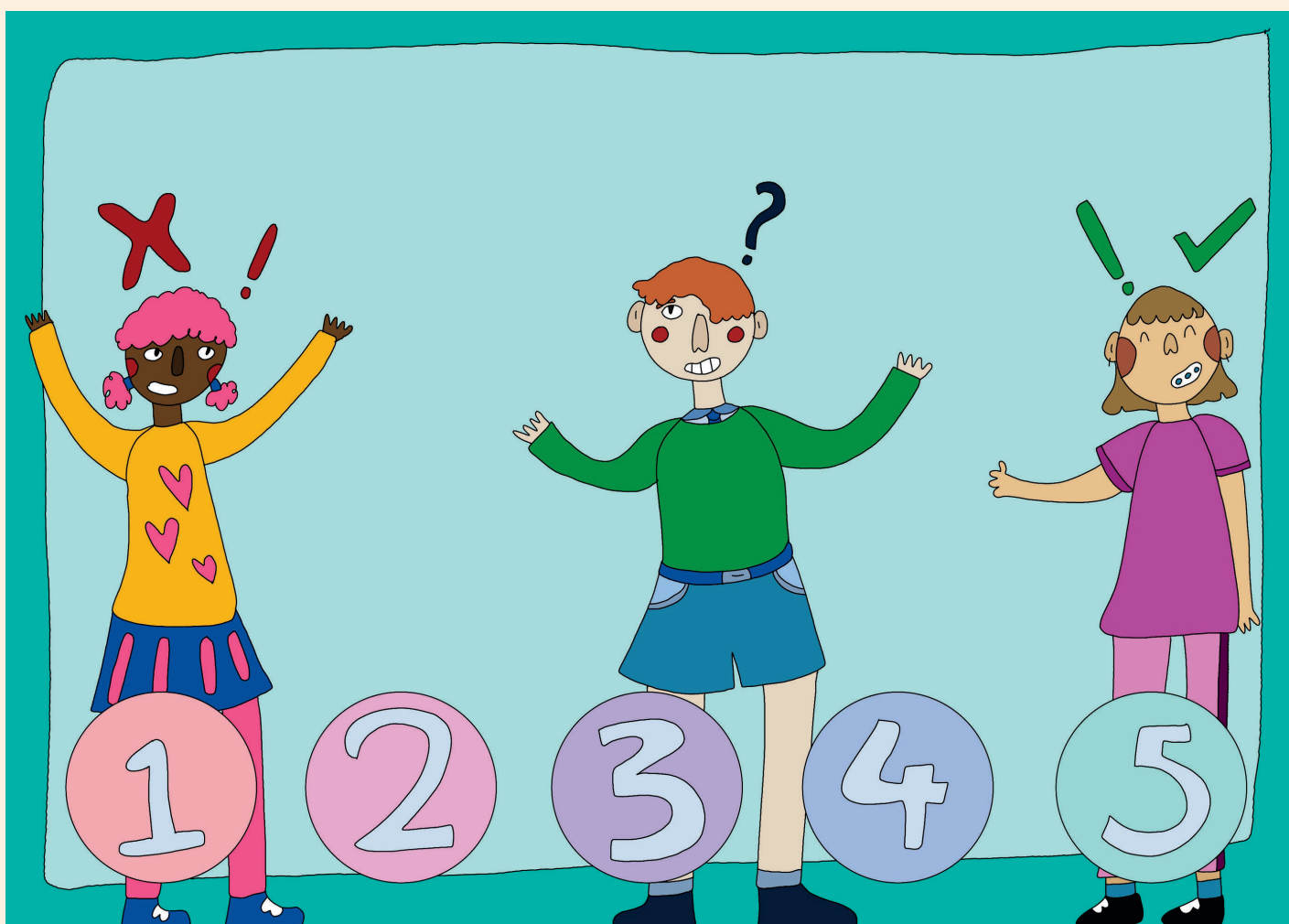


Illustration by Mia Currie (Project Council)

WHY hold a standing debate?

- In many conversations people find themselves taking positions of 'I agree' or 'I don't'. A Standing Debate can be a good way to **resist the polarity**, by offering choices along a spectrum. It promotes being 'in between' and encourages more **depth of discussion** in the rest of your Big Education Conversation.
- Standing debates encourage people to **move around** which means participants become 'active' rather than 'passive'.
- Having everyone involved in the activity **prevents just one person talking** and makes it easier to invite participation from the wider group.
- It feels **safer** for people who aren't comfortable voicing their opinions to express themselves because everyone joins in.
- The host can intentionally choose to probe people with a **range of different views** on the topic by inviting people standing in different places to share their views.



CHOOSING STATEMENTS

for your standing debate

- Think of a topic that people might want to talk about. It should be an issue that is **relevant** to those taking part. For example, it wouldn't make sense to ask home schoolers about uniform.
- The statement should encourage **diverse views** and allow for complex discussion - rather than "school is good" you could say, "school prepares students with the knowledge and skills they will need in life".
- It could be a **topical** issue. Is there something relevant in the news at the moment or an issue that students at your school are facing?
- Think about different ways to **phrase the statement** so that it's not leading to a particular answer. Statements that pose something as 'true or false' (exams put too much pressure on students) could lead people towards a specific response.
- **Sequence** the statements so that you start with an 'easier' topic first - eg 'schools should have a school uniform' before a statement like 'School punishments, like detention, are fair'.
- You may want to **test** the statements out on different people before your BEC, to check that they are clear and make sense.



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Here are some statements that have worked well for us:

- The current education system prepares people for their futures.
- I believe exams are the best way to measure success.
- Students should be in classes grouped by ability instead of age.
- I feel the summer holidays are too long/ too short.
- The school day should start later.
- Maths should be compulsory until the age of 18. (We used this after the Prime Minister said it should be, and there was lots in the news about it).

TOP TIPS

- Say that you'll invite people to share a thought or two - but that no one has to speak if they don't want to.
- Choose people across the spectrum - so you hear a range of opinions.
- Read the room - pick a couple of people who put their hands up first, but then invite people who might seem like they don't want to be chosen. We find that quieter people have some of the most impactful things to say!



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