

# Charter for Responsible Debate

The Young Academy of Scotland proposes **nine general principles** for **responsible public debate**. These are grounded in an ideal of informed, respectful and inclusive decision-making. This is designed as a starting point to support discussion amongst those who initially disagree but who listen well to each other in pursuit of common ground and common cause. We encourage people to adapt and refine the principles for more specific contexts.

## Informed

- 1 Aim for accuracy, and base your contributions on evidence and experience.
- 2 Talk to people with different beliefs, experiences, perspectives and backgrounds.
- 3 Be honest in how you communicate, and speak with conviction for what you believe.

## Respectful

- 4 Listen carefully, open-mindedly, and with empathy.
- 5 Use emotional language judiciously, avoiding disrespectful or inflammatory language.

## Inclusive

- 6 Show appreciation for good points made by others, acknowledging when they change your mind.
- 7 Communicate in ways that unite rather than divide.
- 8 Try to address imbalances in power, knowledge and accessibility.
- 9 Seek to identify common ground and shared purpose.

This list of principles originated at a one-day event in May 2019 with politicians, media personalities, campaigners, activists and academics to share experience and propose possible principles.

YAS hosted an RSE Curious event at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2019 where members of the public were invited to contribute to the ongoing development of our charter for responsible public debate by commenting on the principles proposed at the event in May and proposing their own principles.

We ran an event at the Scottish Parliament's Festival of Politics in October 2019 to further refine the principles and discuss the process of improving the quality of political debate in Scotland.

The general membership of the Young Academy of Scotland has given us invaluable feedback and assistance, especially at a critical feedback session at the December 2019 Plenary meeting. We have also led discussions of the project at Millennialifest 2019, Wigtown Book Festival, and Learning for Sustainability Scotland; and we have taken public feedback via a questionnaire on our website.