



Equipping Christians
for the General Election

General Election 2017 Chairperson's Guide

The information in this guide will help you to take up the exciting challenge of chairing a local Question Time event in the build up to the General Election.



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General Election 2017 – Key Dates

3 May	DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT
11 May	DEADLINE FOR DELIVERY OF NOMINATION PAPERS FOR CANDIDATES
22 May	VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE
23 May	POSTAL VOTE APPLICATION DEADLINE
31 May	PROXY VOTE APPLICATION DEADLINE
3-4 June	FINAL WEEKEND FOR POLLING DAY RECOMMENDED DEADLINE FOR HUSTINGS EVENTS
8 June	POLLING DAY (BOOTHS OPEN 7AM – 10PM)

Keep an eye on cut-off date www.aboutmyvote.co.uk for the cut off date for UK citizens aged 18 and over to register to vote in the General Election to be announced. This date will also mark the deadline for voters to apply for a postal or a proxy vote.

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www.engaGE17.org.uk | www.care.org.uk

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What makes a good chairperson?

The chairperson of a Question Time event fulfils a crucial function for ensuring a successful event.

- They should be an independent arbiter of challenging political debate; someone who is not intimidated by political figures, is not too close to any one of the candidates and has never stood as a candidate for any of the political parties represented at the event.
- The chairperson needs to have an active interest in politics and be a resident of the local constituency. Often they are members of the community who have served in some sort of service role (e.g. magistrate, charity leader, church minister, business executive) is chosen.



How to prepare

The chairperson's preparation should include:

- Reading informed summaries of the party manifestos and ideally, brief research on the candidates recorded opinions (a simple Google search with the candidate's name and where they come from). If the sitting MP is standing again you can find plenty of information about their views on major issues, usually on their own website.
- Communicating with the invited candidates to explain they will be allowed a 90 second closing speech. When the candidates are all present you might like to draw names out of a hat to discover the running order of the final speeches.

Choosing the questions

There are two categories of question that will be asked at the event. Firstly, questions that concern party policy, (usually covered in the manifesto) and secondly, questions of a personal 'conscience' nature. The latter questions are important as they may illicit answers about significant issues otherwise ignored.



- Such live events are unique in allowing the candidates to give their view in front of a sizeable crowd of voters. After listening to a candidate's response, the chairperson should be prepared if necessary to go back to them for a clarification for the audience's benefit (e.g. 'But it says in your party's manifesto...')
- Selecting the range of topics to be tackled during the event is important. There will be a range of topical issues that should be addressed (e.g. approach to Brexit, taxation, poverty, housing, immigration, NHS funding, international aid budget).
- Then there are issues that may not be a matter of party policy (e.g. abortion law reform, assisted suicide, prostitution). CARE has produced some detailed briefings on these and other issues together with suggested questions (see www.engage17.org.uk).
- A balance should be kept between questions selected in advance and an opportunity towards the end to ask other questions from the floor.
- The event is best organised by giving the audience the opportunity to write questions down and hand them in to your team of assistants when they arrive. This could be done using question cards (see appendix 1) and calling people to ask their own question or simply on pieces of paper with the chairperson asking the question. Ensure that you select the questions by checking them against the topics on your list. In this way you both involve the audience and also ensure a wide-ranging debate. One of your assistants can always submit a question if a topic is missed. The questions should all have been submitted 10 minutes before the event commences.
- In addition to these questions selected in advance, it is good towards the end to invite people to ask oral questions from the floor.
- Ensure you have a roving microphone on hand.
- When the candidates are all present they can draw names out of a hat to determine the running order of the final speeches.

Opening the event – step by step:

1. Introduce yourself and welcome everyone.
2. Thank the church for their welcome and hospitality. Hopefully, they will have done a wonderful job in providing refreshments and making everyone feel thoroughly at home.
3. Ask the candidates to introduce themselves and name the party they are representing (if any).
4. Lay down the ground rules for the event.

A brief introductory comment like this will help:

'Why are we here this evening? To ask the candidates important questions so that their answers will help us when we come to vote on 8 June. Tonight is about the electors of <constituency name> and our desire to find the best possible person to represent us in the House of Commons. We pray that more of the truth will be discovered this evening and that we will all return home wiser than we are beforehand.'



Questioning the candidates

Now ask the first selected question. If you are asking it, make sure it short and easy to understand. If it has been submitted but it's a little tortuous, then summarise it. Here are some tips to help the question and answer session to run effectively:

- **Ensure a variety of conscience and party issues** and try not to let one topic dominate the evening- the audience needs to hear across the range of subjects.
- **Ask the candidates to give their response** and bear in mind what their party's policy is just in case of a direct conflict. Remember, the event is primarily for the benefit of the voters not the candidates.
- **Change the order of responses** so that they all get the opportunity to answer first – it is often hard answering last after four candidates have covered most of the ground.
- **Go back to the audience** for one supplementary question. Be clear that it must be related to the topic under discussion. Someone should go to the selected questioner with a roving microphone.

Help further when needed:

- **If a question has been submitted but is not very clear and concise** - summarise it (e.g. How will you seek to ensure maximum well-paid employment when we leave the European Union?' Or: 'Is it possible to give 0.7% of our national income away to developing countries and to adequately fund the NHS?' Or: What measures would you take to ensure that vulnerable women are not trapped in the sex industry?)
- **If an answer is too vague** - ask a simple 'yes or no' follow-up question.
- **If the candidate goes on too long** - interrupt politely ('we must move on now' or 'I'll have to hurry you').
- **If all the main topics have been covered** - you might ask for further questions from the floor - maybe the most demanding part of the evening! Stress that you want to cover new territory not return to the areas already addressed. Again, you might need to summarise their question if it is convoluted. Occasionally, if someone has an obscure 'hobby horse' question of little interest to anyone but themselves you may need to rule it out, gently but firmly.

Candidates' speeches

Ten minutes before the end of the event, conclude the questions and ask each candidate in turn to give their final speech. Hopefully they will have all prepared a well rehearsed talk but that might be wishful thinking! It is vital that they have the same length of time. **USE A TIMER!**

Closing the event

Finally, conclude with thanks to the candidates and their parties, your assistants, the hosting church and the audience for their questions and interest.



Appendix 1

Guide to event running order

7:15pm	Doors open, refreshments are served, audience given question cards or slips of paper to submit questions by assistants
7:45pm	Refreshments stop being served and candidates draw for order of closing speeches (with witnesses)
7:50pm	Question submissions now closed and Chairperson selects questions
8:00pm	Event starts with welcome and thanks to hosts
8:05pm	Candidates introduce themselves briefly
8:10pm	Opening remarks and first question
9:00pm	Questions opened up to the floor
9:20pm	Candidates' closing speeches
9:30pm	Closing remarks

Chairperson's Checklist

- 1) Check that the candidates have been confirmed and know about the 90 second closing speech
- 2) Read summaries of the party manifestos
- 3) Work out the list of topics to be covered by questions in advance
- 4) Appoint assistants and ensure roving microphone
- 5) Remember to bring a timer
- 6) Have candidates' names written on cards in large writing to place in front of them
- 7) Prepare question cards for question submissions and brief assistants about their use

Appendix 2 Question Cards

The best kind of hustings work on the 'Question Time' model based on the weekly BBC topical debate programme. Rather than the Chairperson reading out questions from the front, individuals are invited by the Chair to ask their questions.

As people arrive at the hustings, give out a pen and piece of paper or card. Ask them to write out their full name and a question they would like to ask – both their name and their question should be written out twice. Once they have done so, the card should be cut in two, with one copy being kept by the questioner and the other copy going to the Chair.

The Chair should then select which questions should be put to candidates by saying e.g. 'Our next question comes from Jane Smith', whereupon Jane Smith should stand and ask her question.

This structure helps to encourage engagement between the audience, the Chair and the candidates whilst retaining some control of the structure and direction of the evening.

Example Question Card

QUESTION CARD	QUESTION CARD
Please hand this half to a steward	Please keep this half for yourself
Full name: John Smith	Full name: John Smith
Question: Do you support the current levels of protection which are in place to stop children stumbling across harmful content online? If so, why? If not, why not and what further measures would you support and work for if elected?	Question: Do you support the current levels of protection which are in place to stop children stumbling across harmful content online? If so, why? If not, why not and what further measures would you support and work for if elected?
	<i>If your name is called by the Chair, please be prepared to stand and clearly ask your question exactly as written on this card.</i>

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