

Ideas for hustings on the EU referendum

A hustings for a referendum is different from a hustings for an election. Normally an election involves four or more candidates from different parties, while the referendum on EU membership is a decision between two alternatives.

This document contains two different suggestions for meetings or groups looking to organise discussion events on the EU referendum.

Suggestion 1: a three-part structure

This approach takes a standard debate and breaks it into three separate questions. This could be useful if you have a particular issue which you wish to explore. For example, you may be a group concentrating on sustainability and wish to ask three questions about the environment, climate change and food production.

At the front:

- Chair
- Speaker representing "Remain"
- Speaker representing "Leave"

Other tasks:

- Beforehand - advertising the event, speaking to the local newspapers or radio
- On the day - setting up the room, welcoming the audience, microphones if needed

Welcome:

Introduction and overview by the chair. (Five minutes.)

Question one: how would staying in or leaving the EU benefit peace?

Leave speaker answers. (Five minutes.)

Remain speaker answers. (Five minutes.)

Chair asks the audience for questions. (Ten minutes.)

Question two: how would staying in or leaving the EU help create greater economic fairness?

Remain speaker answers. (Five minutes.)

Leave speaker answers. (Five minutes.)

Chair asks the audience for questions. (Ten minutes.)

Question three: how would staying in or leaving the EU help long-term sustainability?

Leave speaker answers. (Five minutes.)

Remain speaker answers. (Five minutes.)

Chair asks the audience for questions. (Ten minutes.)

Conclusion:

Thanks from the chair, and three minute closing statements from each candidate. (Ten minutes.)

Total time taken: one hour and fifteen minutes

Notes on the structure for suggestion 1:

- *Introduction.* The chair should introduce both speakers, explain what will happen, when the audience will be asked to contribute, and say when the event finishes.
- *Questions.* It's essential that both speakers are happy with the questions, and that none of the questions could be seen to benefit either the Leave or Remain campaigns. In this example, each question would probably be seen as balanced, but as a whole it could be perceived as favouring the Remain campaign. Ask the speakers to confirm that they are happy with all three questions at least a week before the event.
- *Selecting speakers.* The speakers do not need to represent the official Leave and Remain campaigns. However, both speakers must have broadly the same level of experience: it would not be fair to ask an MP to speak alongside an inexperienced sixth-form student.
- *Speaker order.* One speaker will need to go first. A good way of determining this is to flip a coin. In this example, it's been assumed that the Leave speaker won the coin toss. That means that for the first and third questions the Leave speaker speaks first, while for the second question the Remain speaker speaks first.
- *Audience participation.* Remind the audience to keep their questions brief and relevant. There will probably only be time for each speaker to give one or two answers, so it may be worth taking more than one question at a time.
- *Balance.* The chair should be careful not to indicate their own views, and to ensure that both speakers have around the same amount of time. Asking someone at the back of the room to time the speakers and hold up a sign when they have gone over time can be useful.
- *At the end.* Invite everyone to stay for tea and coffee, and lay out leaflets from the official Leave and Remain campaigns on a table.

Suggestion 2: a Quaker conversation

This approach places the hustings in the context of worship sharing or creative listening, setting each contribution in silence and asking the audience to seek clearness and discern the right way for them to use their vote.

At the front:

- Chair
- Speaker representing "Remain"
- Speaker representing "Leave"

Other tasks:

- Beforehand - advertising the event, speaking to the local newspapers or radio
- On the day - setting up the room, welcoming the audience, microphones if needed

Welcome:

Introduction and overview by the chair. (Five minutes.)

Silent worship. (Five minutes.)

Speaker:

Leave speaker outlines their reasons for voting to leave the EU. (Ten minutes.)

Silence. (One minute.)

Speaker:

Remain speaker outlines their reasons for voting to stay in the EU. (Ten minutes.)

Silence. (One minute.)

Other contributions:

The chair asks audience members to put up their hand if they wish to add their views. After every contribution there is a short silence. (Thirty minutes.)

Speaker response:

Leave speaker responds to points made and makes clarifications if necessary. (Five minutes.)

Speaker response:

Remain speaker responds to points made and makes clarifications if necessary. (Five minutes.)

Conclusion:

Thanks from the chair. (Three minutes.)

Total time taken: one hour and fifteen minutes

Notes on the structure for suggestion 2:

- *Introduction. The chair should introduce both speakers, explain what will happen, when the audience will be asked to contribute, and say when the event finishes.*
- *Selecting speakers. The speakers do not need to represent the official Leave and Remain campaigns. However, both speakers must have broadly the same level of experience: it would not be fair to ask an MP to speak alongside an inexperienced sixth-form student.*
- *Speaker order. One speaker will need to go first. A good way of determining this is to flip a coin. In this example, it's been assumed that the Leave speaker won the coin toss, and so speaks first.*
- *Audience participation. Remind the audience to keep their contributions brief and not to be misled by passion into saying something which could be seen as a personal attack. This is about sharing our views and our feelings, not a debate. Ask them to speak from the heart, rather than discussing fact and figures. Remind the audience that not everyone will be able to speak.*
- *Numbers. This structure may not be appropriate for a large group, as only around ten to fifteen people will be able to speak during the audience participation.*
- *Balance. The chair should be careful not to indicate their own views, and to ensure that both speakers have the same amount of time. Asking someone else to time the speakers and hold up a sign when they have gone over time can be useful.*
- *At the end. Invite everyone to stay for tea and coffee, and lay out leaflets from the official Leave and Remain campaigns on a table.*