



# Annual Report 2017-18



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## Foreword

I am so very lucky to do the job I do, and the 2017-18 programme year proved this yet again. Each week over 5,000 young people took part in their Debate Mate clubs, delivered by over 500 of the UK's most impressive and inspirational university mentors. In my eyes, each one of our students is a winner, and a credit to themselves, their schools and their communities.

This year, we had some standout achievements. One of our students, Hannah, captained the England Team at the World Schools Debating Championships in Croatia, before starting her degree in Law at the University of Oxford. Another student, Jola who first started Debate Mate at Ravenscroft Primary School in 2010, won a place to read Medicine at Oxford. Edmund, who took part in Debate Mate for all seven years that he was at Bridge Academy, Hackney, won a place to read Mathematics at Cambridge. We also welcomed George, another former Debate Mate student, into our office, supporting him to complete an apprenticeship. The list goes on.

Students at the other end of their Debate Mate career also had a stellar year. Our Primary School Programme grew yet again, with many of the students having the opportunity to show off their skills at our monthly Platinum 100 Breakfast Debates. We also learnt that a number of Year 5 and 6 students had taken it upon themselves to share their learning and had started mentoring and coaching Year 3 and 4 students at their schools. With this enterprising spirit and commitment to spreading knowledge, the future is safe in their hands!

I could go on and on about how wonderful our students are. They really are. But for now, all that is left to say is thank you to everyone who makes Debate Mate thrive - from our Platinum 100 Members, to our incredible board members, to corporate supporters, to my fantastic team, to the mentors and teachers. You're the reason that I have the best job in the world!

Margaret McCabe,  
CEO and founder of Debate Mate

# Social Context

After years of progress, child poverty is again on the rise in the UK. A predicted 1.5 million more children are expected to fall into poverty from 2010 to 2021 (Professor Philip Alston UN, 2018). A child growing up in poverty in the UK is likely to achieve lower academic qualifications, have lower aspirations, and a poorer skill set than their better-off peers.

Socio-economic background is known to directly influence a child's education as they grow up. From an early age, academic attainment is stratified by parental income, with a third of primary school students in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) in the UK leaving primary school without meeting expected reading, writing, and mathematics levels. This figure is double the average of their better-off peers (OECD, 2015). Unless persistent patterns in secondary attainment change, later in life these students will be half as likely to achieve 5 A\*- C, or 4-9 under the new grade scale, at GCSE, when compared to national average attainment (Social Market Foundation, 2016).

The difference in student progression into higher education is even more stark, with only 24% of FSM students reaching higher education by the age of 19, compared to 85% of students who attend a private school. Child poverty is set to rise in the UK by 7% from 2015 to 2022, with some reporting that by this date up to 40% of children will be growing up in poverty. Amidst rising levels of child poverty, educational inequality is set to become even more entrenched.

In addition to academic attainment, the home environment has shown to be central to a child's aspirations. In particular a child's cultural capital - that is their exposure to a wide range of different cultural knowledge and skills - can advantage children and aligns with their likelihood of success later on in life.

This influences students' own expectations of themselves, with 91% of children growing up in homes of high cultural capital expecting to go to university, compared to just 47% of families with low cultural capital (Archer et al, 2013). At Debate Mate, we expose children to aspirational role models, universities, and businesses, which students would not otherwise interact with, raising their academic aspirations.

However, a focus solely on academic attainment and aspirations does not paint the full picture of educational inequality in the UK. Central to the issue of social mobility is the development of key transferable skills needed to continue on to tertiary education and for success in the labour market (OECD, 2015). Such skills are lacking in UK students, with the CBI reporting that businesses had not seen improvement in the crucial skills of effective communication, self-management, and appropriate personal behaviour (CBI, 2016). At Debate Mate we teach key 21st-century skills through our peer-to-peer debate programmes, equipping students with these key transferable skills.

In the UK, the circumstances of birth have a huge influence on a child's chances of success, with students in the UK born into poorer backgrounds leaving school with lower qualifications, aspirations and skill sets than their better-off peers. At Debate Mate we work to ensure that every student leaves school with the core confidence, aspirations, and skill set to succeed.



“As a former Debate Mate student, I can show my students that Debate Mate is an important vehicle to help get you into university. It certainly was a big turning point for me!”

Iman, mentor at Mulberry School for Girls & student at King's College London



## Our Sources

OECD (2015). ‘Income Inequality and Social Mobility and Economic Growth’ OECD Publishing.

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Alston, Philip (2018) Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

Archer, L. et al. (December 2013). ‘ASPIRES: Young people’s science and career aspirations, age 10-14.’ King’s College London. Department of Education & Professional Studies.

CBI (July 2016). “The Right Combination: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2016.” Pearson UK.



# Debate Mate: Our Solution

Founded in 2007, in order to tackle educational inequality and social immobility, Debate Mate has been employing a peer-to-peer mentoring model to run after-school debating clubs in cities around the UK for over a decade. Debate Mate's programmes, delivered by inspirational university mentors, focus on building key transferable skills to raise aspirations and empower young people to be successful both academically and in the job market.

The advantages of debating are widespread and have been highlighted in a joint-report by CfBT Education Trust, the English-Speaking Union, and EdComs (Akerman and Neale, 2011). The use of a peer-led programme raises students' aspirations and broadens the horizons of the brightest pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Beyond the values of debating, participation in an extra-curricular activity is also key to employment (Thompson, 2013).

By providing a freely accessible extra-curricular programme, Debate Mate gives children from non-selective state schools the opportunity to participate in a competitive and aspiration-raising activity.

All elements of our 17-week programme have been designed with four central goals in mind:

1. To accelerate attainment in speaking and listening
2. To strengthen emotional capacity by building confidence, self-esteem, and resilience
3. To develop key employability skills such as leadership, teamwork, critical thinking and self-management
4. To heighten aspirations towards both tertiary education and meaningful employment

Throughout our ten years, Debate Mate has developed a number of programmes to achieve its aim of combatting social immobility both in the UK and overseas.

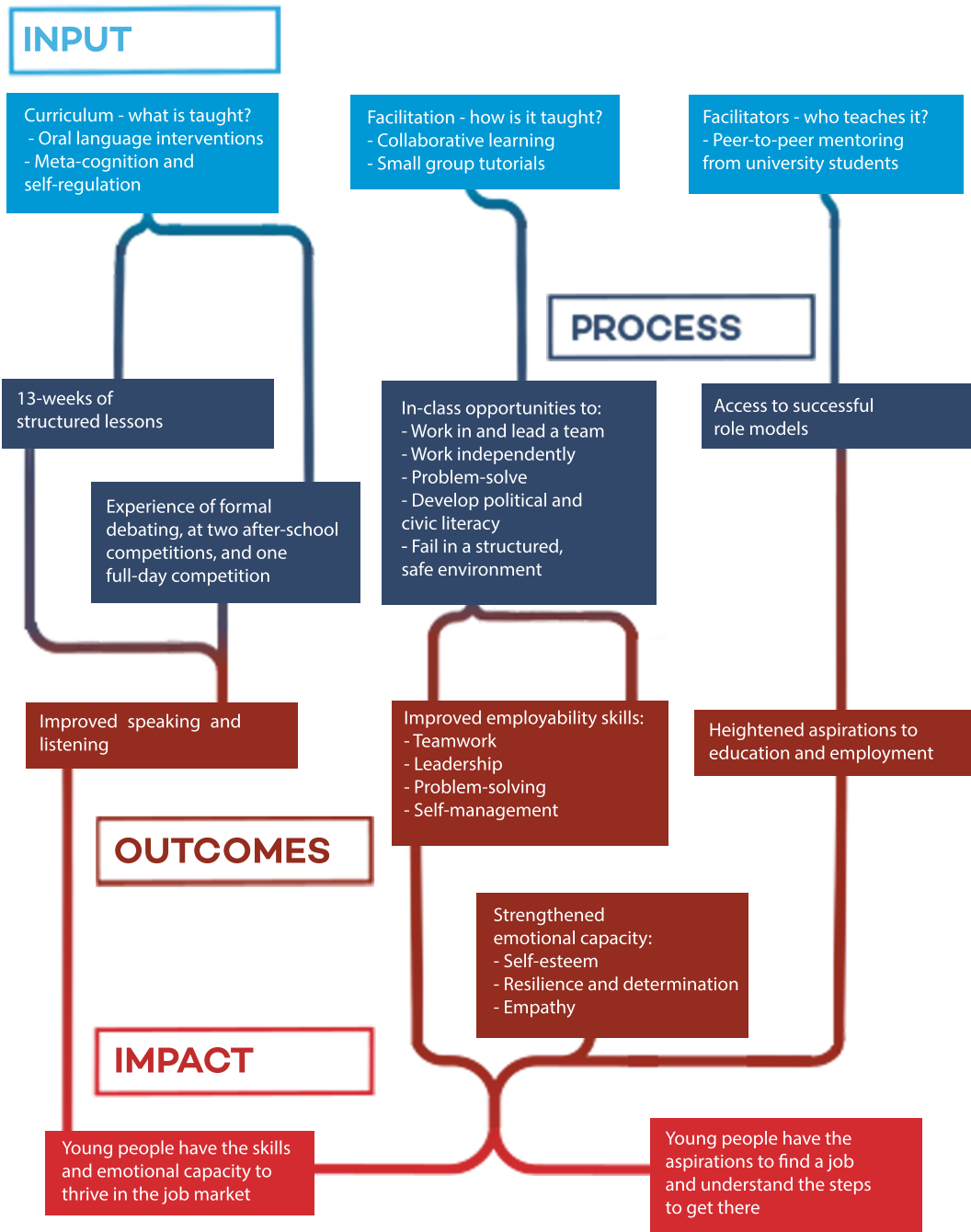
## Our Sources:

Akerman, R. and Neale, I. (2011). 'Debating the Evidence: An International Review of Current Situation and Perceptions.' CfBT Education Trust.








Thompson, L. et al. (2013). 'It's just like an extra string to your bow: Exploring higher education students' perceptions and experiences of extracurricular activity and employability.' In *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 14:2.




# Debate Mate's Theory of Change




# Core Programme

 <p>9 Major UK Cities 242 Schools 5,000 students every week</p>	 <p>14 weekly hour-long sessions with university mentors</p>	<p>Three central outcomes:</p> <div>  <p>Accelerated academic attainment</p> </div> <div>  <p>Raised aspirations</p> </div> <div>  <p>Development of key employability skills</p> </div>
 <p>Students of all abilities from Years 5 to 10</p>	 <p>Launch event and entry for two national debating competitions</p>	

## Accelerate Programme




Students from Years 5 to 10 with challenging behaviour who are disengaged with education




Developing the confidence, desire and skills to participate in the classroom

## Graduate School




Out of school sessions for students aged 15 and above who have had one year of debating experience




Cultivate world-class debaters by providing high-level debate training and opportunities to compete

## DebateBox Programme




Secondary students with challenging behaviour or at high risk of exclusion

One-hour back-to-back debate and Olympic boxing coaching




Helping students with their behaviour

## Debate Mate +




In-school programme for students in Years 10 and above



Focusing on drawing the link between the skills of debating and the world of work


## International Programmes



Our Nepal summer programme was run for the tenth year

Our Rwanda summer programme was run for the fifth year

Debate Mate has run a permanent programme in Jamaica for the fourth year in a row







# The Core Programme

Debate Mate's Core Programme is exclusively offered to non-selective state schools in areas of high child poverty. Working in 242 primary and secondary schools during the 2017-18 academic year, all with an above average percentage of students eligible for Free School Meals, across nine UK cities, Debate Mate has expanded to areas of the highest educational disadvantage in the country.

The Core Programme launches in October and runs until April, and is comprised of 17-weeks of after-school debating clubs and national debating competitions. Students attend two rounds of our after-school competition, The Urban Debate League and one full-day competition in the summer, The Debate Mate Cup.

At Debate Mate, we believe that every student should have the opportunity to debate. Of the students that attend our

weekly clubs, 46% are in receipt of free school meals, and 43% have English as an additional language. 59% of the students that attend our clubs identify as female, with 41% identifying as male. At Debate Mate we believe that every student should leave school with the core confidence, aspiration, and skill set to succeed in whatever they do, and we are proud of our inclusivity.

An integral part of the Debate Mate model is sustainability. That is, we ensure students continue debating even after our final competitions by encouraging them to complete a leadership project in their school or local community, in order to instill a culture of debating. Students elect a president and three officers to continue running their clubs once the mentors have left. Students become leaders of debating in their schools, teaching younger year groups how to debate, and setting up their own clubs.

# Our Results

The Debate Mate programme is designed to develop key 21st century skills as a way to tackle social immobility in the UK. We break these down into two categories: hard and soft skills. To analyse the extent to which both skill sets were developed by students participating in our Core Programme, two kinds of evaluation were carried out.

## HARD SKILLS ASSESSMENT

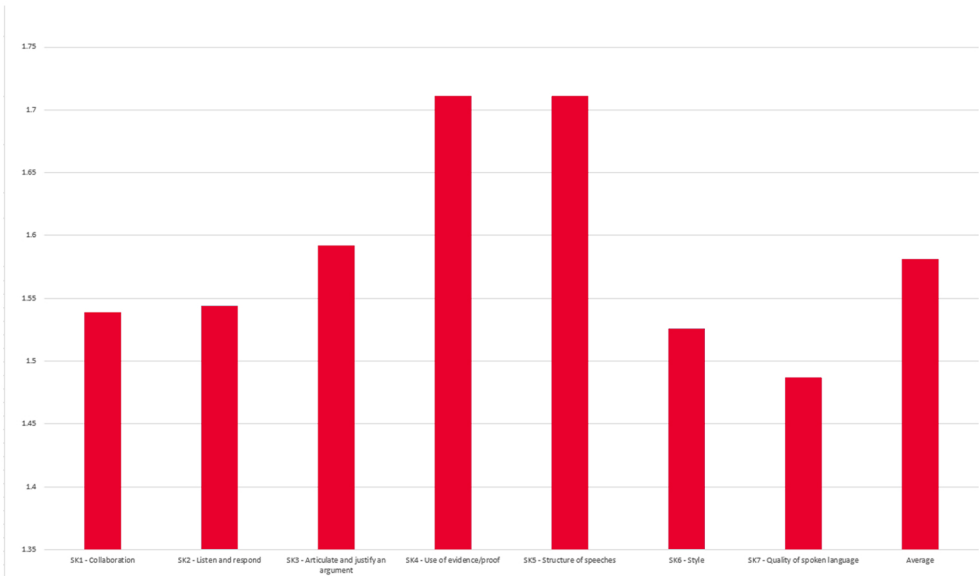
Our hard skills assessment uses a bespoke Speaking and Listening metric designed in consultation with teachers to measure students' development. This was carried out by trained Debate Mate staff at the beginning and end of our programme. To complete our assessment, we watched the first and last debate of the year and graded students' progress in seven key skill areas. This was moderated by teachers from the schools that the assessments took place in.

Our holistic metric measures student progress continuously from Key Stage Two up to

GCSE and beyond, assessing progress through seven key skills: collaboration, listening and responding, articulation of argument, use of evidence, speech structure, style and quality of spoken language. Each skill category is given a level from 0 to 8, describing a wide range of abilities that might be observed in students from Years 4 to 10.

Our results show that on average students make 1.6 levels of progress across the seven different skills, with students for whom English is an Additional Language making above average progress over the year. This is a remarkable level of development within the course of a year, and 87% of teachers have reported that Debate Mate has accelerated their pupils' progress in Speaking and Listening.

Good speaking and listening skills form the basis of all learning in literacy and are key to academic success and employability.





## SOFT SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Available data shows that students growing up in poverty are less likely to demonstrate high levels of perseverance, self-belief, and motivation to learn, which in turn affects educational outcomes (Fair Education Alliance, 2015). To combat this, Debate Mate actively seeks to develop these soft skills, which are crucial to students' academic success, personal wellbeing and employment later in life.

These take the form of self-reflection surveys that students complete at the end of the programme. Students were asked to respond to a number of statements regarding their progress in six skill areas: confidence and self-esteem, resilience, leadership, teamwork and self-management, critical thinking and aspirations.

In 2017-18, our self-assessment was completed by 2098 students, half of our total cohort. Some of our results are:

89%

said they are better able to respond to, and respectfully disagree with, the ideas of others

83%

said that when their ideas are challenged they are better at coming up with new ones

81%

said they are more comfortable speaking up in class

86%

said that they are more likely to help others when working in a group

89%

said they are better able to use feedback to reflect on their learning and improve their skills

98%

said they liked their mentor

One member of staff in a different department has recently contacted me to say, "I gave the Year 10 students 45-minutes to prep a debate in class. They debated for pretty much an hour the following lesson. It worked really well, much better than when I have tried to facilitate a debate in the past. It was really helpful to have the Debate Mate students in the class as they each led a team. Tarik\* was a student who stood out, which surprised me as I have had problems with him in the past. The team leaders knew exactly what to do so it was very easy for me – you have trained them well!" Unfortunately, I can take no credit for this – it's all down to our mentors who go above and beyond to help our students!

Melissa Boyd, Teacher at Cedar Mount Academy, Manchester

\*the student's name has been changed for protection purposes



# The Accelerate Programme at Eastbrook School, Dagenham

Eastbrook School in Dagenham has been on the Accelerate programme since it was first piloted four years ago. Every week for the past four years, a group of students who have been identified as having serious behavioural issues, being disengaged in the classroom, and at risk of exclusion have been taking part in Debate Mate as part of their regular school timetable.

The Accelerate programme focuses on giving students the skills to express themselves with composure when they disagree with someone. Rafi\*, a Year 10 pupil who took part in the programme at Eastbrook, told us that in the past he was known to be argumentative and used to interrupt people without listening to what they were saying fully. Rafi has found that he has gained patience and an understanding that, “Everyone has a right to their opinion, regardless of if it’s right or wrong. I just need to listen more, and then maybe tell them what’s wrong about it”.

\*names have been changed for protection purposes

Rafi’s teacher, Mariette Lotter, has noticed a change in the student’s behaviour. She said the programme has had a clear impact on a number of the students. “Year 10 students seemed to be more aware of their long-term goals and took their preparation for GCSEs more seriously. Possibly one of the most important parts of the programme has been their progress in teamwork and really working on the challenge of getting along with a variety of other people who you might not normally cooperate with.”

This was especially true for Rafi, whose “confidence has also grown in relation to relationships with staff and other students and he is able to articulate himself more clearly, especially when dealing with adults.”

“Debate Mate has given me confidence. Confidence to stand up for myself. Now I know how to form my opinions, and Debate Mate has given me the confidence to express it.”

Rafi, Year 10



The Accelerate programme empowers students in their classroom, outside of the Debate Mate sessions. Teacher Mariette Lotter noticed that confidence soared amongst a number of the students, especially when responding to questions and discussions in class. This is a testimonial supported by our statistics: 91% of students who went through the programme now feel confident speaking up in a classroom environment and 100% now feel that they have good ideas to contribute in a classroom discussion. In Rafi's own opinion he is now "able to contribute as Debate Mate has given me an inside look on what's going on." Contrary to disrupting lessons, he now enjoys them, commenting, "It's nice to contribute and just know things - it makes me feel smart."

The Accelerate Programme was run in 34 primary and secondary schools across London, Manchester and the West Midlands last year. We are looking forward to growing this programme further over the coming year, offering it for the first time to primary schools in Manchester.

# DebateBox

DebateBox is a behavioural intervention programme for young people disengaged with their education and at risk of exclusion. Over the last three years, the DebateBox programme has taken place in West London, working with four local schools, delivered in collaboration with The Harrow Club Community Centre and Cuban Boxing Academy.

The 14-week programme is run for 12-15 students from each of the schools and is comprised of weekly debate workshops and boxing sessions. DebateBox focuses on the shared skills needed to excel in both boxing and debating strategy: discipline, creative and critical thinking, resilience, determination, commitment, and self-confidence. The programme works towards a competitive DebateBox Cup in which students debate and box in succession, in an innovative and engaging format.

The DebateBox Programme scheme of work integrates debating and boxing, linking the skills together where appropriate. The tried-and-tested, Ofsted-approved, Debate Mate curriculum builds skills gradually through interactive game-based activities, working towards competitive exercises and competitions. We have designed the DebateBox curriculum to build the same skills, but through adapted boxing-related exercises.





# The Graduate School

The Graduate School was established in London in 2011. Since then it has grown substantially, with 60 students taking part in the programme over the course of the 2017-18 academic year. Every Saturday morning, students who have excelled on our Core Programme commute into central London to to receive advanced debate coaching, and take part in social leadership projects.

In 2017-18, our students competed and thrived at national debating competitions, historically dominated by students from the top public schools. Over the course of the year, our students attended seven different debating competitions, regularly reaching finals and topping speaker rankings. A particular highlight was Debate Mate's unprecedented performance at Durham Schools - the world's largest residential schools debating competition - where all six of our teams reached the quarter finals. Seven of our students were named amongst the top 18 speakers at the competition, with Debate Mate students placing both first and second in the speaker rankings.

While these are remarkable achievements, our students are also quick to say that the improved debating skills are just a small



portion of what they have taken away from the Graduate School Programme:

Zarina, a student from St Dominic's Sixth Form College in London, made the Team England Development Squad last year and, when interviewed, highlighted the role the Graduate School played in allowing students to "compete and make friends with people from different kinds of institutions and independent schools, which just wouldn't be a thing if you weren't doing the Debate Mate Programme", adding "I feel a lot more confident competing with other people now, there's no pedestal."

Louis began debating in year 9 when he joined the Core Programme at Little Ilford High School. He started attending the Graduate School when he was in Year 11, and

"The Graduate School gave me a 'just go for it' ethos. I was the timekeeper at my first competition, then I was like 'just go for it'... then five years later I went for Head Boy and got it. Debating helped me to make friends, be ambitious, and take those jumps. Without Debate Mate I would have been far less ambitious in terms of where I want to go. Now I have the confidence to apply to study medicine at university."

Haider, Kingsbury High School, Year 13

continued throughout his time completing A-levels at the London Academy of Excellence. Before debating, Louis recalls being terrified of standing up in class, and being asked to do things in front of an audience. This year, Louis was a star mentor on our Primary School Programme and took on a leading role in the Graduate School, bringing in new students and carrying on the legacy of the Programme:

“Through debating, my confidence has blossomed tremendously, and I wouldn’t be at all the same person I am without it. I lead conversations with other mentors, giving them tips and making an effort to lead people into becoming part of the bigger group. Having self-confidence and being able to respond to arguments quickly really helped my university application. I had an interview process for History at Cambridge, and because I’d had the Debate Mate training I was able to respond to questions on the fly.”

We are looking forward to watching these students grow as they enter university and pursue their respective career paths. Haider, another former Graduate School student, is spending his gap year as an Assistant Programme Director in the Debate Mate Office, before commencing his study of medicine next academic year. Louis has started his first year at the University of Cambridge reading History and Politics, and Zarina has just been announced as the captain of the England World Schools Debating team during her final year of A-levels. She follows in the footsteps of another Graduate School student, Hannah, who captained the team during the 2017-18 year.

This year we are expanding our Graduate School Programme to Manchester. We look forward to sharing with you the hard work and incredible achievements of our students on the Programme as it expands across the UK.

## Debate Mate +

2017 also saw the launch of Debate Mate Plus (DM+), a programme aimed at 15-18 year olds and designed to encourage and enable students to put their debating skills to use in the real world. This programme was piloted in eight schools across London during the 2017/18 academic year.

Students on DM+ received weekly after-school sessions with some of our best mentors, following a more advanced version of our core curriculum.

Alongside this, DM+ students debated about foreign policy in the state rooms at the Foreign Office, provided consultancy to one of the world’s premier consultancy firms, McKinsey & Co., taught Goldman Sachs employees how to debate and, on the 100th Anniversary of Women’s Suffrage, explained the virtues of debating and the skills it teaches to Prime Minister Theresa May at a special event in Manchester.

After a successful pilot, DM+ will now be rolling out as a full 16-week programme and will be expanding into more schools across London over the coming year.



# Conclusion

Over the past ten years, Debate Mate has reached tens of thousands of students across the UK, and even more around the world. By carefully monitoring our progress and evaluating our impact, we hope to improve our effectiveness year-on-year and provide even better support to schools already on the programme.

We are proud of the continued success of our additional programmes in London, and are looking forward to, during our 2018-19 programme year, focusing our efforts on expanding these additional programmes to our regions around the UK. To achieve this we will be launching our Primary Accelerate and Graduate School Programmes in Manchester, helping hundreds more young people across the city speak more fluently, take on leadership roles, work in teams, think critically and develop core confidence and resilience. In London we will be growing our new Debate Mate + Programme, making it a permanent feature of our offering to schools.

In order to help students make sense of the complex issues facing their generation, we will place a greater emphasis on equipping mentors and pupils with the content they need to make compelling, factual arguments. As we look to the future, we are excited to see even more former Debate Mate students return to mentor with us, helping to provide students with valuable 21st-Century skills through debating. We hope you will join us as we continue to develop our programmes and reach even more students across the UK.



"The work you do is amazing!" - Bill Gates



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**“Debate Mate has introduced me to so many different people, it has boosted almost everything about me; my general knowledge, my public speaking skills, my attitude towards others, and my ability to communicate.”**

**Lokmane, Student at Kingsbury High School, London**

**“Debate Mate is a wonderful organisation which inspires children. The debating groups and training programmes are first class.”**

**Sir Michael Wilshaw, former Chief  
Inspector of Ofsted**

**“There's been an individual success story  
for every child, which is really great.”**

**Teacher at Montgomery Primary  
School, Birmingham**

