

How to fill in your speaker's card

Debates are the heart of federal conference: they're where the party sets its policy and decides its future direction. Unlike in the other parties, the Liberal Democrat conference is sovereign, and what it decides really matters.

Any party member can speak in debates: all you need is to be registered as either a voting or a non-voting representative. Then fill in and submit a speaker's card and wait to see if you're called in the debate.

During conference, speaker's cards are available from the Speaker's Table and from the stewards in the Auditorium. They can also be collected from the Information Desk in the conference centre and from the foyer of the conference hotel.

There are three key points to remember to maximise your chances of being called:

1 Submit your card well in advance

If you hand your card in late, in a popular debate you're virtually guaranteeing you won't be called. The chair and aide team for the debate always meet well in advance to plan the debate – sometimes the previous day.

2 Fill in your card completely

The second major mistake potential speakers make is not to fill in their card completely. As well as the information on the front of the card (name, local party, for or against the motion, etc.), there are two sections on the back, for relevant background (professional or consumer experience, party background, etc.) and for a brief outline of what your speech is going to be about.

These sections are needed for the chair and aide to balance the debate – to make sure that people with relevant experience are called (not necessarily to the exclusion of others, but professional or user backgrounds are always valuable), and to make sure that they don't call a whole string of people who'll make the same point.

3 Make sure it's readable!

Don't take this as an invitation to fill every square centimetre of the card; and don't write illegibly, or in very small letters, or in green ink ... the easier you make it for the chair and aide to read your card the more likely you will be to be called.

The wrong way to fill in a speaker's card (1): no useful information

Why should you be called to speak? What expertise do you have on this topic?
Broad knowledge of many aspects of climate change issue

What do you want to say that will make a difference to the debate?
Will speak generally in support of the motion but with some reservations

FOR HELP WITH FILLING IN THIS CARD, SEE THE SECTION ON 'SPEAKING IN CONFERENCE DEBATES' IN YOUR AGENDA.

The wrong way to fill in a speaker's card (2): too much information, but mostly neither helpful nor easily readable!

Why should you be called to speak? What expertise do you have on this topic?
Member of GreenLib Pains Campaigner of green issues locally. Worked on Incommunal Trust. Spoken at consultation environmental issues

This I feel I am the most knowledgeable person as I have worked on so many courts taking about these issues at great length

What do you want to say that will make a difference to the debate?
I am a local environmental campaigner. I often speak at council on these issues. The problem with the environment is that lots of people speak about it but no one really knows what they can actually do to help the environment. Real people need real advice on what they can do to help out. I mean people really do not believe that once the slowly button costs them money

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The right way to fill in a speaker's card: clear, concise, to the point, and probably different from anyone else's

Why should you be called to speak? What expertise do you have on this topic?
Worked for energy company for the last 5 years, advising small businesses on energy saving options. Co-chair of campaign to persuade local council to improve its environmental performance. PPC for local constituency, have received good response on the doorstep to Lib Dem environmental policies.

What do you want to say that will make a difference to the debate?
Want to support the motion and oppose amendment 1. Would particularly like to speak on lines 25-27 getting the right mix of incentives, regulation and advice is crucial to ensure (particularly small business) make environmental investments. Also want to stress the role of the local authority and propose coordinated approach by Lib Dems in power locally.

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