

THE SPEAKER

Autumn 2024

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You can visit our website at the-asc.co.uk or visit our Facebook group at facebook.com/groups/speakersclubs

A word from the editors

We must start with a huge thank you to Alice Herron for her amazing work as the outgoing Editor. Alice has worked tirelessly cajoling people to write articles and bringing it all together. Every edition has been a pleasure to read, and we know how much work goes into making it enjoyable for the members of the Association of Speakers Clubs. Alice – you will be a hard act to follow. Thank you.

Jayne and Gillian met with Alice as they expressed an interest to get involved with future editions, and were soon after appointed Joint Editors. Gillian has a real interest in collating, writing and organising articles and Jayne has a passion for design, so the collective skills have created this latest edition which we hope you will enjoy.

Once again, thank you to Alice for your dedication to ‘The Speaker’ magazine.

Jayne Cowan and Gillian Mundy
Your Editors



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A letter from our National President

My friends and fellow speakers. It is an enormous privilege to be your National President, following on from my father Tony, uncle Dilwyn, and my late grandfather Coulson after whom our chain of office is named. For the next two years, I will try to live up to them, the Association, and most of all, to you. Verity Eunson Hickey, the National Vice President, and I will be working closely together leading a team of amazing volunteers for the ASC. We have three themes to achieve change and improvement for the continued prosperity and survival of the Association: Engagement, Inclusion, and Growth.

Engagement

The Hivebrite system (see page 12), our new community platform, has now been launched (crosses fingers at the time of writing); this is a crucial tool for allowing everyone easier access to resources and to each other maximising the benefits of the Association for every member.

The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) is planning a series of Zoom calls, open to all interested members, that will explore diverse topics including club leadership roles, inclusive practice, good-to-great feedback, and speaking games. Another development in this area will be the

addition of links to key materials (new evaluation forms, supplementary resources for each of the first ten assignments, the Guide and Speaker magazine) to every all-member email.

There is a lot to do, and we do not need to look hard for challenge, but there is also the potential for us to achieve great things together.

Inclusion

Recently the interactions over Facebook have been kind, supportive, and compassionate and we want to maintain that sort of discourse as it fully reflects ASC values. We will also be talking to members about potential for moving the national AGM online to allow more time for innovation in the conference weekend and enable greater discussion amongst those who wish to spend time on the formal administration of the ASC and the scrutiny of the SLT.

There are also exciting initiatives happening such as an LGBTQI+ event in Western Region and a potential new club aimed at



refugees and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) students in Scotland.

Growth

The SLT is currently supporting active and potential new clubs in Norwich, Oban, Stirling, South Lanarkshire, Richmond and Wandsworth Council, and Kent. We have relatively new clubs in Newcastle, Lincoln, and Sainsbury's that are getting ongoing support. If you want to start up a new club, get in touch with me or Jeremy Richards, our superb National Development Officer. There is plenty of support and advice available. Another critical factor for growth is filling the vacant SLT posts. If you have ever thought about getting involved in

leading and improving the ASC, the time is now. I want to hear from you!

There is a lot to do, and we do not need to look hard for challenge, but there is also the potential for us to achieve great things together. Verity and I look forward to serving you and the Association over the next two years.

Tom Scott
National President

Glasgow 2024

The Friendly Conference

“Pure, dead, brilliant man! We gied it laldy... it was brow... wit a belter!”

If by any chance you “dinnae hae a scooby” (don’t know) what the sentence above means, then allow me to translate for you. Glasgow 2024: The Friendly Conference was a success. It was not perfect, nothing ever is, but by many measures, this was one of the great national conferences of the Association of Speakers Clubs.

What worked?

Let us start with the good stuff. The number of members who engaged with the event was humbling. The Friday night AGM was well attended, the contests held in the Buchanan Suite were standing room only, and the Gala Dinner was an 85-member

sellout! The Lord Provost of Glasgow had a wonderful time at our event and her speech was applauded warmly by our members. My brother clearly misheard my instruction of “Toast to the ASC,” instead he heard “Roast of Tom Scott”!

All the speakers on the night gave speeches that bought into the theme of the friendly conference and on that note, the Mercure Glasgow City Hotel wrote to us after our event to express their gratitude for being “the friendliest group of people they have ever had the pleasure of serving.” If any National Conference weekend is going to be good, then it needs the membership to show up and make it work and this is exactly what happened in Glasgow. The quality of learning and development opportunities was high and



innovative. The conference organising team revived “The Speakers Marketplace” idea, drawing in partner organisations including the Royal National Institute of Blind People (this organisation provided the audio version of the new Speakers Guide), Soroptimists International, and The Jane Austen Society. The seminars delivered by National Vice President Verity Eunson Hickey and National Development Officer Jeremy Richards were well received by members and covered the live topics of judging standards and club growth using social media.

If any National Conference weekend is going to be good, then it needs the membership to show up and make it work and this is exactly what happened in Glasgow.

The keynote speech by Past National President Catherine Williamson was an excellent example of how far members can develop and how the ASC can be a strong part of your journey. The speech and speaker were enlightening, personal, informative, and hilarious!

All four contests over the weekend were of a high technical standard showcasing memorable and impactful speaking that had us all laughing, thinking, and feeling. Yes, I did say four contests because we had Speech, Evaluation, Topics, and for the first time ever we had the National Team Speech Contest as part of the conference weekend. Moreover, for the first time ever, the winning team was awarded a trophy! Horsham, Glasgow, and the Midlands teams all demonstrated the best parts of this contest by cultivating a creative connection with their audience and putting the contest theme right at the heart of their performances.

All the speeches and topics from the national finalists in those two contests reflected ASC values, as well as being exceptional quality competition presentations, which was appreciated. The evaluation contest produced a volume and depth of advice that was gratifying as year on year, members are more fully exploring the “why” and the “how” behind their advice to the speaker, making it more accessible and more likely to be remembered and acted upon.

What could have been better?

There are always things to improve upon and this conference was no different. There were things we would have liked to have happened differently. Sound was an issue at times, with only one handheld microphone available, and no T-Loop system for the member who required this. Registration and the Speakers Marketplace being on a different floor to the rest of the conference was not ideal as it meant less natural footfall. It was a packed programme over the two days with new innovations introduced to the event, this led to some tough decisions about when to schedule breaks and how long they could be. A collection of heather brooches had been intended to be worn by all conference volunteers to highlight us to members, but unfortunately, these were not distributed.

The biggest issue was that our original choice of hotel double-booked us and took months to inform us of this. The organising team had to quickly find an alternative that satisfied our baseline requirements around location, travel, parking, food, event space, and cost. All these challenges have been discussed with the key people who have already volunteered to help deliver the next National Conference in 2025.



Grateful appreciation

Over the past two National Conferences, Jeremy (Cardiff 2023 Convener) and I have made many improvements to the organisation and management of Conference, including a primary spreadsheet, project management boxes, volunteer role descriptions, and novel use of social media communications. While not very glamorous, this also contributed to the success of Glasgow 2024.

I am grateful to all the members and volunteers who made Glasgow 2024 truly live out its theme of The Friendly Conference. The event paid for itself and produced a surplus of approximately £1500 thanks to the bottle tombola and all Gala Dinner tickets being sold. As Conference Convener I am especially grateful to my team who deserve massive credit for what they achieved. Some of us had been involved in conferences before, but some of my team were brand new to this and yet they delivered this amazing ASC event.

Before I start “greetin” (crying) or “gibbering” (talking nonsense) I will sign off by saying that Glasgow was great... see you all in 2025 for another great ASC event next year! ■

Glasgow 2024: The Friendly Conference – Organising Team

Conference Convener	Tom Scott
Master of Ceremonies	Tony Scott
Conference Secretary	Sharron McColl
Competitions and Seminars	Verity Eunson Hickey
Chief Steward and Northern Scotland Representative	Ewen Anderson
Lord Provost Liaison and Western Scotland Representative	Grace Hendry Nash
East Central Scotland Representative	Sandra Wilson
Chief Timekeeper	Thomas Roe
Team Speech Contest Organiser and Chair	Vicki Thomas
Speakers Marketplace Director	Mary Philips
Communications Manager	Jeremy Richards

A conference of firsts

This year's conference offered me a lot of fantastic firsts.

It was the first time I have attended the whole conference weekend and the Gala Dinner, but being local to Glasgow that was an easy one. I was impressed at the distances other people had travelled to attend, and glad that the Glasgow weather showed off the city beautifully.

It was also the first time I had been involved in the organising committee. An immense amount of work goes into organising the conference and there is no better way to appreciate that than to get involved in the organising committee. Being involved gives you a sense of how much this organisation means to so many people and how much care and attention is given to making sure everybody has a great experience at conference.

It was the first time I have chaired a session, and this was the Team Speaking Contest. I believe it was also the first time such a contest has featured at the National Conference. This felt like a landmark Speakers Club moment for me. I hadn't expected the room to be so full. It is the first time I have spoken to a room that size and felt 100% assured that everybody was willing me on (and jumping in to help out when I looked like I needed it!) to make the event a huge success. The contributions from the teams were brilliant and I hope this becomes a regular feature of the conference. I loved every minute!

It was the first time I had competed in a competition at National level. Competition at that level really gets you thinking: you are in with the best of all of the clubs, being judged by different people. We get so used to speaking to people that we know and are familiar with, it's great to experience something fresh and to hear feedback from different people (both from the officials and from the audience members!). Again, I did not expect that room to be so full first thing on a Saturday morning, but the attendees really turned out to support the competitors (even those that were a little worse for wear from the Glasgow hospitality)!

I think everybody in attendance would agree that Conference 2024 was a fantastic experience. The main takeaway for me was that we really are a very lovely bunch of people who are very generous with our time and willingness to help and support each other and yes, that includes you!! ■



A few more photos from t



The Glasgow Conference...



Congratulations to our winners!

Here we celebrate the winners of Glasgow 2024

ASC National Contest Results

Topics Contest

- 1st** Ben Wadsworth (MIDLANDS)
- 2nd** Trevor Millar (EASTERN)
- 3rd** Jeneffer Zielinski (SCOTLAND)

Evaluation Contest

- 1st** Torin Zieboll (EASTERN)
- 2nd** Lucy Pitts (SOUTH EAST)
- 3rd** Vicki Thomas (SCOTLAND)

Speech Contest

- 1st** Rob Parsons (SOUTH WEST & WALES)
- 2nd** Rob Waldron (MIDLANDS)
- 3rd** Neil Wilson (EASTERN)

Team Speech Competition

Horsham Speakers Club (SOUTH EAST)
(Katie Nagel, Lucy Pitts, John Corbin, Lorraine Talbot)



Team Speech Winners
Horsham Speakers Club



Speech Contest Winner
Rob Parsons



Evaluation Contest Winner
Torin Zieboll



Topics Contest Winner
Ben Wadsworth



Introducing our exciting new online platform...

Hivebrite!

When I came into the role of National Secretary, it soon became clear to me, that we had a very antiquated method of collecting data from our membership and recording club details. Spreadsheet attachments would clog inboxes; discrepancies would be lost, and the administrative overload was immense. Quickly, we responded by establishing a new method of data collection built around Google Sheets, which could be accessed by Club Officers, National Officers, and Regional Coordinators. The online sheets are updated in real-time and serve as a helpful aid when the fee collection period comes around each year.

There were, however, several outstanding issues that my 'process brain' became troubled by. Crucially, unless someone monitored the online sheets every day, there was still a piece of manual labour

to extract the information and add the members to the mailing list. If a member moved house, their old address would stay on the spreadsheet unless the Club Officer updated it. We continued to receive reports from members who struggled to navigate the website; they could not locate competition rules or compliance documents as the website seemed overly packed with information. This has two important consequences; search engines are less likely to boost the search position of websites with myriad documentation, and they are confusing and less attractive to prospective members. It seemed we were trying to achieve two priorities on one site – and failing at both. This spoke to a wider issue of a lack of digitalisation that is necessary for a voluntary organisation to exist in today's post-covid world.

Speaking to my dad, who has served as a Scout Treasurer for over 20 years – he, too, has some bling to boast about – he could not understand why the ASC did not run off an online platform. Around ten years ago, scouting groups – of which hundreds are operating in the UK – left cheques, spreadsheets, and awkward IT systems behind, in favour of Online Scout Manager; a platform that allows its members to update their details themselves, such as a change of postal address, pay their membership fees and track their progress record of achievement.

And so, the work began. I spent over a year and a half researching different systems, bringing their salesmen into the orbit of the SLT, with mixed results.



One chap from California attempted to demonstrate his online solution from his conservatory – the scene was bizarre – before telling us it would cost an annual fee of \$20,000. Another potential provider made it clear we were being offered a hefty non-profit discount and then disclosed that the first £17,500 would be spent on a ‘discovery phase’ – corporate speak for fact-finding and no action – before we would need to cough-up another £18,000 a year.

This project had become a pipe dream; yet, after discovering Hivebrite, we appeared to have found our partner in crime. No conservatories, no extravagant figures in US dollars. It was gratifying to have

someone on the other end of the Zoom call who understood that our organisation was much smaller in comparison with their other clients and did not try to treat us like a colossal conglomerate or massive multinational.

The result, after a lengthy tender process and comparison of quotes, was a vote, in November 2022, in favour of adopting Hivebrite as the Association’s platform of choice. I began work on the platform in January 2023 and after a brief demonstration in April 2023, we launched in March 2024. ■

Michael Cox is the National Secretary and Treasurer of the ASC.

What does the platform do?

At this stage, the platform allows us to:

- record membership data in real-time
- collect information about our membership than ever before to prepare for the future
- send emails automatically to new members without additional online forms
- run events for the membership that are easy to access and can be targeted to certain groups, such as Club Education Directors.

Members will be able to record their certificates, Education Directors are able to assess the attainment of members throughout their patch, Club Officers can indicate their roles, ensuring SLT has an accurate picture of who is in what role, and there’ll be easy links to ‘members-only’ resources including the Materials Shop, certificate request forms, and competition resources collated in simple folders. In addition, the forum and live feed will serve as the heartbeat of the ASC, allowing members new and old to share ideas in a secure space that has no links to Facebook – a key concern of a number of our membership who do not wish to join the ASC Facebook Group.

What is in store for the future?

Over the year, we will roll out additional features, including groups for regions, and roles to collaborate and share information, as well as taking the national and regional membership fee online next year, ensuring smoother payment and reducing the admin burden on the two roles of National Secretary and Treasurer; the latter I have been acting for since June 2023.

This platform promises to be an exciting new chapter in the history of the ASC, and I hope to share more with you – via the platform, of course – in the coming weeks and months.

Giving a masterclass evaluation

We've all been there; you're evaluating a speaker and you're feeling panicked. The entire time you have been furiously scribbling notes, quotes, and anecdotes – and yet it seems like you haven't written nearly enough. You might be worried about how to give advice without it sounding rude, you might be thinking that you can't give advice because the speaker is ten times better at it than you, maybe they're even so good that you can't find anything to improve on.

While daunting, evaluating other speakers can be one of the most rewarding and useful activities for other speakers as well as for yourself. Below are my main tips for evaluating (including for competitions) which will help to set you apart as a well-regarded evaluator.

Only talk about the most important points

An easy trap to fall into when first evaluating is to feel the need to comment on everything mentioned in the evaluation sheet. You will obviously, need to refer to the speaking technique the speech is targeting, but nowhere does it say we need to cover every speaking technique. You only have six minutes for an official evaluation, so if you try to cover a high number of points, you will struggle to cover any at all with sufficient quality to provide useful insights for your audience – or to receive higher marks in competitions.

Instead, use the evaluation sheet as a guide, but only talk about the points in the speech you feel you have the most to say something about. I would recommend covering three things you loved, sandwiched with two things the speaker could do to make their speech even better. Apart from the objective of the speech, your evaluation can include anything you want, even if it's not mentioned in the Speakers Guide. So don't limit yourself, talk about what you want to talk about.

Set yourself an evaluation structure in advance

While you generally can't prepare in advance for evaluations, one of the few things you can do is to have a structure in advance to keep your speech on track. I would personally recommend the following for praise:

1. What technique you liked in the speech?
2. What specific example of that technique stood out?
3. Why the technique is used (in general) and what made it work so well in the speech?

and the following for improvement:

1. What technique in the speech you think could be improved?
2. A specific example in the speech where you think this could be applied?
3. How and why, you would personally improve the example you have referenced?

“Once you adopt this mindset, it will change how you deliver evaluations forever.”

I write these points down on my paper before the speaker stands up, ready to be filled out once I have written down all my observations. This has the following advantages:

1. It massively improves your speech's structure – this stops you from speaking about too many things, going off on tangents, and throwing your audience off in different directions. Because of this, it also helps you win points for speech construction.
2. It forces you to include what we often forget in the heat of the moment – to use specific examples and improvements for the speaker – which gives us higher marks and the best quality evaluation possible.
3. It makes it much easier for the judges in competitions to award you marks, as you consistently signpost that you're covering the harder parts of the mark scheme (parts 2 and 3).

Is the speaker so good you can't find anything to improve? Instead, give them things which were brilliant which you would have liked to have seen more of. Or, what part of the speech was good, but could have been phenomenal with a technique that wasn't used?



Have a clear opening and conclusion – with a hook

As if evaluations weren't hard enough, they are also speeches themselves and you are marked on it as such in competitions! Because of this, we should plan to have an opening and a conclusion. Try not to start your speech with multiple small compliments about the speech - after all, you have lots of good things to say with your new structure. Instead, use what all the best speeches have, a hook. A hook can be a rhetorical question, a joke, repeating an impressive fact in the speech, anything which grabs your audience's attention. Once you have your audience, you can transition into the body of your evaluation.

Equally, once you have given your last piece of praise, you will want a few short sentences to summarise the important points to the audience. Again, try to reference the hook from the start (if it works), otherwise aim for an impactful and obvious ending, as you would with a written speech.

Evaluations are for the audience, not just the speaker

Once you adopt this mindset, it will change how you deliver evaluations forever. The best evaluations are ones that provide

value to your audience as well as to the speaker. I have alluded to it already, but the main way you can achieve this is by explaining why something matters. Why did that technique work so well? Why did it make the audience feel the way they did? By providing the why, your audience will also have learned something that they can apply to their own speeches in the future.

As they delve into public speaking, newer speakers may struggle with the why at first. Sometimes the Speakers Guide doesn't allude to when/why to use certain techniques, or in fact when/why NOT to use them. The understanding of why simply comes over time, by being exposed to speeches (as well as giving them), but you can greatly accelerate your learning by asking your club to have an education session on its agenda, or studying famous speech evaluations on YouTube.

Remember, knowledge and practice are the most important factors when improving a skill. With these tips, some preparation and practice, you will very quickly improve, and dare I even say it - enjoy giving evaluations! ■

Torin Ziebold was the overall winner of the Evaluation Contest at the National Conference this year in Glasgow.



Members' Stories

A speakers' club? What's all that about?

Rob Waldron

Like me, that's probably the question you get asked when you say you are a member of a speakers' club.

Speakers Club can mean many things to each of its members. And in my opinion, that's brilliant!

I got involved with the ASC back in 2010, when three different people all unconnected said (within about 2 weeks of each other) that I should go and give it a try as they thought I would be good at it.

And here I am 14 years later the West Midlands Area President, five-time National Finalist - three wins, and a runner-up spot - maybe they were right.

I joined Speakers Club because I knew I needed to get out of my comfort zone and do something that would help me grow and develop. I feel it's important that as members we should see that change in ourselves.

Evaluation, education, and evolution should be at the forefront of our minds. Getting our Showpiece Certificate should be seen as a starting point for giving back and helping those new members coming through.

Believe it or not, I was quite nervous about going to Speakers Club for the first time (and if the truth be told a few times after) but the warm welcome and supportive atmosphere had me hooked. I like to think that giving back and helping new members not only makes me feel good as

a human being but also continues to help me develop as a speaker.

Now of course I would be telling a fib if I said I haven't enjoyed my wins at Nationals, but I have to admit some of the most fulfilling times I have had at Speakers Club have come from helping others. Seeing that person arrive not knowing a soul barely being able to introduce themselves and watching them transform into someone worthy of getting their showpiece. Helping local clubs when they need judges and supporting neighbouring regions in their contests.

All of which brings me back to my first question "what is Speakers Club?". It is a place to grow, a place to develop, a place to make new friends, and maybe most importantly of all, a place to help, support, and encourage people, the way you wanted to be helped, supported, and encouraged yourself. How often do we ask the first-time visitor "How can we help you?" and "What do you want to achieve from coming here?"

Speakers Club shouldn't stop when your meeting ends, get out there with your A-Game, don't just speak, ask questions. Take a leaf from a certain JFK and ask not what Speakers Club can do for you. But what you can do for Speakers Club! ■

Speaking up for Yourself

Warren Abis

Education Director for Cheltenham Speakers Club

For much of my life, I felt I had little or nothing to contribute to conversations. Both personally and professionally. I would much rather hang back and let others ask questions or answer them, yet deep down I did want to be involved and I did have questions. It's just that something was holding me back. Perhaps it was confidence. Maybe I lacked communication skills. I really wasn't sure what to do about my 'quietness' and it was concerning me.

Speakers Club

My break came when I was introduced to the 'Speakers Clubs'. A friend had visited a club, so I googled 'Speakers Clubs in Gloucestershire' which led me to the club in Cheltenham. I was a little apprehensive but to my joy, I was made to feel right at home from the start.

There was a very mixed bunch of people at that meeting but all of them, I thought to myself, are here for a reason. Mine was to improve my communication skills. I was to later discover that others were there, either to improve their skills, just for the social aspect, or wanted to be Public Speakers which was the last thing on my mind.

After that first meeting, inspired by other speakers, I was hooked. By the time the next meeting came around, I had decided to join. I could immediately see how this was going to help with my communication skills and help me to speak up for myself.

Giving Back

Now I'm not the kind of person who does things by halves so when new committee

positions became available, I put myself down as Education Director. I'm now in my second year and I love it! I cannot wait for club meetings to come around.

Inspiration

I recently took part in the Southwest England & Wales Regional Finals in Cardiff. I was the target speaker for the Evaluation Contest. Whilst there, I met some amazing people from other clubs. One person stood out for me: not only as an experienced speaker but also as a lovely, caring person. That day, Rob Parsons inspired me to become a Public Speaker. I have since seen Rob talk about The Art of Public Speaking and tell his life stories.

“After that first meeting, inspired by other speakers, I was hooked.”

Acquiring skills

Speakers Clubs are much more than places to learn how to become a Public Speaker. If communication is a highly valued skill - and according to some of the most successful people out there it is - then it makes sense to invest some of your time improving yours. Not just as a speaker but also as a



listener - another highly valued but less talked about - skill. As an evaluator, the club teaches you how to listen and provide valuable feedback to others.

Since joining Cheltenham Speakers Club and participating in the different levels of talks, I would say that the improvement in my ability to speak up for myself and communicate better has been remarkable. I have noticed the difference in my personal life and at work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Association of Speakers Clubs and the hard-working committee members of the clubs around the UK for making communication skills more accessible.

What next?

I plan to become a Public Speaker, Author and Life Coach on a mission to help others find their voice and improve their ability to communicate.

Everyone has a voice. Everyone has a story to tell. I look forward to listening to yours. ■

Highland Revival

Rosemary Barry

I live on Lismore a little-known island located at the end of the Great Glen between Oban and Mull. One dreary late autumn afternoon I was sitting in front of my cheery fire idly flicking through the Oban Times when an article caught my eye. It was about Oban Speakers Club. I began to read with interest.

Apparently, it was in danger of closing without enough members to keep it going. There was a plea at the end for anyone interested to get in touch with a name and a phone number. I had never heard of Speakers Clubs before, but it sounded intriguing, and much as I love living on the island it's nice sometimes to have an excuse to spend time on the mainland.

Going somewhere new and unknown on your own is very intimidating but meeting such lovely friendly people made it something special.

So... I rang the number. The chap who answered seemed rather low-key and not very hopeful but he took my name and contact details and promised to get back to me.

The weeks moved on into winter and then the phone rang. It was the Speakers Club chap. He was grateful for my interest but

sorry that they had only had two expressions of interest - including mine – and it wasn't going to be possible to keep the club going. I shrugged and forgot about it. Christmas and New Year came and went. And then John rang. He had had my details passed to him and wanted to know if I was still interested?

He was determined to give the Club another go and drum up support. I replied in the affirmative. So... in April I was invited to a meeting in a hotel bar on Oban seafront. It seemed like a pleasant way to spend a spring evening, so I caught the ferry over. Another meeting was arranged for a couple of weeks later which I couldn't make. Another meeting was, however, arranged for July.

Summer now. About 9 of us met in the Kilmore and Oban Parish Church church rooms, a few who had fortunately had experience of Speakers Clubs before, and the rest novices like me. We thrashed out – with John's amazing effort of preparation – a constitution and somehow or other a programme was arranged for the autumn and winter. And we were off!

It was late August and the first meeting was planned for the first Monday in September. I had offered to do an icebreaker speech and was a little surprised to see I wasn't on the list of speakers... and even more surprised to see I wasn't even on the list of those who had signalled their intention to be present!

I emailed John to say I would be there but didn't seem to have been included thus far. He replied that the identity of Rachel - who was down to speak - was a mystery to him.

He didn't know where he had got her from as he didn't even know a Rachel and it was meant to be me! Thanks John – that gave me how many days' notice: Four? Nothing like a short deadline to concentrate the mind.

I managed 12 minutes 40 seconds (when I had put in 12 minutes) without any notes. A feat, the like of which had never been achieved before in the memory of the old Club.

During the next few months, I had a go at an 'off-the-cuff' talk and my first effort at general evaluator which I reckoned was a good gig as no one evaluates the general evaluator. The week before Christmas we had a splendid Christmas supper, well looked after by the staff of the Royal Hotel with crackers and all the trimmings as well as good conversation.

Into the New Year, I did a talk with the topic given - again without notes, I find it easier that way – and my first go at Chairing the evening. Never having been in possession of a gavel before I made it clear that the power of the gavel might go to my head. Which to great laughter I think it did!

At the AGM in March I had the privilege of being voted President for the following year. In my address, I made it clear that the purpose of Speakers Clubs is obviously to have fun, meet people and learn new stuff. Well... and perhaps to improve your public speaking. Who knew? I had had a blast. Going somewhere new and unknown on your own is very intimidating but meeting such lovely friendly people made it something special.

National Conference

As a club, we were kindly invited to join the National Conference in Glasgow. Four of us went, two newbies and two with prior experience. I had no idea what to expect, but it was billed as the Friendly conference and that is exactly what it was! But then I suppose we are all the sort of people who like talking and unlikely to be shy sorts. I sat in the sun with a sandwich in George Square in between sessions on the Friday evening and even joined in the 'waulking' on Saturday lunchtime.

I was impressed with the slick organisation and the varied types of competition. Horsham's 1980s fashion debate was particularly enjoyable as I grew up and went to school there many years ago. Reading the new President's article in The Speaker magazine I was interested in his comment that we were asking people to confront two difficult things at once – speaking in public and receiving criticism. The emphasis on development, learning, and positivity in the evaluator's criteria for the competition is particularly welcome.

Next Season

With a core of nine members and up to around a dozen attending meetings we are planning for our new season now. We are moving to the first Tuesday of the month in an attempt to accommodate those who couldn't make Mondays, although one can never please everyone. I am very grateful to that Oban Times article for opening up a whole new world to me. Sometimes the old ways work! ■



The Wonders of Speakers Clubs

Jayne Cowan

Speakers Clubs are incredible organisations. Some were formed decades ago, some only recently, but they all have the aim of promoting and developing public speaking.

There are few voluntary organisations within the United Kingdom which actively promote this essential skill. The heart of the Welsh capital boasts two highly-performing Speakers Clubs – Cardiff Speakers Club and Cardiff Mixed Speakers Club. With a dynamic and exciting programme of events, the clubs have become a draw for people seeking to improve and perfect their public speaking skills.

I am a proud member of Cardiff Speakers Club, a club founded in 1968. In 2021 I became the very first female member when the club changed from being male only. A club that is proudly hybrid, giving people

unable to attend in person the chance to speak and become a part of the club.

My dad, Bob Cowan, was a member for several decades and was a proud Club and Area President on many occasions. He encouraged my husband to attend, and Adrian has now been a member for 20 years and is a past Club President.

Every Speakers Club has its idiosyncrasies in how a meeting runs. Cardiff's meetings normally include a round-robin to get everyone warmed up. There will also be one-minute ice breakers, prepared speeches, topics, and evaluations, providing a comprehensive and varied platform for members to practice their public speaking amongst friends.

But Cardiff Speakers Club isn't just about individual growth; it's also an opportunity

to become part of something much bigger. Members have the chance to get involved with the national team, showcasing their skills on a broader stage and contributing to the larger public speaking community.

The Club competitions, from the true-or-false contest to the speech and evaluation contests, add to the excitement, creating a friendly regional rivalry with other clubs in the area. Participants vie for the coveted opportunity to represent Cardiff at District and then National Conference, a chance to shine on the grand stage and showcase their great speaking abilities.

One of the club's defining features is its warm and welcoming atmosphere. Attendees, whether seasoned speakers or those stepping onto the stage for the first time, find a supportive community that encourages growth and development.

Members often join to build confidence for various life situations, from job interviews to delivering wedding speeches, or simply to gain confidence.

The wealth of experience within the club is evident in the presence of established and esteemed speakers who generously share their insights and guidance. The mentorship provided by these seasoned speakers proves invaluable to those taking their initial steps into the world of public speaking. Whether it is helping new speakers progress along the ASC pathway or demonstrating tips and tricks they have picked up over many years, members and guests always leave a club meeting musing over what they have learned to strengthen their public speaking skills.

Public speaking is often referred to as one of the most critical skills in both personal and professional development. Attending

the club on a regular basis can help to conquer fears and refine communication skills to become more confident in any environment.

People often think that the path to being a confident public speaker is a solitary one. I don't agree. The benefits of joining a supportive club cannot be underestimated. The clubs provide a really nurturing environment, which goes beyond just public speaking, as they offer many opportunities including mentoring and support.

One of the club's defining features is its warm and welcoming atmosphere.

The camaraderie amongst members creates a safe and encouraging space for members to share their thoughts and concerns, as well as successes. Some people want to conquer stage fright or perfect the art of storytelling. The club is a warm environment where everyone feels heard, appreciated, and supported. Beyond the podium, the club fosters a busy social life. Organising dinners and events and even skittle nights, Cardiff Speakers Club has created an environment where members and their families can come together, sharing not only the joy of public speaking, but also friendship and community.

Belonging to a public speaking club is more than a commitment to self-improvement; it's an investment in a network of like-minded people. The connections formed within these clubs often extend beyond the podium, evolving into lasting friendships. ■

Regional Spotlight

South West England & Wales – Exciting times ahead!

Cardiff Speakers Club

The past few months have been nothing short of exhilarating for Cardiff Speakers Club. With our membership now boasting 23 enthusiastic individuals, we've also welcomed several guests, including a cherished returning member. Our inbox has been bustling with inquiries about the upcoming speaking year, and we're delighted to have two guests scheduled to join our first meeting on September 5th, after our summer break in July and August.

One of the highlights of our year was witnessing Rob Parsons' triumphant win at the National Speech Contest during the National Conference in Glasgow. It was not only a proud moment for the club but also quite the adventure getting Rob's enormous trophy through airport security! Rob's achievement has been a source of immense pride for all of us.

Our Annual General Meeting ushered in new leadership, with Phil McCaffery stepping in as our incoming President. Phil is hard at work crafting an exciting programme for the new speaking year. It was equally heart-warming to see Phil back in action after several months of ill health.

As we gear up for the new speaking season, the excitement is palpable. We're particularly looking forward to the Southwest England & Wales Regional topics

and novel contest taking place in Swindon on Sunday, November 24th. Our members are eager to dive in and showcase their skills.

As the Southwest England & Wales Regional Coordinator, I am thrilled to congratulate Julie Nicholls from Swindon Speakers Club for her impressive participation in the National Topics Contest. Julie's dedication and hard work have been truly commendable.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Julie for her exceptional efforts in video recording all the National contests. Her commitment has been invaluable, and her contributions have significantly enhanced the experience for everyone involved. Thank you, Julie, for your unwavering dedication and hard work.

Stay tuned for what promises to be an incredible year at Cardiff Speakers Club!

Newport Speakers Club

As Newport Speakers Club takes a well-deserved break during July and August, the anticipation for their September return is palpable. Nestled in their new home at Llandevaud Village Hall, the club has found a haven that exudes warmth and camaraderie, setting the stage for enriching meetings and vibrant discussions.



With a current roster of 13 devoted members, Newport has weathered challenges and celebrated victories.

Despite losing a few members last year, the club proudly welcomes two fresh faces, Wes Jarvis and Stephen Thompson, injecting renewed energy into their dynamic group. Each gathering sees an average of seven members in attendance, fostering an intimate setting where every voice is heard and every speech is celebrated.

While their Facebook page and website have seen a lull in attracting new members recently, Newport remains undeterred. They are determined to revitalise their online presence, leveraging these platforms to connect with a wider audience and expand their passionate community of speakers. In a shining moment of

recognition, Newport celebrates Stephen Dance's remarkable achievement—his journey to the ASC Evaluation National Final in Glasgow. This accomplishment not only reflects Dance's dedication but also underscores Newport's commitment to nurturing talent and excellence within their ranks.

Looking ahead with enthusiasm, Newport Speakers Club gears up for an exciting season ahead. Mark your calendars for the Topics and Novel Contest slated for October, promising thrilling competitions and inspiring performances. As they prepare to embark on another chapter of growth and achievement, Newport invites you to join them on their journey—a journey marked by camaraderie, personal growth, and the joy of mastering the art of public speaking.

Cheltenham Speakers Club

In just one year, Cheltenham Speakers Club has undergone a thrilling transformation, expanding its membership from a dedicated core of 8 to a vibrant community of 18 passionate speakers. This surge in numbers has sparked a flurry of activity aimed at nurturing fresh talent and diversifying opportunities for members.

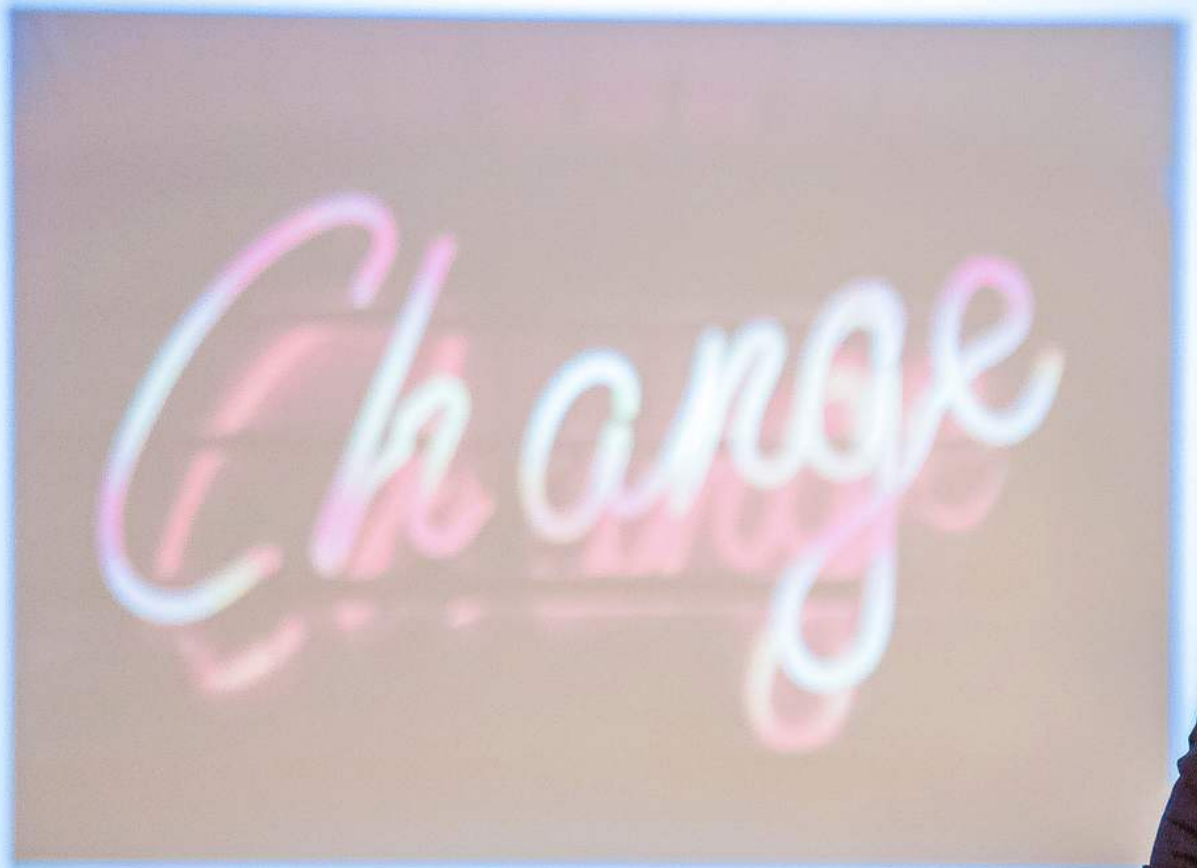
With a wave of newcomers eager to embark on their speaking journeys, the club has doubled down on its commitment to mentorship and development. Dedicated

efforts to guide new members through foundational levels have paved the way for a dynamic evaluation process, ensuring a broader range of voices contribute to each session.

Highlighting their spirit of camaraderie, neighbouring clubs have stepped in to assist with evaluations, underscoring the supportive network that defines Cheltenham Speakers Club. This collaborative approach not only enriches the experience for all members but also reinforces the club's inclusive ethos.

Content Inspiration

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In a move that underscores their growth and organisational prowess, the club has successfully established a new bank account and navigated the complex task of transferring funds from their original account. This achievement speaks volumes about their determination and administrative acumen.

Harnessing the power of digital platforms, Cheltenham Speakers Club revamped their Eventbrite SEO strategy, resulting in a significant uptick in event attendance. Such strategic moves have propelled the club into a new era of visibility and engagement within the community.

Looking ahead with optimism and ambition, Cheltenham Speakers Club is now scouting for larger, more accommodating premises to accommodate their burgeoning membership and ambitious plans for the future. This expansion marks a pivotal moment in their journey, promising even greater opportunities for growth and collaboration in the years to come.



Swindon Speakers Club

A Year of Growth and Achievement.

Swindon Speakers Club has maintained a steady membership of 18 dedicated individuals. While they lost a few members at the beginning of the season, they welcomed new members who have been making impressive progress through the various speaking levels.

This year, three members attended the regional competition with remarkable success. Fredrick, a new addition to Swindon, secured 3rd place in the Novels competition. Their president, Julie, was the runner-up in the Topics category, earning her a spot at the National competition in Glasgow as the winner could not attend.

Additionally, four members have had the honour of speaking at Women's Institute meetings, showcasing their growing skills and confidence.

Swindon's YouTube channel, @swindonspeakersclub, has become an invaluable resource for members. It offers them the opportunity to evaluate their performances and learn from others. One standout video, entitled "The Same Yet Couldn't Be More Different," garnered 344 views and was instrumental in identifying the club's end-of-year winner, significantly outpacing the runner-up's 24 views.

At Swindon Speakers Club, they always find time to laugh and learn something new. And are eagerly looking forward to the next season, ready to embrace new challenges and achievements. ■

Jeremy Richards is the National Development Officer of the ASC.

Cover story

Learning to speak in public changed my life. I talk about that in a new book that's being published later this year. It's called *A Knock at the Door* and tells the story of Ronnie, a homeless man, who knocked on our door one Christmas evening. My wife and I invited him in, cooked him a meal and offered that he stay the night.

He never left.

He lived with us for 45 years until his death, aged 75. He was there before we had kids and still there after they had left and had children of their own.

Ronnie had spent much of his childhood in a care home and had some learning challenges. When I asked him the name of the school he'd gone to as a child, he told me it was called, 'The Backward School'. He

had grown up with a belief engrained in him that he was of no value and could achieve little in life.

I understood something of 'The Backward School'. I was brought up in a small terrace of houses in Cardiff. We didn't have running hot water, an inside toilet or even toilet paper. But perhaps an even greater disadvantage was that we had only three books in our home. And yet my dream was to pass the eleven plus examination – something no kid in our street had ever done.

It was Oscar Wilde who said that there are two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants; the other is getting it. It proved true for me. My dream came true but I did poorly at the grammar school. It drummed into me that I was poor academically and



had little talent in any other area as well. In the Easter term of 1962, I came bottom of a class of 34 boys. I still have the report in which my form teacher wrote, “A disgraceful result. He is making no use of what little ability he has.”

For many years I believed that what he wrote was true. I was, like Ronnie a paid-up member of ‘The Backward School’. But when I was 15, I met Arthur. An older man from the little church on the corner of my street, Arthur and his wife Margaret used to help with the youth club. They didn’t have much going for them; they were even poorer than us. Arthur had never passed an academic examination in his life, and he had a speech impediment. But they were brilliant youth leaders, and they seemed to believe in me.

One day Arthur took me aside and said, “I think God has given you a gift of public speaking and I’m going to teach you.” This was both kind and terrifying: Arthur Tovey was a dreadful public speaker. But he insisted, and on Sunday afternoons he taught me how to tell stories to the kids

in the Sunday school. Five years later a lawyer heard me give a talk to a group of teenagers and offered to pay for me to go through law school.

Even now I’m not exactly sure how it happened, but by the time I was in my late 20s I was a joint senior partner in an eleven-office law practice and lecturing to thousands of lawyers on practice management in the UK and overseas. On one occasion, the Law Society of England and Wales invited me to be a keynote speaker at its annual conference in Vienna. Before I went on stage I decided to ring Arthur. I told him that I was about to address a thousand lawyers, and then added, “You taught me to do this.” He said, “Did I?”

My unlikely public speaking tutor died some years ago. I was able to visit him in the final days of his life. The last time I saw him he was practically comatose, but just before I left his bedside, I put my lips next to his ear and spoke softly. I said, “Thank you Arthur. You changed my life.”

With all my heart I hope he heard me. ■

Dr. Rob Parsons OBE is the author of over 25 books. He holds a master’s degree from the University of Bristol and a PhD from the University of Plymouth. He has spoken to over a million people in live events across the world. He is the founder of Care for the Family, a national charity which aims to strengthen family life and help those who face family difficulties.

A Knock at the Door is published by Harper Collins on 21st November 2024. Use the QR Code here to pre-order.



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better presenter and
better leader.

