# Oxford Schools' competition faces backlash over pronoun policy



The Oxford Union, known for being one of the most prestigious debating societies globally, oversees the Oxford Schools' competition, which is the largest British Parliamentary school-level debate contest in the UK. Currently in its 2025 edition, the competition involves hundreds of participants aged 14-18 from various schools around the country.

According to the Daily Mail, one significant aspect of the competition is the requirement for competitors to declare their gender pronouns—stating whether they are ‘he/she/they’—at the beginning of each round. Organisers have indicated that this policy, designed to prevent misgendering, has been in place for the last seven years and aligns with practices seen in many other competitive environments.

The organisers mandate compliance with this pronoun declaration, warning that failing to do so may lead to immediate disqualification. A statement released about the policy suggests that it aims to foster an environment of respect, stating: "Just as people like to be called by their correct name, so they should be called by the pronoun they feel most comfortable with."

However, some student testimonies suggest that the option to declare a 'no preference' status is often overlooked during the implementation of this policy. This has led to criticism from free speech advocates and gender critical activists alike. Lord Young, the General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, expressed his disapproval, stating: "This is unacceptable." He raised concerns about what he perceives as the potential implications of requiring students to acknowledge pronouns as a tacit acceptance of the idea that sex is a social construct.

Further commentary was provided by Kellie-Jay Keen, a women’s rights activist known as Posie Parker, who described the pronoun policy as stemming from "incompetence" and labelled it "authoritarian." Keen has been involved in numerous controversies surrounding women's rights and gender identity, being notable for her public demonstrations.

Helen Joyce, the director of advocacy for the human rights charity Sex Matters, also critiqued the policy, characterising it as "outrageous" and likening the requirement to indoctrination. She stated, "It’s outrageous that schoolchildren are being made to pay lip service to gender identity beliefs in order to participate in a debate," adding that it presents a potentially limiting framework for young people's critical thinking.

The Oxford Union, while historically significant and independent of the university itself, has yet to comment on the unfolding discussions regarding the pronoun policy implemented by the organisers of the Oxford Schools' competition. The society boasts a rich lineage of notable speakers from various sectors, including political leaders, scientists, and cultural icons, and has played a significant role in facilitating important public discourse since its establishment in the 19th century.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.oxfordschools.nl> - This URL supports information about the Oxford Schools' Debating Tournament being the largest British Parliamentary school-level debate competition. However, it does not directly address the pronoun declaration policy.
* <https://www.oxfordschools.net/faq> - This URL provides additional details about the Oxford Schools' Debating Competition, such as the structure and participation criteria, but does not specifically address the pronoun declaration policy or the associated controversy.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This URL is mentioned as a source for an article discussing the Oxford Schools competition, including the pronoun declaration policy, but direct access to this specific content is not available.
* <https://www.oxfordunion.org> - While not directly mentioned in the search results, this URL would be relevant for understanding the history and role of the Oxford Union in organizing prestigious debates.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk> - This URL is mentioned in the context of the article as the Daily Mail, which may have reported on the gender pronoun aspect of the Oxford Schools competition.