

Top of the Bench regional heats

2020/2021

Support and guidance for Local Section
committees

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Top of the Bench

Top of the Bench is a national chemistry competition for students aged 14–16 to promote practical skills and teamwork in chemistry. The competition is one of our longest-standing school engagement activities: with the help of our members we have been organising and running this for more than 20 years.

The competition takes place in two parts during the academic year.

Regional heats

Regional heats are organised and funded by the Royal Society of Chemistry Local Sections. These run from October to January and the winning team from each heat progresses to a national final. The format of the regional heats varies across the regions, appropriate to each Local Section.

National final

The national final is organised by the RSC and held at a UK university in spring each year. Activities on the day include:

- an individual test of factual chemical knowledge
- a team practical exercise
- interactive lecture
- prize giving ceremony

There is also a session for teachers with one of our Education Coordinators exploring resources and ideas for the classroom. First prize is awarded to the best overall school performance, with five teams receiving runners up prizes. The Jacqui Clee Award is given to the student who has demonstrated an outstanding individual contribution to the day.

Examples of written and practical papers from previous national final are available to download from the [Top of the Bench webpage](#), please share these with any schools that you wish.

Due to Covid-19, the 2020 national final was cancelled. We will confirm the format for the 2021 national final later in the year once further advice has been issued by the government.



Top of the Bench rules

1. Schools cannot enter more than one regional heat competition
2. Only schools located within the Local Section can enter the Local Section's regional heat (a Local Section/postcode look up table can be found [here](#))
3. The teams should have 4 students with the following composition:

England and Wales	Two students from Year 9 One student from Year 10 One student from Year 11
Scotland	One student from S2 Two students from S3 One student from S4
Northern Ireland	Two students from Year 10 One student from Year 11 One student from Year 12

4. Students must be in these school years for both the regional heat and the national final
5. The winning team from the regional competition should be the same team that enters the national final
6. Teams should be broadly representative of their school's gender balance
7. Students must not have taken part in previous TOTB competitions. In extraordinary circumstances please contact TOTB@rsc.org if this rule restricts schools in your Local Section taking part. With advanced permission from the RSC flexibility with this rule may be possible.

The exception to this rule will be for the national final taking place in 2021. Due to the cancellation of the 2020 national final, the 2020 finalists (who are still eligible) can enter the 2021 national final competition. The school team composition must be the same as above.

8. For safeguarding reasons all communications (by email, phone or post) should only be with a teacher, not direct with students. The teacher is responsible for the support and safety of their students, and it is very important that students taking part in the remote competition are supervised by their teacher.
9. Schools cannot be penalised if they prepare their students for the competition
10. Any suspicions of cheating must be discussed with RSC staff (TOTB@rsc.org) before approaching/disqualifying the school
11. The correct answer is what is written on the mark scheme
12. The question master/competition organiser's decision is final

Planning your regional heat

Date

Regional heats should be run between October and the end of January. The closing date for submitting school entries to TOTB@rsc.org for the national final is the **31st January 2021**.

Format

Reflecting the most recent UK Government advice and prioritising the safety of our members and volunteers we are asking you to cancel or adapt your TOTB face-to-face regional heat to a remote competition. In line with our previous communications to members this decision takes into consideration the continuing uncertainty regarding the safety of public transport, uncertainty regarding timing and phasing of schools reopening, and desire that no-one is unnecessarily put in a difficult position, or excluded, regarding organising or attending RSC events.

If you do plan to hold your regional heat remotely **all communication with the schools must be done electronically**. Due to the safety of our volunteers, members and schools we ask that you do not run a competition that involves posting hard copies of documents. For safeguarding reasons it will not be possible for a regional heat to involve any photos or videos of students, for example video calling using a platform such as zoom/skype or competitions that involve photos/videos being emailed and stored on a member's personal device. All communication about the competitions must be with the teacher, not students. If you need any further support with ideas for your remote regional heat or if you have any questions regarding safeguarding please contact TOTB@rsc.org.

We understand that this is a different approach for TOTB this year and we do not wish you to feel compelled to organise a competition. If you are not able to organise a regional heat, but would like a competition to run in your Local Section please let us know and we will run the competition for you.

Support for Local Sections

Planning and organising the regional heat should not be a laborious process. If you are struggling with volunteers, ideas for a remote competition or need further financial support, we are here to support you.

Assistance in finding more volunteers

Organising and running a TOTB regional heat can be a considerable amount of work. Should you need more volunteers please contact TOTB@rsc.org and we will be able to contact members of your Local Section to let them know of the opportunity to get involved.

Financial support

If a Local Section requires financial support to run their regional heat, they are welcome to apply to the Outreach Fund. This fund provides financial support to members, individuals and organisations in order to enable them to run chemistry-based public and schools engagement activities. Full details about funding categories, eligibility, criteria, restrictions and deadlines are available on the [Outreach Fund website](#). Please note, the Outreach Fund is competitive and funding for a regional heat is not guaranteed. If you have any further questions about the Outreach Fund please contact outreach@rsc.org.

Promotion

Your regional heat should be advertised on your Local Section events page and your local Education Coordinator can promote your regional heat through their newsletters or local teacher events. Please contact your local Education Coordinator to organise this route of promotion.

Resource bank

To help support our Local Sections, a shared regional heat resource bank of resources shared by Local Sections is available. This is secure and held on the RSC internal network to which only staff involved in the competition and our Education Coordinators have access. Should a Local Section require any ideas for their regional heat please contact TOTB@rsc.org or your local Education Coordinator, and we will search the collection on your behalf, and provide by email the appropriate resource. Please be assured, to avoid any teachers or students being in possession of your resources, we will only take a request from a member who is involved in TOTB. If there is any doubt, the TOTB organiser will be contacted to confirm the request. We ask that the resource bank is not shared with any teachers or students. As a disclaimer, we will not be undertaking any quality assurance of the resources and when these are shared it will be made clear they are from the named Local Section and not created or moderated by staff.

Inclusion and Diversity

As representatives of the Royal Society of Chemistry, it is expected that Local Sections uphold our values of inclusion and diversity. Chemistry should be for everyone and we are committed to promoting and supporting inclusion and diversity across our education activities. In the past it has been identified that a lack of diversity of the students taking part in the TOTB competition needs addressing, in particular the low number of state schools participating and the gender imbalance in the national final. Further details about our [inclusion and diversity strategy](#) as well as the [report](#) on 'Diversity landscape of the chemical sciences' give further details of the reasoning behind this initiative and how we plan to address the challenge.

We understand that the demographic of the winning school is not in our control, however we believe that through positive action a more diverse range of schools and students can be encouraged to take part in the regional heats, potentially resulting in a more balanced representation in the national final.

Gender

To address any gender imbalance we would recommend that Local Sections **invite schools to submit teams that are broadly representative of their school's gender balance**

School type

To address the imbalance of school type in the competition we would recommend that Local Sections have a **proportional representation based on the local school landscape** and where necessary **encourage more state schools to enter their regional heats**.

Attracting a broader range of schools to enter your regional heat can be a challenge, especially if the same schools have historically always entered. The following barriers have been identified:

- Contacting state schools and getting interest from state schools may be addressed by sending personal invitations to local state schools with information about the event. A list of schools in your area can be found using the website www.schoolswebdirectory.co.uk. Your local Education Coordinator may be able to help with contact names or an introduction. It may also be possible for your Education Coordinator to help.
- Independent or grammar/selective schools filling up places first may be addressed by having a phased invitation process where state schools have priority registration or you may wish to reserve places for state schools.

Additional needs

A student's additional needs should not be a barrier to participation in the competition and everyone should have the opportunity to take part. Local Sections are encouraged to communicate that their event **is accessible to all and they can accommodate students with additional needs**. Should you need advice on how to accommodate students with additional needs please contact TOTB@rsc.org

Diversity monitoring

To ensure we are providing equality of opportunity and that the competition embraces inclusion and diversity, we would be grateful if you could complete and return the regional heats monitoring form in Appendix I (this is an excel spreadsheet that can be cut and pasted directly into an email) along with details of the winning school. Please note we do not need names or dates of birth of the students.

Health and Safety

Risk Assessment

Hazards and risk must be considered, assessed and managed for all events run on behalf of the Royal Society of Chemistry which includes TOTB competitions. Please see our [risk assessment for events webpage](#) for information regarding risk assessments and how to complete the appropriate documentation for your event. **Due to the safety of our volunteers, members and schools we ask that you do not run a competition that involves posting hard copies of documents**

Safeguarding

All TOTB competitions comply with the [RSC safeguarding policies and procedures](#). It must be made clear when inviting schools to take part in the remote competition (and any further communications) that contact by email or phone should only be with a teacher, not direct with students. The teacher is responsible for the support and safety of their students, and it is very important that students taking part in the remote competition are supervised by their teacher. For safeguarding reasons it will not be possible for a regional heat to involve any photos or videos of students, for example video calling using a platform such as zoom/skype or competitions that involve photos/videos being emailed and stored on a member's personal device.

Further safeguarding information for member networks can be found in the under item 8.3 of [Rules for Member Networks of the Royal Society of Chemistry](#).

The RSC's safeguarding policy, safeguarding procedures and processes and safeguarding incident form are available on our [website](#). If you have any questions regarding safeguarding, please contact the Designated Safeguarding Officers, safeguarding@rsc.org.

GDPR

Please consider what information is appropriate to ask when registering students for the event and ensure you are not collecting any unnecessary data, for example only the Year group of the students is needed not their date of birth. Local sections can use an existing list of email addresses to contact schools about their Top of the Bench competition. It is also possible for you to store contact details to invite schools to future Top of the Bench competitions. You will need to include the sentence below in your communications to ensure the schools understand how they can be removed from your mailing list:

The Royal Society of Chemistry will contact you regarding future Top of the Bench competitions. None of the data we maintain for Top of the Bench will be used for marketing purposes or shared with third parties. If you prefer not to hear about future competitions please let us know by contacting [\[insert Local Section email address\]](#)

Running an inclusive TOTB competition checklist

Organising committee

- Use a diverse team of individuals for the organisation of an event in order to provide balanced views and reduce the risk of any unconscious bias

Invitation and Registration

- Make sure all Top of the Bench marketing materials represent the diversity of our community, thinking about language and imagery used and being careful not to perpetuate any negative stereotypes (such as the competition is only for certain schools or students)
- Consider advertisement of the event – have all schools been included in the Local Section?
- Provide information on accessibility services offered
- Ensure the event registration is inclusive and considers all potential registrants
 - Request information any additional needs (eg if large text resources are required)

Participants

- Collect diversity monitoring data and send to TOTB@rsc.org

A more detailed guide to running an inclusive event can be found on the [RSC website](#)

Timeline and key dates

Now – October	Plan remote event. Running a remote competition will be new to many Local Sections so do allow appropriate time to plan how your competition will run this year.
October 2020 – January 2021	Regional heats
Following the event and no later than 31st January 2021 :	<p>TOTB organiser/Local section will need to submit the form in Appendix I to TOTB@rsc.org. This information includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winning school name • Teacher name and email address • Format of your regional heat (including deadlines) • Diversity monitoring information of schools that entered <p>Local Sections that miss this deadline may forfeit their winning team entering the national final.</p>
Early February 2021 (or before if school details have been provided)	The RSC will contact all schools providing details of the national final and how to register

Appendix I: Top of the Bench regional heats form (please return to TOTB@rsc.org)

Local Section:

Format (and deadlines) of competition:

Winning School:

Winning School Contact and email:

School name	Postcode	Has the school entered before? (Y/N)	Gender of team (Male/Female/Other)				Any additional needs?
			Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	

Appendix III: Example Documents

The following documents can be used as templates when organising your event:

- Example invitation
- Example entry form

Example invitation – this can be adapted to be sent by email

Royal Society of Chemistry Top of the Bench competition

The [local section] will be holding a remote regional heat for the Royal Society of Chemistry Top of the Bench competition. This competition is open to all schools and we would like to invite you to nominate a team of four students to take part.

The regional heat will consist of a [insert details of heat]. The winners of the regional heat will progress to a national final held in spring 2021.

The Royal Society of Chemistry is committed to inclusion and diversity. Our Top of the Bench competition is assessable to all and we can accommodate students with additional needs.

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7. Students must not have taken part in previous TOTB competitions. In extraordinary circumstances please contact TOTB@rsc.org if this rule restricts schools in your Local Section taking part. With advanced permission from the RSC flexibility with this rule may be possible.

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8. For safeguarding reasons all communications (by email, phone or post) should only be with a teacher, not direct with students. The teacher is responsible for the support and safety of their students, and it is very important that students taking part in the remote competition are supervised by their teacher.
9. Schools cannot be penalised if they prepare their students for the competition
10. Any suspicions of cheating must be discussed with RSC staff (TOTB@rsc.org) before approaching/disqualifying the school
11. The correct answer is what is written on the mark scheme
12. The question master/competition organiser's decision is final

You can nominate a team by completing the enclosed entry form and returning it to [address of event organiser] or [email address of event organiser] by [deadline].

If you have any questions, feel free to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

[Local Section Secretary Name]

RSC Local Section Secretary

Example entry form - this can be adapted to be sent by email

Royal Society of Chemistry Top of the Bench competition

School entry form

[Local Section name]

Name of school:

Teacher(s) name and contact details:

Team:

Student name	Gender Male/Female/Other	School year	Any additional needs (eg large text resources required?)
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

School address:

School phone no:

Contact email:

Has your school taken part in this competition before? Yes/No