

Prime Ministerial Debates – key principles, agreed December 21st 2009

The following principles to be the basis of holding a series of Prime Ministerial debates:

1. There will be three live TV debates during the forthcoming general election campaign.
2. There will be one debate in each full week of the campaign assuming the election is called at least four weeks before polling day.
3. If there are less than four weeks between the election being called and polling day, it may be necessary to schedule two debates in one week. The first debate will not be held before the fourth day after the start of the campaign.
4. Each of the three broadcasters, the BBC, ITV and B Sky B will be responsible for producing their own individual debate programme in three separate locations in England.
5. ITV will produce the first debate in the North West. Sky will produce the second debate in the South/South West. The BBC will produce the third debate in the Midlands.
6. The three party leaders of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties will appear in each debate programme.
7. Each party leader will have equal treatment in each programme. The broadcasters will each nominate one person who will monitor the debate and be contactable by a nominated representative of each of the parties during the debate. The broadcaster's nominated person will advise and liaise with the executive producer who will have responsibility for ensuring equal treatment.
8. Each debate will be between 85 and 90 minutes in duration, transmitted live by the originating broadcaster in peak time.
9. There will be no advertising within the programme.
10. The format of the debate will be the same for all broadcasters.
11. Around half of each debate will be themed.
12. There will be a live audience, transparently selected mainly from the surrounding region by an agreed and reputable polling company.
13. Each audience will be broadly representative of the country as a whole subject to detailed discussions with ICM and agreement with the parties.
14. Each broadcaster will have a named editorial panel of their own to select the questions submitted by the public. Each will set out the criteria by which questions may be selected.
15. Each debate will be hosted by a single presenter provided by the host broadcaster. Alastair Stewart, ITV; Adam Boulton, Sky; David Dimbleby, BBC.
16. B Sky B and the BBC will make their programmes available to other broadcasters simultaneously. ITV will make their programme available to other television broadcasters immediately after transmission and available simultaneously to online and radio.
17. This proposal is subject to each broadcaster complying with its duties on due impartiality and election coverage across the nations of the UK.