

Top of the Bench regional heats

2023/2024

Support and guidance for Top of the Bench organisers

Top of the Bench

Top of the Bench (TOTB) 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 support 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 RSC Local Sections. These run from September to January with the winning team from each heat progressing to the 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 in spring each year. The 2024 final will be held on 16 March 2024 at Edinburgh Napier University.

Examples of written and practical papers from previous national finals are available to download from the [Top of the Bench webpage](#). You may share these with schools should you wish.

Planning your regional heat

Date

Regional heats should be run between September and the end of January. The closing date for submitting school entries to TOTB@rsc.org for the national final is the **31st January 2024**.

Format

For the academic year 2023/2024, regional heats may be face-to-face, hybrid or virtual at the discretion of the organiser to best support the needs of the local section and regional schools.

Our members have run various virtual competitions including:

- Online quiz
- Live quiz
- Poster competition (with/without audible description task)
- Practical challenge carried out in individual schools
- Virtual practical challenge
- Assessment of online experiments and name the lab equipment

Timeline and key dates

Now – September	Plan regional heat event
September 2023 – January 2024	Regional heats
Following the event and no later than 31 January 2024 :	<p>TOTB organiser/Local section must email the following information to TOTB@rsc.org:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Winning school name, teachers name and email address• Date and format of your regional heat• List of schools who attended, their postcodes and number of teams from each school <p>Local Sections that miss this deadline of 31st January 2024 may forfeit their winning team entering the National Final.</p>
Early February 2024 (or before if school details have been provided)	The RSC will contact all winning schools to provide details of the national final and how to register.

TOTB 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.
8. For safeguarding reasons all communications must be with a teacher, not direct with students. The teacher is responsible for the support and safety of their students, students taking part in the remote competition must be 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 that which is written on the mark scheme.
12. The competition organiser's decision is final.

Support for Local Sections

Financial support

If your Local Section requires financial support to run their regional heat, they are welcome to apply for top up funding. Please complete this [Top Up Fund form for Local Sections](#) and return to networks@rsc.org.

The deadlines for applications are 1 January, 1 April, 1 July and 1 October. Please apply as early as possible for top up funding. Requests for retrospective funding are not considered.

If you have any questions regarding top up funding please contact networks@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 TOTB@rsc.org to organise this route of promotion.

Resource bank

We have a regional heat resource bank held on the RSC internal network which contains contributions from previous Local Sections face-to-face events. If you require any ideas for your regional heat please contact TOTB@rsc.org

Resources should not be shared with any teachers or students. Please note, we have not undertaken any quality assurance of these resources as they have not been created or moderated by RSC staff.

Booking or hiring a venue for TOTB heats

RSC interest groups and local sections organise many successful events each year. We ask volunteers organising face-to-face events when booking or hiring a venue (including making an internal booking if you work at the venue) for a TOTB heat, to please ensure one of the following is in place:

- **[Letter signed by venue](#)** - ask the relevant authorised person at the venue to sign and send the completed signed agreement letter with a copy of the venue's current public liability insurance certificate to networks@rsc.org
- **[Letter to be signed electronically by venue](#)** - Please provide the name and email address of the person at the venue who should sign the letter, the public liability insurance and unsigned agreement to networks@rsc.org. The Networks Team will arrange for the relevant people to complete the agreement via DocuSign.
- **[Venue Hire Contract](#)** with the T&Cs and a copy of the venue's current public liability insurance certificate to be sent to networks@rsc.org.

The Networks Team will arrange for the letter or contract to be countersigned by the RSC and a copy of the countersigned letter will be sent to the organiser.

If you have any questions about hiring a venue, please contact networks@rsc.org

Venue FAQ's

Do all face-to-face TOTB competitions need a venue contract?

If the venue where you are holding your competition has any booking terms and conditions, this constitutes a contract and therefore needs to be approved by RSC. If they do not provide a contract, then the TOTB agreement letter signed by the venue with a copy of their public liability insurance would suffice.

Why does the RSC need to have contracts or agreements in place?

We must provide protection for our volunteers and ensure the event is covered by the RSC's public liability insurance, not doing so may cause reputational ramifications for the RSC.

Do Local Sections need a contract/letter of agreement if they are not being charged for the venue or at their own university labs?

Yes. The contract review process is not linked to the financial value of the activity, but to the insurance and liability of any terms and conditions.

What name and address should be on the contract?

All contracts must use RSC, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W1J 0BA. No contracts can be signed in the name of the interest group or Local Section.

Why does the RSC have to sign the contract?

We ensure RSC staff sign the contract to protect our members from inadvertently becoming personally liable for any damages or loss. Members are not authorised to sign any contracts for RSC activities. We will ensure the contract is signed by the appropriate member of staff.

Inclusion and Diversity

As representatives of the Royal Society of Chemistry, Local Sections must 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. Further details about our [inclusion and diversity strategy](#) as well as the [Diversity data report 2022](#) can be found on our website. In 2020 we launched the findings from our [Chemistry for All](#) outreach study looking at the learnings from five years of outreach to widen participation.

Disability and adjustments/assistance

A student's disability or the requirement of adjustments/assistance should not be a barrier to participation in the competition, 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 disabled students and students who require adjustments/assistance**. Should you need advice please contact TOTB@rsc.org

Running an inclusive TOTB competition

Please visit our [promoting inclusion and diversity](#) webpage for information on [making your committee inclusive and diverse](#) and [making your events inclusive](#).

School type

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

To address the imbalance of school type in the competition we request that Local Sections encourage **more non-selective state schools to enter their regional heats**.

Encouraging non-selective state school participation

- Education Coordinators can promote TOTB competitions via local newsletters which are sent to all Teach Chemistry schools in their area
- Run your event at a suitable time to avoid teachers missing teaching time or suggest students are accompanied by another suitable adult, such as a technician or parent helper, to reduce the burden on the teacher (this must meet the schools safeguarding requirements)
- A remote event for schools in rural areas to make it more inclusive. A practical activity run in the school might work well (with the offer of the school keeping the kit).
- How the event is advertised. Is it advertised in the way that state schools will want to take part? (Is it 'for them'?)
- Contact these schools directly by sending personal invitations with information about the event. A list of schools in your area can be found here: www.schoolswebdirectory.co.uk.
- If place numbers are limited please ballot to ensure fairness (not 1st come 1st served)
- Ensure schools receive enough time to arrange cover / gather parental permissions etc (ideally 6 weeks) once notified of the regional heat date
- Organisers can use their budgets to fund transport for non-selective state schools at the discretion of your committee. We strongly recommend this to all Local Sections so that it is equitable across all regions.

Safeguarding

All TOTB competitions must comply with the [RSC safeguarding policies and procedures](#). It is mandatory that students taking part in the competition are always supervised by their teacher and the teacher is aware they are responsible for the support and safety of their students. It must be made clear when inviting schools to take part in the competition (and any further communications) that contact by email or phone should only be with a teacher, not direct with students. For safeguarding reasons, you must not run a regional heat that involves any photos/videos being stored on a member's personal device.

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

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

Safeguarding FAQ's

- You should never be left alone with a young person during a member volunteer activity such as Top of The Bench or careers talks.
- There should always be a teacher present, they are responsible for the health and safety of the young people.
- Always be in open view when working with young people.
- Avoid situations where you and an individual child or children are completely unobserved.
- You should not have physical contact with a young person, except where there is danger of harm.
- If a young person makes a disclosure to you:
 - Listen unconditionally; without judging or showing shock or any sign of disbelief.
 - Reassure the child that they have done nothing wrong.
 - Only ask necessary and open questions (Who? What? Where? When?) that will clarify exactly what is being disclosed.
 - Do not take photographs of physical injuries.
 - Do not promise secrecy. You will have to share information to ensure the child's safety.
 - Write it down as soon as possible after the conversation.
 - Report it to the person responsible for safeguarding (The Designated Safeguarding officer).
 - Keep it confidential – don't share the information with anyone else.

Photography

- Each school or event organiser will have their own photography and privacy policies, depending on where the activity is taking place (e.g. school, community group etc.).
- Please ask them for clarification on these guidelines, and gain permission beforehand, if you are considering taking photographs during your activity.

Follow up post activity

If a young person is looking for additional information following a member volunteer activity such as top of the bench or careers activity, and they want to contact you directly, all questions and answers should be routed via the school or activity organiser.

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.

We ask that all communication with the schools is done electronically to align with the RSCs sustainability aims.

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 TOTB competition. It is also possible for you to store contact details to invite schools to future TOTB 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]