

SCHOOLS PUBLIC SPEAKING

International Public Speaking Contest

21st September 2008

by Paul Mainon, Director Province 1
National Public Speaking Co-Ordinator

I was installed as Director for Province 1 in May 2006 at the Grand Council Meeting in Eastbourne, and given the role of national Public Speaking Contest Co-ordinator.

At the annual conference, Brother Grand President Mike O'Malley expressed a wish that there be a national or, indeed, international Public Speaking Contest for Catholic Fifth and Sixth form students in 2008 as part of the Centenary Celebrations of the Association.

After establishing that, at the time, six Provinces were holding competitions, namely 1 and 17 (joint), 4, 5, 6, 12 and 19.

I made contact with the organisers and advised them of the proposed national contest in 2008. I declared my intention to attend all their contests.

A notice was placed in Catena and further interest was shown from Provinces 2, 3, 15, 18 and Malta area Council.

It was decided to invite the winners and runners-up from each provincial competition to contest the final.

The first qualifier was held at Durham University (Province 5) in July 2007, followed by Bristol (Province 12) and West Byfleet (Province 19) in October 2007.

After liaising with Past Grand President John Clarke and Director Frank Hinds in November 2007, the decision was taken to field the final in the Weston Theatre of the Conference Centre of

Manchester University in September 2008.

A generous offer of sponsorship of the event was received in January 2008 from Brother Peter Jones of Wilmslow Circle and his wife, Audrey, from their Emerson Foundation. This gesture played a huge part in allowing the planning of the final to proceed smoothly.

In February 2008, Provincial contests took place at Stockport (1 and 17 joint) and Kegworth (15).

Approaches were made to adjudicators in January 2008 and February 2008, and by the end of February 2008, three judges out of the proposed five had accepted.

Further qualifications took place in March 2008 at Ampleforth College (Province 3), Liverpool Hope University (Province 4) and Solihull (Province 6).

In early May 2008, invitations were sent out to contestants, via their schools/colleges, coaches and tutors, advising them of the final, detailing the rules, criteria for adjudication and prize money. Travelling expenses were to be offered to contestants.

Acceptances came in steadily, and by mid-July 2008, 17 had been received, including two from the Maltese competition which was held in July 2008. Only one person declined the invitation.



The Maltese contestants were to be home-hosted by Catenians rather than stay in a hotel.

Before the end of July 2008, the remaining two adjudicators had accepted and Grand Vice President Joe and Philomena McNally agreed to attend.

As the contest was to be held early in the academic year, competitors were told they could

use the same topics as when qualifying, in order to avoid the stress of a new topic interfering with studies at the start of the new school term.

Director Frank Hinds (Cheshire North), Provincial President Phil Brown (Davyhulme), Brian Hampshire (Oldham) and myself liaised to finalise details, and after meeting with the conference centre staff, final arrangements were made.

Running orders of the event were sent out to contestants and adjudicators and everything seemed to be in place.

Unfortunately two contestants pulled out, one for personal reasons, and the other because of illness, reducing the number of competitors to 15 from the original 18.

At their September 2008 meeting, Province 1 Provincial Council agreed to provide a trophy for the event, and Councillors would help with whatever was required on the day. John Colligan of Rochdale Circle would act as Chief Steward.

Two days before the contest, my wife and I met the contestants from Malta, Lara Dean and Erin Stewart Janti, at Manchester Airport and took them to the home of Michael and Mary Connolly (Didsbury Circle), who had kindly agreed to home-host the young pair.

Late on the eve of the event, Television Director Mary McMurray, who was to be one of the judges, found her husband Nick collapsed and had no choice but to withdraw.

On arrival at the Weston Theatre, Past Grand President Jim Kelly was approached and kindly agreed to act as a replacement adjudicator.

Unfortunately, one contestant did not appear.

The contestants who took part were:

Raymond Hughes St Ursula's School, Bristol (Province 12)

Victoria Hawkins St Augustine's RC High School, Redditch (Province 6)

Katjana Cleasby Radcliffe College, Leicester (Province 15)

Fiona Campbell St John Fisher Catholic High School, Harrogate (Province 3)

Liam Finn St Mary's Sixth Form College, Middlesbrough (Province 3)

Priyanka Suresh English Martyrs College, Hartlepool (Province 5)

Chris Page Xaverian College, Manchester (Provinces 1 and 17)

Nicola Underhill St Nicholas High School, Northwich (Provinces 1 and 17)

Francesca Docherty Colona Convent Girls School, Croydon (Province 19)

James Hulse Ellesmere Port RC High School (Province 4)

Andrew Kirby St Mary's College, Great Crosby, Liverpool (Province 4)

Erin Janti De La Salle College, Malta

Lara Dean De La Salle College, Malta

Matthew Rodger St Mary's Catholic High School (Province 15)

Paul Mainon welcomed competitors and guests and thanked the sponsors, the Emerson Foundation of Peter and Audrey Jones and introduced Director Frank Hinds, who acted as MC for the event.

The contest was a great success with excellent contributions from the young people who exuded confidence. The quality of the competitors was very high giving the adjudicators a most difficult task.

The event was split into two halves with an audio-visual Bursary Fund presentation by Provincial President Phil Brown at the interval.

The adjudicators were:

Sir Netar Mallick, Professor Emeritus of Renal Medicine in Manchester

Claire Ward, MP for Watford

Dr James Hagerty, who has written the Centenary History for the Association

Wendy Sutcliffe, the Oral Skills Manager for the English Speaking Board

Jim Kelly, Past Grand President and a former Headmaster, kindly stood in for Television Director, Mary McMurray.

Wendy Sutcliffe, who chaired the judges remarked on the contribution of each contestant and then announced the winners.

In first place was *Priyanka Suresh* whose topic was "Why I think it is important to keep smiling".

In second place was *Katjana Cleasby* whose topic was "Honesty is not now seen as the best policy".

The topic of third placed *James Hulse* was "School spoils your education".

Grand Vice President Joe McNally congratulated the contestants, thanked the sponsors, adjudicators and everyone connected with the organisation of the event. He then presented cheques for £200 to *Priyanka Suresh*, £150 to *Katjana Cleasby* and £100 to *James Hulse*.

PRIZE WINNERS



Their schools received cheques for £100, £75 and £50 respectively. All other contestants received £25.

The Centenary Trophy was presented to *Priyanka Suresh* to be kept at her school, with a smaller version for her to keep. The reaction from the audience throughout the event helped to give the day a good feel and the atmosphere was splendid throughout.

Letters of thanks and messages of congratulations have been received from parents, schools and many attendees. Many hoped that the event would become annual.

The value to the Association in terms of awareness can only be good.

The weekend ended for me at 4am on Monday morning when I took the Maltese contestants to Manchester Airport for their return journey.

They advised since, that they are still in touch with other contestants via e-mail and Facebook, another spin-off from the event.

Many thanks again to Peter and Audrey Jones for their sponsorship and provision of programmes. Without their help the contest would not have taken place.