

**MAY 2016**

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**SPONSORSHIP  
OF THE ARTS**

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**ANWAR  
ODURO-KWARTENG**



**DEBATING MATTERS  
TOPIC  
GUIDES**

[www.debatingmatters.com](http://www.debatingmatters.com)

**MOTION:**

**“CORPORATE  
SPONSORSHIP IS  
GOOD FOR THE ARTS”**

# ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.

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## KEY TERMS

[Philanthropist](#)

[Renaissance](#)

[Sponsor](#)

# INTRODUCTION

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# NOTES

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In March this year BP ended its 26 year sponsorship of Tate Galleries, as well as its 34 year sponsorship of the Edinburgh International Festival, citing an “extremely challenging business environment” as the reason [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. This announcement coincided with the recent debate about the pros and cons of corporate sponsorship of the arts, which has been under scrutiny from critics who question the ethics of theatres, art galleries and museums accepting funding from businesses such as oil companies and banks. Although taking place amid cuts in government funding in the arts, those opposed to corporate sponsorship argue that ethics are a vital aspect of an institutions identity, and are concerned by cultural institutions accepting corporate sponsorship from companies such as Boeing, GlaxoSmithKline, and Goldman Sachs [Ref: [Wired](#)]. On the other hand, supporters of corporate sponsorship point out that the arts and corporate money have had a long and complex relationship, and note that without the help of corporate donors from all industries the arts would suffer hugely, as one commentator highlights: “Until museums find a grove of money trees, corporate sponsorship will be a necessary part of their lives.” [Ref: [Financial Times](#)] So, should corporate sponsorship of the arts be celebrated as a key aspect of maintaining the UK’s reputation as a world-leading cultural centre? Or do cultural institutions compromise artistically and ethically when they seek corporate funding?



# THE SPONSORSHIP OF THE ARTS DEBATE IN CONTEXT

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## The arts funding problem

With Arts Council England seeing a reduction by 36% in government funding since 2010 [Ref: [BBC News](#)], arts institutions are under increasing pressure to find alternative streams of funding. As writer Michael Skapinker argues, in this financial environment corporate sponsorship has become vital to arts institutions because: “It helps keep museum admission free...an end to corporate sponsorship would mean museums having to charge for entry, getting rid of staff, restricting opening hours, or all of these.” [Ref: [Financial Times](#)] However, opponents counter that with the modest levels of sponsorship that Tate have received from BP annually (on average £224,000), representing just 0.5% of their annual revenue [Ref: [Guardian](#)], they could easily do without that money – or could find it elsewhere. Some also argue that the state is the best source of funding for the arts. They suggest that rather than encouraging institutions to seek corporate sponsorship, it is the role of government to support culture, because “the arts are one of the hallmarks of a civilised society” [Ref: [New Statesman](#)]. Others see things differently, with one radical suggestion being that the state stops funding the arts altogether because “if the funding tap was turned off tomorrow, we would not run short of artists in the way we might run short of nurses or bin men. No artist or impresario was ever put off their vocation by the lack of a guaranteed wage.” [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]

## Biting the hand that funds?

“Money, power and culture have always been intertwined” [Ref: [Financial Times](#)] observes commentator Nick Butler, a view which many advocates of corporate funding of the arts share. Using the British Museum as an example, he goes on to argue that business sponsorship of art and culture is a good thing, because: “What is clear is that without the funding, the museum could not have put on the great exhibitions, covering everything from Vikings to ancient Persia, that have drawn tens of thousands of people in the last decade.” [Ref: [Financial Times](#)] Cultural historian and sociologist Dr Tiffany Jenkins agrees, and highlights the long standing relationship that has existed between big business and art. She states that: “Artists and arts institutions have always needed significant sums from the wealthy and from corporations like BP. And they always will.” And furthermore: “The Medici, a prominent banking family, was partly responsible for the flourishing of Renaissance Florence, as they funded some of the greatest artists that ever lived. Without the support of such power crazed men, we may never have had the art of Michelangelo, Donatello, Fra Angelico and Leonardo da Vinci.” [Ref: [Scotsman](#)] Advocates also suggest that art and culture do not occupy an ethically pure domain which is sullied by corporate money. The Nobel Prize, and its money for instance, come from Alfred Nobel, an arms manufacturer, the renowned Getty Museum and Trust were founded by John Paul Getty, an oil magnate, and: “The Guggenheims became philanthropists only after polluting Philadelphia and running some mining interests that would, perhaps, today, be seen as criminal” [Ref: [Telegraph](#)], yet their contributions to funding art and culture benefit us all. However, despite these arguments, critics of corporate funding



## THE SPONSORSHIP OF THE ARTS DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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are not convinced. Activist and artist Amanda Grimm asserts that it does matter to the art and the institution where sponsorship comes from – as this reflects the kind of values that they adhere to, which is vitally important. As such, with respect to BP, she notes that, “the arts are too good to associate themselves with fossil fuel companies” [Ref: [Commonspace](#)].

### Unethical and bad for the arts?

For critics of corporate funding, the issue has both ethical and practical dimensions. Playwright Mark Ravenhill warns that arts organisations which accept funding from oil companies such as BP are by virtue of association endorsing their activities, and suggests that: “Artists should have no part in this.” [Ref: [Guardian](#)] Some critics also challenge the motives of companies, and claim that their sponsorship is nothing more than an attempt to gain positive publicity because, “the prestige of being associated with the UK’s leading arts organisations” makes it worth their while [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Moreover, many argue that cultural institutions do make ethical distinctions that determine which type of organisations they will accept sponsorship from, as author and environmental activist Mel Evans emphasises. She notes that the arts have a history of distancing themselves from certain brands and industries – for example Tate have refused to accept money from arms or tobacco companies since 1986 [Ref: [New Statesman](#)], and the Museums Association’s code of ethics states that museums should, “seek support from organisations whose ethical values are consistent with those of the museum.” [Ref: [Museums Association](#)] However, critics of an ethical approach to funding argue that more often than not: “Any inflated posturing about the relationship of art to

ethics to money, is bound to end in an embarrassing collision of principles” [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Aside from the moral aspects of corporate funding, critics also outline practical concerns, one of which is artistic autonomy. Amid recent claims regarding BP [Ref: [Guardian](#)] and Shell [Ref: [Guardian](#)] attempting to wield influence in their relationships with arts institutions, some say that corporate funding will always come with conditions. Theatre director Rebecca Atkinson-Lord outlines the problem of artistic licence, and concludes that ultimately: “It is important to realise that, consciously or not, every pound of corporate money we accept risks making artists less able to genuinely pursue the activist agendas of their choice.” [Ref: [Guardian](#)] If this is the case – what are the other options - does state funding allow any more artistic licence? Opponents think not, and highlight that: “Public funding itself is far from pure. It often comes with strings attached” [Ref: [spiked](#)], and, “arts practitioners and institutions seeking state funding, are still compelled to prove that they can meet a range of targets that have nothing to do with creating and presenting high quality art, and everything with fulfilling various political agendas.” [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)] So, given the competing arguments, is corporate funding in the arts a good thing? Or are there too many ethical and artistic problems associated with such arrangements?



## ESSENTIAL READING

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### FOR

[Why the British Museum should accept BP's Money](#)

Michael Skapinker *Financial Times* 6 April 2016

[BP outlawed as a British Museum sponsor? Amazing](#)

Stephen Pollard *The Times* 5 April 2016

[The British Museum should ignore protesters and take BP's money](#)

Tom Harris *Telegraph* 4 April 2016

[Biting the hand that funds art](#)

Tiffany Jenkins *Scotsman* 28 June 2014

### AGAINST

[British Museum must sever its links with BP](#)

Margaret Atwood et al *Guardian* 3 April 2016

[Why the arts should break free from their unequal relationship with big oil](#)

Amanda Grimm *Commonspace* 3 March 2016

[Are ethics and activism becoming luxuries for arts organisations?](#)

Rebecca Atkinson-Lord *Guardian* 30 September 2015

[What museums sacrifice when they take corporate cash](#)

Kate Collins *Wired* 1 June 2015

### IN DEPTH

[Is divesting from fossil fuels the best tactic for tackling climate change?](#)

Suzanne McGee *Guardian* 24 April 2016

[Who funds the arts and why we should care](#)

Rachel Spence *Financial Times* 19 September 2014



## BACKGROUNDEERS

[The British Museum should take BP's cash](#)

*Financial Times* 20 May 2016

[Oil companies' sponsorship of the arts 'is cynical PR strategy'](#)

*Guardian* 19 April 2016

[Why cultural institutions should accept oil money](#)

Nick Butler *Financial Times* 10 April 2016

[Arts + corporate sponsorship = a match made in Hong Kong](#)

Bong Miquiabas *Forbes* 20 March 2016

[A fossil fuels-arts world divorce is 'the way the world was moving'](#)

Arthur Nelson *Guardian* 11 March 2016

[Artists often take the money and run – but we must say no to oil companies](#)

Mark Ravenhill *Guardian* 28 January 2016

[Museums Association code of ethics](#)

*Museums Association* 2016

[Why shouldn't the Tate take oil money?](#)

Tiffany Jenkins *spiked* 29 December 2015

[Corporate art sponsors' cash earns perks and mutual benefits](#)

Dalya Alberge *Financial Times* 4 December 2015

[Corporate art sponsorship is a complicated business](#)

Matt Timms *Business Destinations* 25 August 2015

[A critics plea: stop all arts funding now](#)

Douglas McPherson *Telegraph* 28 May 2015

[Italy's cultural heritage at risk – with private sponsors brought in to help protect iconic landmark](#)

Michael Day *Independent* 17 May 2015

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[Biting the hand that funds: is the Tate losing out from its association with BP?](#)

Barbara Speed *New Statesman* 23 April 2015

[The sponsorship files: who funds our biggest arts institutions](#)

Susanna Rustin & George Arnett *Guardian* 2 March 2015

[Tate and oil: does the art world need to come clean about sponsorship?](#)

Susanna Rustin *Guardian* 4 October 2014

[When it comes to the arts, BP's 'oil money' is far less compromising than state funding](#)

Nathalie Rothschild *Huffington Post* 14 August 2011

[Should Britain's arts organisations accept more corporate sponsorship?](#)

Susannah Butter *New Statesman* 3 February 2011

[A Government of philistines](#)

Sholto Byrnes *New Statesman* 24 July 2010

[Ignore the protests against BP and the Tate. Oil and art get along fine](#)

Stephen Bayley *Telegraph* 2 July 2010



## IN THE NEWS

[Ditch tobacco sponsors health experts warn cultural institutions](#)

*Guardian* 30 April 2016

[Curtain falls on Edinburgh festival's deal with oil giant](#)

*The Times* 7 April 2016

[BP ends 34 year sponsorship of Edinburgh International Festival](#)

*BBC News* 6 April 2016

[BP to end Tate sponsorship after 26 years](#)

*Guardian* 11 March 2016

[Science Museum ends sponsorship deal with Shell](#)

*Guardian* 12 November 2015

[Flashmob invades British Museum in protest of BP's sponsorship](#)

*ITV News* 13 September 2015

[Royal Opera House urged to axe BP sponsorship by classical music luminaries](#)

*Independent* 3 July 2015

[Climate change activists occupy Tate Modern's Turbine Hall](#)

*Guardian* 13 June 2015

[Arts council boss makes funding plea](#)

*BBC News* 25 May 2015

[Tates' BP sponsorship was £150,000 to £330,000 a year, figures show](#)

*Guardian* 26 January 2015

[BP pledges £10bn art sponsorship](#)

*BBC News* 19 December 2011

[Can philanthropy help the arts?](#)

*BBC News* 21 March 2011

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## ORGANISATIONS

[Art not oil](#)

[Arts Council England](#)

[BP: Connecting through arts and culture](#)

[Museums Association](#)

## ADVICE FOR DEBATING MATTERS

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[www.debatingmatters.com](http://www.debatingmatters.com)

### FOR STUDENTS

#### READ EVERYTHING .....

In the Topic Guide and in the news - not just your side of the argument either.

#### STATISTICS ARE GOOD BUT.....

Your opponents will have their own too. They'll support your points but they aren't a substitute for them.

#### BE BOLD

Get straight to the point but don't rush into things: make sure you aren't falling back on earlier assertions because interpreting a debate too narrowly might show a lack of understanding or confidence.

#### DON'T BACK DOWN

Try to take your case to its logical conclusion before trying to seem 'balanced' - your ability to challenge fundamental principles will be rewarded - even if you personally disagree with your arguments.

#### DON'T PANIC

Never assume you've lost because every question is an opportunity to explain what you know. Don't try to answer every question but don't avoid the tough ones either.

### FOR TEACHERS

Hoping to start a debating club? Looking for ways to give your debaters more experience? Debating Matters have a wide range of resources to help develop a culture of debate in your school and many more Topic Guides like this one to bring out the best in your students. For these and details of how to enter a team for the Debating Matters Competition visit our website, [www.debatingmatters.com](http://www.debatingmatters.com)

### FOR JUDGES

Judges are asked to consider whether students have been brave enough to address the difficult questions asked of them. Clever semantics might demonstrate an acrobatic mind but are also likely to hinder a serious discussion by changing the terms and parameters of the debate itself.

Whilst a team might demonstrate considerable knowledge and familiarity with the topic, evading difficult issues and failing to address the main substance of the debate misses the point of the competition. Judges are therefore encouraged to consider how far students have gone in defending their side of the motion, to what extent students have taken up the more challenging parts of the debate and how far the teams were able to respond to and challenge their opponents.

As one judge remarked *'These are not debates won simply by the rather technical rules of schools competitive debating. The challenge is to dig in to the real issues.'* This assessment seems to grasp the point and is worth bearing in mind when sitting on a judging panel.



**“WORLD REQUIRES  
THE CAPACITY  
TO MARSHALL  
CHALLENGING IDEAS  
AND ARGUMENTS”**

**LORD BOATENG, FORMER BRITISH HIGH  
COMMISSIONER TO SOUTH AFRICA**