Young Speakers Scotland

Communicate with Confidence

2026-2027

Schools' Mace Competition Handbook

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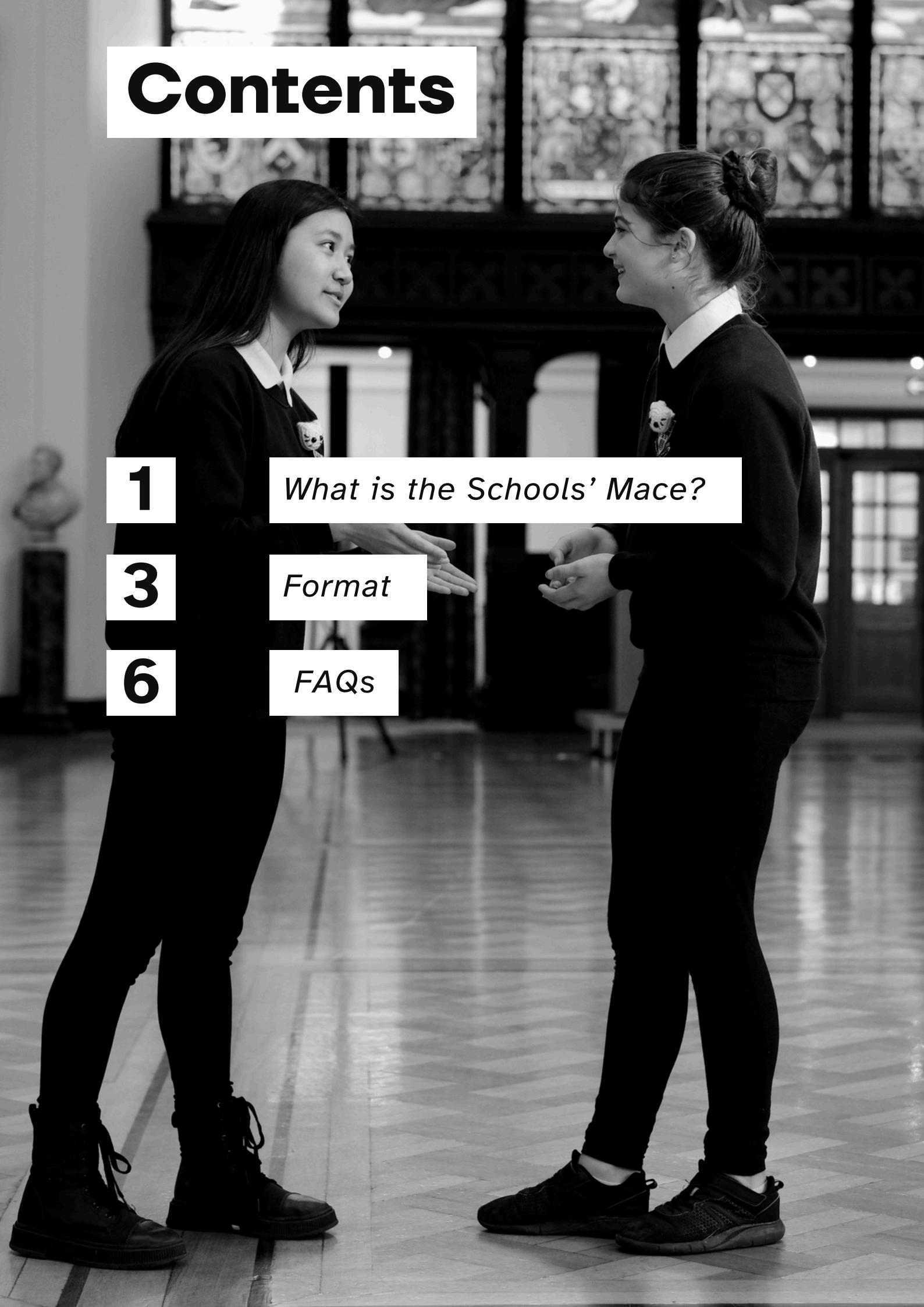

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1

What is the Schools' Mace?

The Schools' Mace competition is Scotland's oldest debating competition for schools. The name comes from the mace (a sort of heavy club) that used to be awarded to the winning team. In the modern era giving weapons to children is frowned upon so we hand out trophies instead, but the name remains as a fun reference to our history.

The Mace has undergone various format changes over the years but the fundamentals remain the same - teams debate a variety of topics, delivering speeches on why they are correct and their opponents are wrong. At the end of the debate, judges rank the teams by how compelling their arguments were. In this way, the Schools' Mace Competition tests your ability to think critically, speak persuasively and work as a team.

Regional preliminary rounds take place in September and October. The best teams in the preliminary rounds win a coveted spot at the Finals Day in February, which concludes with a team declared the Mace Champion.

The Mace is open to all schools in Scotland. Speakers of all ages compete against each other but there is a special **Junior Final** for the best four teams of S1-S3 debaters.

Entrance to the Schools Mace costs £50 per school.

2

What is the Schools' Mace?

Last year, the following schools took part in the Schools' Mace:

1. Aberdeen Grammar School
2. Aboyne Academy
3. Banchory Academy
4. Biggar High School
5. Broxburn Academy
6. Clydeview Academy
7. Craigmount High School
8. Currie Community High School
9. Dingwall Academy
10. Dollar Academy
11. Douglas Academy
12. Fettes College
13. Forres Academy
14. George Heriot's School
15. Grantown Grammar School
16. Gryffe High School
17. Hyndland Secondary School
18. Invergordon Academy
19. Inverurie Academy
20. Kingussie High School
21. Kirkwall Grammar School
22. Mackie Academy
23. Mallaig High School
24. Marr College
25. The Mary Erskine School
26. Mearns Castle High School
27. Millburn Academy
28. Nairn Academy
29. Robert Gordon's College
30. Stewart's Melville College
31. Thurso High School
32. Tynecastle High School
33. Wellington School
34. Woodfarm High School

We were thrilled to see such a wide range of schools taking part in this event.

3 Format

The Schools' Mace uses the **British Parliamentary (BP)** format. This is the most common format for debating comptitions in Scotland.

In BP, there are four teams, each with two speakers. Teams are given a topic ("**motion**") to debate. One preliminary round at the Mace will feature a prepared motion that teams can prepare for in advance, and the others will be **unprepared** debates. In unprepared debates, teams will have 15 minutes to prepare their arguments, with no help from teachers or use of the internet. Sides for both the prepared and unprepared debates will be announced 15 minutes prior to the debates taking place

The Mace is not a knock-out competition. Instead, the break to the Finals Day will be decided based on the number of wins and speaker scores teams accumulate over the course of the preliminary rounds. This guarantees schools at least three chances to debate.

The teams are the **Opening Government** and **Closing Government** (who support the motion), and **Opening Opposition** and **Closing Opposition** (who oppose the motion).

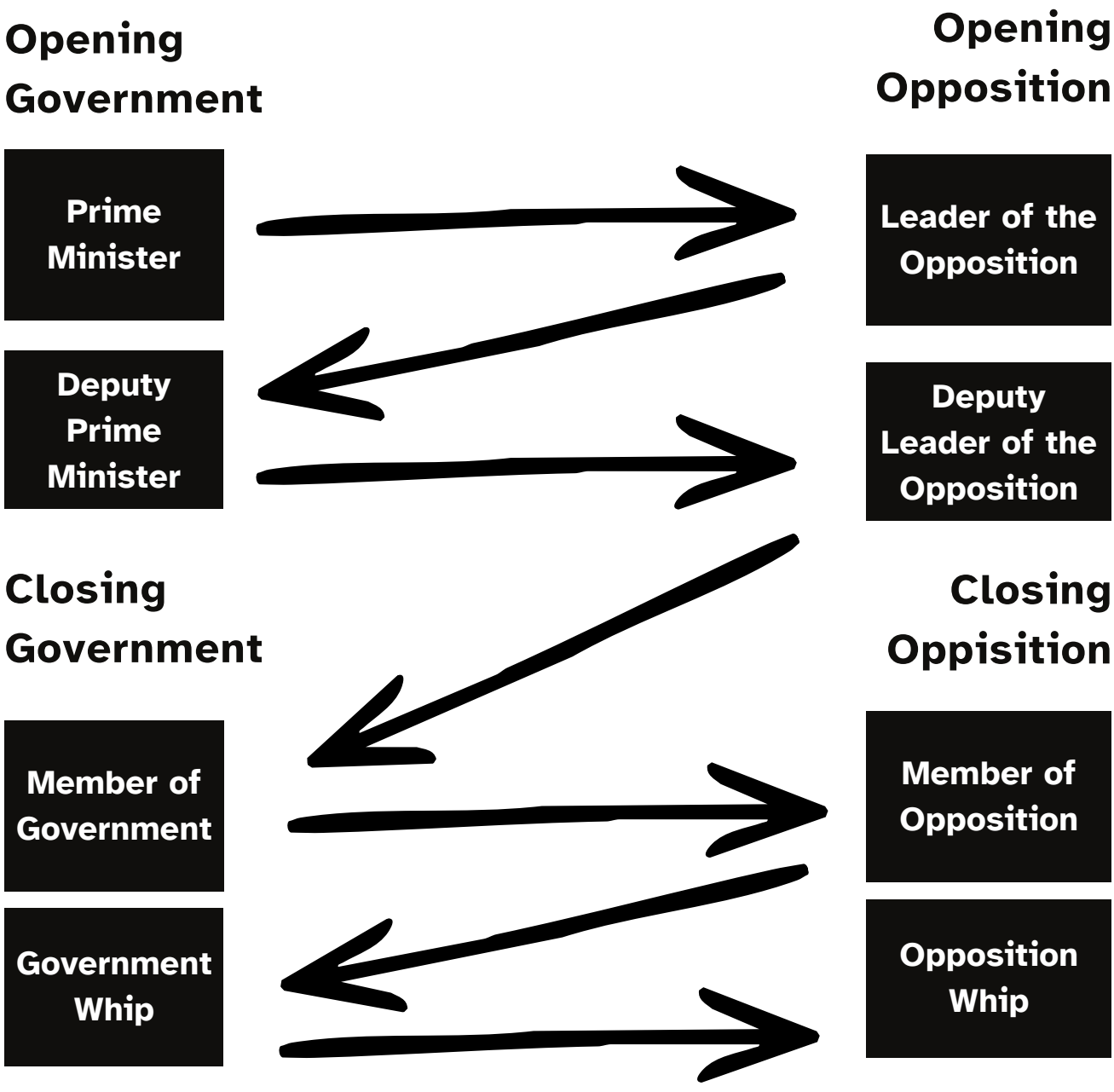
One-by-one, a speaker from each team will give a 7 minute speech, presenting arguments for their team and **rebuttal** (responses) to the arguments from the other teams. Each speaker only gets one speech to make their case.

The most important thing for any speaker in a BP debate is to be **comparative.** There are 4 different teams - you must explain why your team is the best.

At the end of the debate, judges will rank the teams from 1st to 4th.

4 Format

This is a diagram showing the order of the 8 speeches in a BP debate. Don't worry too much about the "titles" of each speaker, they are ceremonial and don't need to be memorised!



5 Format

In a British Parliamentary debate, speakers have specific roles they need to fulfil.

The **Prime Minister** and **Leader of the Opposition** (the first speakers for each opening team) need to introduce their teams' arguments and clarify any terms or definitions needed to have a clear debate. For example, in the motion "this house would legalise recreational drugs", teams may want to clarify that they would only legalise recreational drugs for those over the age of 18. Teams should be reasonable in their definitions.

The **Deputy Prime Minister** and **Deputy Leader of the Opposition** (the second speakers for each opening team) need to further the arguments of their partner as well as rebutt the arguments from the other team. It is very important to have rebuttal in a BP debate.

The **Member of Government** and **Member of Opposition** (the first speakers for each closing team) need to introduce their teams' **extensions**. An extension is required for closing teams - something new that their opening team has not done. An extension can be a new argument, new rebuttal or even new examples, if they add to the debate meaningfully. Member speakers should also have rebuttal.

The **Government Whip** and **Opposition Whip** speakers (the second speakers for each closing team) should rebutt arguments that have arisen in the debate as well as summarise the arguments of their team. Whip speakers benefit from a big picture look at the debate, comparing and weighing all the arguments that have been made to explain why their team is the best.

FAQs

What is Point of Information?

A **point of information** is a short question asked to a speaker by a debater from the opposite bench during a speech. A speaker has the option to accept or reject a point of information, and points of information cannot be offered in the first or last minute of a speech.

Are there summary speeches?

No. There are no summary speeches or reply speeches in the Schools' Mace. Every debater only gets one 7 minute speech each.

Do I need to wear a uniform?

No. Debaters are not required to wear their school uniform, but should be aware that other participants may choose to do so.

Can I share my time?

No, each speaker can only speak for 7 minutes. The 14 minutes a team has to speak must be divided equally between the two team members.

How many teams can I enter?

Spaces for the Mace are limited. We can guarantee every school one team but will frequently be able to offer additional spots on a first-come-first-served basis.

Can S1s enter?

Yes. S1s are welcome to enter the Mace but please be aware that juniors will compete against seniors in the competition.

Will we receive motions and sides in advance?

One preliminary round motion and all the Finals Day motions will be released beforehand.

Sides for all rounds will only be announced 15 minutes before the debates begin.

Will food be provided?

Pupils are expected to bring their own packed lunches to the Mace rounds. At the Finals Day lunch will be provided to all participants.

FAQs

Can I bring supporters with?

Absolutely. You are welcome to bring supporters, but please let us know numbers in advance.

Are composite teams allowed?

Yes. Composite teams (speakers from different schools) are allowed at the Mace. If you are an individual speaker looking for a partner we can try to help you find one but cannot guarantee anything.

Can I use pre-written notes?

For prepared rounds you are allowed to bring in pre-written or typed notes. For unprepared rounds the only pre-written material you are allowed is a dictionary.

Can I use tech during a debate?

You are allowed to use tech to time yourself or read your notes from a laptop. However, you are not allowed to use this tech to connect to the internet to get information during a debate.

Can I use AI?

For impromptu rounds you are not allowed to use any research material outside of your own brain. For prepared rounds, you are allowed to use AI although we would highly encourage writing your own speeches to ensure creativity and originality.

Do I need to use statistics?

Statistics and research can help strengthen an argument but debating is about more than throwing facts at each other. Make sure you explain *why* what you are arguing is true, and do so persuasively.

What will motions be about?

Motions can be about anything - politics, the economy, culture, science, policing, religion, theatre, movies, art, interpersonal relationships. To prepare make sure you are well read and creative!