



CONTEST RULES

VERSION 11.11

**APPLICABLE FROM
MARCH 2026**

The British Association of Barbershop Singers
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Change History

Version 11.11 – March 2026

Attachment 5	Minor change to Divisional Award boundaries
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Version 11.10 – September 2025

Attachment 2	Minor change to definition of Most Improved Quartet
Attachment 2	Minor change to definition of Most Improved Chorus

Version 11.9 – September 2024

Article 4 (a)	Change to contest definition
Article 6 (a)	Change to contest definition
Article 7 (d)	Change to quartet eligibility
Article 18 (b) 2	Breaking of ties changed from Musicality to Performance
Article 20	Minor changes to awards
Attachment 5	Clarification of divisions for choruses who have not entered in the past two years.

Version 11.7 – September 2023

	Category name change from Music to Musicality
Article 7	Changes to gender definition
Article 11	Updated to reflect changes in Musicality category description Updated to reflect changes in the Performance category description

Version 11.6 – September 2022

Attachment 5	Updates to Chorus Divisions
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Version 11.5– September 2022

Article 20	Updates to trophies
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Version 11.4– November 2020

Article 11(a), (b), (f), (h)	Minor changes to rules concerning patriotic and religious material, and good taste
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Version 11.3– September 2020

Article 7(a)	Eligibility for Seniors and Youth Quartet Contests changed to include singers of any gender
Article 7(d), (g), (j)	Minor changes to gender definition

Article 7 (n)	Change to the definition of a mixed chorus
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Article 1

Scope

- (a) These rules apply to all British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) contests.
- (b) In general these rules apply to quartet and chorus contests, the word "contestant" being used to denote either a quartet or chorus. Where the word "quartet" or "chorus" is used, that rule shall be specific to that type of contest. Such rules are identified by the letter Q or C, as appropriate.
- (c) Where rules make reference to gender, 'male' is defined as any individual who, wherever possible and recognisably, lives their life as a male person, and 'female' is defined as any individual who, wherever possible and recognisably, lives their life as a female person.

Paragraphs in italics are for guidance of contestants and do not form part of the Contest Rules.

Article 2

National Contests

The National Quartet, Male Chorus and Mixed Chorus Contests shall be held each year in conjunction with the BABS Annual Convention and shall be under the general supervision of the BABS Contest & Judging Team, hereinafter called "C&JT". The following procedures shall be observed unless otherwise ordered by the C&JT.

- (a) Preliminary Contests may be held as deemed necessary.
- (b) If necessary, byes may be given in the Preliminary Contests.
- (c) **Q** At the BABS Annual Convention, quartets shall be judged in the first stage of the contest, which will be known as the BABS Quartet Semi-Final.
- (d) **Q** From the Semi-Final, the top six quartets plus ties shall be selected to compete in the Final Contest.
- (e) **Q** At the end of the Final Contest, the placing of quartets shall be computed by the combined scores obtained in the Semi-Final and Final Contests. Contestants placed first, second and third shall be designated Medallists, whilst the remaining contestants appearing in the Final shall be recognised as Finalists.
- (f) **C** Following any Preliminary Contests, choruses shall be judged in only one stage, this being called the Final of the Male Chorus Contest or the Final of the Mixed Chorus Contest.

Article 3

International Contest Qualification

Details of the rules for qualification for International contests can be obtained from the Director of Music and Education.

Article 4

Seniors Quartet Contest

- (a) **Q** A contest for BABS senior members shall be held over two rounds, as directed by the C&JT. The winners shall be known as the "BABS Seniors Quartet Champions".
- (b) **Q** Entry qualification is by age: 55 years or over with a minimum aggregate quartet age of 240 years. Seniors Quartets shall be held on a separate register from the National Quartet Register.

Article 5

Article deleted

Article 6

Youth Quartet Contest

- (a) **Q** An open contest for youth quartets shall be held, over two rounds, as directed by the C&JT. The winners shall be known as the "BABS Youth Quartet Champions".

- (b) **Q** A Youth quartet is one where all members of the quartet are under 26 on the day of the first round.

Article 7

Eligibility

- (a) Gender of the singers:
- Singers taking part in the Male Chorus and Male Quartet Contests will be of any gender except cisgendered women.
 - A chorus director identifying as a cis woman may take part in the Male Chorus Contest but shall not be heard to sing.
 - Singers in the Youth or Senior Contests may be of any gender.
 - Singers in the Mixed Chorus Contest will be of any gender.

- (b) **Q** With the exception of quartets entering the Youth Quartet Contest, every Quartet member shall be a full member of BABS. Quartets entering the National or Seniors Contests, and their individual members, must be registered with the BABS Quartet Registrar at least 28 days before the contest.

Quartet members who are not full members of BABS should check their eligibility to compete with the BABS Director of Administration or BABS Membership Secretary.

- (c) **Q** A quartet winning the National Quartet Contest, Seniors Quartet Contest or the Youth Quartet Contest shall not recontest in that contest. A champion quartet shall be defined as containing more than two members from the original personnel of the quartet that won, regardless of any name change.
- (d) **Q** A member shall be permitted to compete with more than one quartet provided they are a member of each quartet before the Preliminary Contest. Where no Preliminary Contest takes place then the member should be registered with each quartet 28 days prior to the contest. A competing quartet may not contain more than two members of another quartet in the same contest.
- (e) **Q** A novice quartet consists of any quartet which contains no more than two members who have previously competed together in a BABS quartet contest (Preliminary or Semi-Final) and contains no more than one member who has previously competed in a BABS Quartet Final. Seniors quartets are not eligible.
- (f) **Q** Professional quartets may not enter.
- (g) **C** Each registered BABS club may enter only one Male Chorus and/or one Mixed Chorus contest in a given year. Each chorus shall consist of fully paid up BABS members of that club. Singers may compete with more than one club. For the Mixed Chorus Contest, female singers already registered as members of LABBS will be granted free-of-charge BABS membership for the purposes of singing in a BABS club's mixed chorus. LABBS membership or paid BABS membership must be current at the time of contest. Competing chorus members shall be registered with the BABS Membership Secretary no less than 28 days before the contest.
- (h) No-one is allowed on stage during a contest performance who is not a member of the competing quartet or club.
- (i) **C** Two or more BABS clubs shall not combine to form one competing chorus.
- (j) **C** A member shall be permitted to compete with more than one club provided they are a member of each club before the Preliminary Contest. Where no Preliminary Contest takes place then the member should be registered with each club 28 days prior to the contest.
- (k) **C** A competing chorus must be composed of 12 or more members on stage, with or without the director.
- (l) **C** A club winning a BABS Chorus Contest shall not compete in the equivalent competition the following year.
- (m) **C** Don Amos members may not compete in BABS Chorus Contests. They must be full members of the club they are representing.
- (n) **C** In the Mixed Chorus Contest a chorus is considered mixed if more than one gender is represented.
- (o) Violation of any of the eligibility articles (7(a) to 7(n)) will be penalised under Article 15.

Article 8

Entry To Contest And Provision Of Contest Rules

- (a) Entry shall be made on the appropriate online form by the published closing date.

- (b) Late entries may be accepted in exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the relevant Contest Manager and shall sing in a draw position to be determined by the relevant Contest Manager.
- (c) Copies of the current Contest Rules can be obtained from the C&JT website.

Article 9

Order Of Appearance On Stage

- (a) Contestants shall sing in the order in which their names are drawn by the Chair of the C&JT or their appointee, except as allowed in Articles 8(b) and 10.
- (b) Violation of Article 9(a) will be penalised under Article 15.

Article 10

Penalties for Tardiness

Any contestant failing to perform in the assigned order of appearance shall, unless there are exceptional circumstances, be penalised. The penalty will be 15 points on a single panel of judges, 30 points on a double panel, 45 points on a triple panel etc. The Chair of Judges shall have the power to waive the penalty where the situation that has arisen to cause the tardiness is clearly outside the control of the contestant. The Chair of Judges shall permit such contestant(s) to appear where minimum inconvenience is caused to other contestants.

Article 11

Contest Material

- (a) A song performed in contest must not be primarily patriotic nor primarily religious in intent. Where there is reasonable doubt that the performance would meet the criteria of being primarily Religious or Primarily Patriotic, benefit must go to the performer and no penalty is justified. Otherwise the Performance judge shall apply a penalty up to and including forfeiture (*See Performance Category Description and Position Papers*)
- (b) A song performed in contest must be in good taste. Songs or actions by a contestant that are not “in good taste” will be penalised up to and including forfeiture. (*See Performance Category Description and Position Paper 3*)
- (c) The melody and implied harmony must be consistent with the barbershop style. All songs performed in contest must be arranged in the barbershop style, which is an unaccompanied vocal style of music. Songs must be sung without any kind of musical accompaniment and without instrumental introduction, interlude, or conclusion. Disregard of this article may result in points reduction or forfeiture by one or more judges, as explained in the BABS Judging Reference Book.
- (d) A song’s melody should be present and distinguishable and is most consistently sung by the lead, with the tenor harmonizing above the melody, the bass singing the lowest harmonizing notes, and the baritone completing the chord. Excessive passages with the melody not in an inside voice will result in penalties up to and including forfeiture by the Musicality judge(s) only.
- (e) Lyrics should be sung by all four parts through most of the song’s duration. Excessive passages without words in all four parts will result in penalties up to and including forfeiture by the Musicality judge(s) only.
- (f) Songs not consistent with the barbershop style for any other musical reason (including characteristic chord progressions featuring dominant seventh and ninth chords resolving around the circle of fifths, harmonic richness, chord vocabulary or lack of homorhythmic texture) will be adjudicated in terms of the quality of the performance by the Musicality judge(s). Songs lacking these stylistic characteristics will score lower holistically.

*Contestants are referred to the BABS Judging Reference Book or to any qualified member of the **Musicality Category** for a detailed explanation of the Barbershop style and suitability of a song.*

- (g) Gestures or visual presentation by any contestant that are deemed suggestive, vulgar or otherwise not in good taste will result in a lower score up to forfeiture by the Performance judge. In addition, the performance may be stopped by the Contest Administrator. (*See Position Paper 3*)
- (h) Performers must not utilise others outside of the members of the performing group to enhance the effectiveness of the performance. If this is evident, and not a reflection of some spontaneous reaction by members of the audience, then the Performance judge shall apply a penalty up to and including forfeiture.

- (i) In chorus contests, selected use of a soloist, duet, trio or quartet is acceptable providing it is brief and appropriate. At no time should the musical texture exceed four parts. Any difficulty in understanding a song (whether due to language or otherwise) reduces a judge's scope for rewarding the performance.
- (j) Contestants must comply with copyright laws in the acquisition, arranging and learning of songs for contest performance.

Article 12

Number of Songs

- (a) At each stage of the contest, including the Preliminary Contest, contestants shall sing two songs, either or both of which may be a medley.
- (b) **Q** Taking the Semi-Final and Final Contests as a whole, no song (including constituent songs of a medley) may be sung more than once. The title of every song, including the constituent songs of a medley, shall be recorded.
This rule is not intended to bar the use of musical quotes. Material sung at a Preliminary Contest may be repeated at a later stage.
- (k) **C** No song, including constituent songs of a medley, may be sung more than once.
This rule is not intended to bar the use of musical quotes. Material sung at a Preliminary Contest may be repeated at a later stage.
- (l) Musicality judges may apply a penalty up to and including forfeiture for any violations of Article 12.

Article 13

Scoring Categories

Judging of contestants' performance will be carried out in three categories: Musicality, Performance and Singing. Each category may use up to a maximum of 100 points per song per judge.

For the criteria being judged refer to the current BABS Category Descriptions from the C&JT website.

Article 14

Sound Equipment and Stage Effects

- (a) Contestants may not use their own or additional in-house electronic amplification, sound producing equipment or stage lighting.
Establishment of pitch using an electronic pitch pipe is permissible.
- (b) Contestants may use props, but they should be limited to those which can be easily carried on and off stage by one person.
Any queries with regard to props should be referred to the Quartet or Chorus Contest Manager prior to the event.
- (c) Contestants should leave the stage in the same good condition as they would wish to find it for their own performance and props should be chosen accordingly. Anything that can be quickly cleared by a stage hand is acceptable. Confetti and similar small material that requires extensive clean-up is banned from use in both chorus and quartet contests. Other materials which are difficult to clean-up (requiring mops, brooms, vacuum cleaners, etc.) are strongly discouraged from the stage.
Any queries with regard to props should be referred to the Quartet or Chorus Contest Manager prior to the event.
- (d) A chorus may request the use of a provided stage microphone during a performance for an announcer, as provided by Rule 16. Written notice of such requirement must be given to the Contest Manager no less than 30 days before the contest. Such microphones shall be turned off at all other times.
Microphones used for announcements are normally not switched on during a performance.
- (e) Any effects used on stage which make loud or sudden noises must be declared in advance to the appropriate Contest Manager with specific details of where the effect will occur.
- (f) Violation of Article 14 will be penalised under Article 15.

Article 15

Disqualification

The Chair of Judges shall be responsible for penalising violations of Articles 7, 9 and 14. The Musicality judge may award disqualification under Rule 12. Such contestants shall receive no score and shall not appear on the official scoring summary, except by way of a note using the wording

"Contestant.....disqualified: Violation of Article....."

Article 16

Verbal Comment

Non singing dialogue is generally not part of a contest performance. However, relevant **brief comment** with supporting visual communications are permitted, to help establish the mood and/or theme, before, in between and at the end of the performance package. Spoken words deemed to be excessive or detrimental to the performance are adjudicated in terms of the quality of the performance, but are not subject to penalty of forfeiture.

Article 17

Disturbances during Contests

Should any event occur which, in the opinion of the Chair of Judges, adversely affects the contestant, such contestant shall be offered the chance to sing again after the last contestant has finished and at least fifteen minutes after the disturbed contestant has left the stage. The contestant shall be given a reasonable period of time to make a decision. If the contestant accepts the offer, the scores from the first performance will be discarded and the contestant will be judged on the second performance.

Article 18

Ranking of Contestants

- (a) Contestants shall be ranked in accordance with the total score of points awarded by the judges.
- (b) If two or more contestants are awarded the same total score, including all previous rounds except Preliminary Contests, ties will only be broken for 1st, 2nd and 3rd places in Finals. The method used for breaking ties will be:
 - 1) The highest total score awarded by the Singing Judges will be ranked as the "Tie-break" and that contestant will be ranked above the other(s) in the tie.
 - 2) If a tie still exists the highest total score awarded by the Performance Judges will be ranked as the "Tie-break" and that contestant will be ranked above the other(s) in the tie.
 - 3) If the tie is still not broken the following shall apply: The "Tie-break" shall be the highest total score at the Preliminary contest. If the tie continues unbroken the Singing score at the Preliminary contest shall be the "Tie- break" and if still not broken the Performance score at the Preliminary contest shall be used.
 - 4) In the event where a tie cannot be broken for 1st, 2nd or 3rd place, joint medallist status will be awarded
- (c) Total scores for 4th place and below will be ranked as equal placing. At Preliminary contests ties will be ranked as equal placing and if there is a tie at the cut-off for the Semi-Finals or Finals contest, all tied contestants will go through.

Where there have been no qualifying Preliminary rounds, it may be necessary, if the above procedures result in a tie, where only one can go forward to a Society contest, for a draw to be held to determine which group is given first refusal to go to that contest. Such a draw would have no effect on the status of the groups concerned.

Article 19

Publication of Results

At all BABS contests, results shall be made known by the Chair of Judges or an appointed nominee for each stage, as follows:

- (a) An Official Scoring Summary shall be displayed at the contest site, showing the score per category and per song; details of any penalties or disqualification by the Chair of Judges, including the Article number violated; details of any ties; and the names of the Judging Panel.
- (b) The scores obtained by the Finalist Quartets in the Semi-Finals shall be held over for publication after the Final.
- (c) There shall be no public announcement at the venue of penalties and disqualifications. *Publication of a full report detailing penalties and forfeitures will be available on the website in a suitable time frame after the contest.*
- (m) Following the public announcement and publication of results to the satisfaction of the Chair of Judges, there can be no change to rankings or scores.

Article 20

Trophies

(a) Quartets

The following quartet medals and trophies shall be awarded at the relevant Quartet Contest:

	Medals	Trophies
Quartet Champions 1st Place	Gold Medals	Tyneside Trophy
2nd Place	Silver Medals	Michael Sides Rose Bowl
3rd Place	Bronze Medals	The Ian Stone Trophy
Novice Quartet		The Sheng Pitch Pipe (see Attachment 1)
Most Improved Quartet		The BQC Trophy (See Attachment 2)
Seniors Quartet Champions	Winners' medals	Seniors Champions Trophy
BABS Youth Quartet Champions	Winners' medals	The Steve Hall Trophy.

(b) Male Chorus Contest

The following chorus trophies shall be awarded at the Male Chorus Contest:

	Medals	Trophies
1 st Place Chorus	Gold Medals	Crawley Cup
2 nd Place Chorus	Silver Medals	Bristol Cup
3 rd Place Chorus	Bronze Medals	Wearside Trophy
Individual certificates shall be awarded to the top 3 choruses. Chorus certificates shall be awarded to all competing choruses.		
Chorus Division 2 Winners		The Shannon Express Award
Chorus Division 3 Winners		Division Winners' Plaques (see Attachment 5)
Small Chorus Award		Jim Carter Trophy (see Attachment 3)
Most Improved Chorus		Cambridge Scroll (see Attachment 4)

(c) Mixed Chorus Contest

The following medals and trophies shall be awarded at the Mixed Chorus Contest:

	Medals	Trophies
1 st Place Chorus	Gold Medals	Bolton Barbershop All In Harmony Trophy
2 nd Place Chorus	Silver Medals	The Bristol Mix Together in Harmony Trophy
3 rd Place Chorus	Bronze Medals	The Lux A Cappella Trophy
Individual certificates shall be awarded to the top 3 choruses. Chorus certificates shall be awarded to all competing choruses.		
Chorus Division 2 and 3 Winners		Division Winners' Plaques (see Attachment 5)
Small Chorus Award		BABS Mixed Chorus Small Chorus Shield (see Attachment 3)

Most Improved Chorus		The Roy Phillips Award (see Attachment 4)
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End of Contest Rules

Attachment 1

The Sheng Pitch Pipe

The Sheng Pitch Pipe shall be awarded to the highest placed novice quartet in the BABS Quartet Final. If no novice quartets appear in the Finals, it shall be awarded to the highest place Novice quartet from the Semi-Finals.

A novice quartet consists of any quartet which:

- (a) Contains no more than two members who have previously competed together in a BABS quartet contest (Preliminary or Semi-Final).
- (b) Contains no more than one member who has previously competed in a BABS Quartet Final.

Seniors quartets are not eligible for this award.

Attachment 2

Most Improved Quartet

To be awarded to the quartet showing the "greatest improvement" between two consecutive quartet contest cycles.

The "greatest improvement" is evaluated as:

$S_2 - S_1$

where

S_2 is the highest score achieved by the quartet in the current contest cycle.

S_1 is the highest score achieved by the quartet in the previous contest cycle.

The "highest score" may be the score from Prelims or the Semi-Final. The Quartet Final score is not included. It will not necessarily be from the same stage of the contest in both seasons. It is normalised to a 3 judge panel prior to comparison, to eliminate possible differences in the size of judging panels from contest to contest.

The following rules will apply:

- (a) The results of two consecutive contest seasons will be used unless decreed otherwise by the BABS Contest Manager to accommodate unusual circumstances.
- (b) Except for (c) and (d) below, any quartet competing in any round of a BABS contest is eligible including those competing in the Youth Contest, the Seniors Contest or for a placing at the BHS International Contest.
- (c) A quartet must compete in both seasons to be eligible, unless allowed otherwise under rule (a).
- (d) Any quartet forfeiting all their marks in any one or more categories, in either season, will not be eligible.

Attachment 3

The Male Small Chorus Award - "The Jim Carter Memorial Trophy"

In order to encourage smaller choruses to enter the BABS Chorus Contests, Reading Barbershop Harmony Club donated in the 1970s a trophy, to be known as The Jim Carter Memorial Trophy, to be presented to the highest placed small chorus competing in the Male Chorus Contest covering both preliminary and final rounds.

The rules governing the award of this trophy are:

- (a) Only choruses with 25 or fewer singers will be eligible (excluding the chorus director)
- (b) The highest placed eligible chorus shall be declared the winner
- (c) The winners of the trophy may not win the award more than once in any three-year period

The Mixed Small Chorus Award

In order to encourage smaller choruses to enter the BABS Chorus Contests, a trophy will be presented to the highest placed small chorus competing in the Mixed Chorus Contest covering both preliminary and final rounds.

The rules governing the award of this trophy are:

- (a) Only choruses with 25 or fewer singers will be eligible (excluding the chorus director)
- (b) The highest placed eligible chorus shall be declared the winner
- (c) The winners of the trophy may not win the award more than once in any three-year period

Attachment 4

The Most Improved Male Chorus Award - "The Cambridge Scroll"

To be awarded to the male chorus showing the "greatest improvement" between two consecutive Male Chorus Contest cycles.

The "greatest improvement" is evaluated as:

S2 - S1

where

S2 is the highest score achieved by the chorus in the current contest cycle.

S1 is the highest score achieved by the chorus in the previous contest cycle.

The "highest score" is normalised to a 3 judge panel prior to comparison, to eliminate possible differences in the size of judging panels from contest to contest.

The following rules will apply:

- (a) The results of two consecutive contest seasons will be used unless decreed otherwise by the BABS Contest Manager to accommodate unusual circumstances.
- (b) Except for (c) and (d) below, any chorus competing in any round of a BABS contest is eligible.
- (c) A chorus must compete in both seasons to be eligible, unless allowed otherwise under rule (a).
- (d) Any chorus forfeiting all their marks in any one or more categories, in either season, will not be eligible.

The Most Improved Mixed Chorus Award

To be awarded to the mixed chorus showing the "greatest improvement" between two consecutive Mixed Chorus Contest cycles.

The "greatest improvement" is evaluated as:

S2 - S1

where

S2 is the highest score achieved by the chorus in the current contest cycle.

S1 is the highest score achieved by the chorus in the previous contest cycle.

The "highest score" is normalised to a 3 judge panel prior to comparison, to eliminate possible differences in the size of judging panels from contest to contest.

The following rules will apply:

- (a) The results of two consecutive contest seasons will be used unless decreed otherwise by the BABS Contest Manager to accommodate unusual circumstances.
- (b) Except for (c) and (d) below, any chorus competing in any round of a BABS contest is eligible.
- (c) A chorus must compete in both seasons to be eligible, unless allowed otherwise under rule (a).
- (d) Any chorus forfeiting all their marks in any one or more categories, in either season, will not be eligible.

Attachment 5

Male Chorus Divisional Awards

To be awarded to the Chorus placing highest in each division of the Male Chorus Contest. Choruses are placed in divisions based on their last score achieved by their club in a BABS competition, provided they have competed at least once in the two preceding years, according to the boundaries below. A chorus which has not competed in the last two years will be entered into Division 1.

- Division 1: 75.0% and above
- Division 2: 65.0% - 74.9%
- Division 3: Below 65.0%

Mixed Chorus Divisional Awards

To be awarded to the Chorus placing highest in each division of the Mixed Chorus Contest. Choruses are placed in divisions based on their last score achieved by their club in a BABS competition, provided they have competed at least once in the two preceding years, according to the boundaries below. A chorus which has not competed in the last two years will be entered into Division 1.

- Division 1: 75.0% and above

- Division 2: 65.0% - 74.9%
- Division 3: Below 65.0%

Attachment 6

Contest Bursaries and Financial Support

Contest Bursaries

Award winners in the Male Chorus Contest, Quartet Contests (including Youth and Seniors) and Mixed Chorus Contest, will receive bursaries to aid future development. Further details about these bursaries, including amounts, can be obtained from the BABS Finance Director.

International Contest Bursaries

Details about financial support for International Contests can be obtained from the BABS Finance Director

End of Attachments