

## Bridging the Gap: An Exploration of Transitions in Play through the Lifecourse

**English Bridge Education & Development**

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## EBED, UK and Irish Bridge Unions & University of Stirling Partnership

PhD Researcher - Kevin Judge ('outsider')  
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

**Supervisors**  
Prof Samantha Punch – Sociologist ('insider')  
Dr Louise McCabe – Dementia Studies  
Dr Caroline Small - EBED Trustee

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### First ever 3 year PhD in Sociology of Bridge

## Bridging the Gap: An Exploration of Transitions in Play through the Lifecourse

Kevin Judge started 1 Oct (out of 16 candidates)

Opportunities and barriers to participation and progression

- New approaches for different age groups

<https://www.ebedcio.org.uk/health-wellbeing-research>

Funded by EBED, UK and Irish Bridge Unions, and the University of Stirling

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## Media interest

### UK National Newspapers Headlines:

*University's coming up trumps with latest PhD... in bridge*

*Card doc 3 year deal*

*Doctorate in game of bridge is on the cards for university*

### Playing bridge helps to maintain 'brain fitness'

**By Tim Bugler**

A SCOTTYRISH university is to fund a doctorate in bridge after a major study showed the trick-taking card game keeps people sharper, happier and more social into old age.

The three-year PhD studentship in the sociology of bridge at the University of Stirling is part of a project funded by Welsh, Irish and English bridge unions, which makes people play in clubs and help playing all their lives.

It will also explore the role a hobby can play in friendships and personal communities, as well as how it creates a sense of belonging and collective identity within and across generations.

Academics intend people to join the newly founded University Bridge Club, set up as part of a series of research projects into the health and wellbeing benefits of the game.

The first, headed by British Bridge Education and Development (EBED), compared the responses of more than 6,000 bridge players with over 10,000 non-players over one of the British Longitudinal Study of Ageing.

It found those playing bridge have higher levels of education, more time when down.

The one starting club will also help build intergenerational relationships within and beyond the university.

Professor of Sociology Samantha Punch, who is an international bridge player, leads the research with Dr Caroline Small, an honorary senior lecturer at Imperial College, London.

She said: "The club has the potential to enable people to maintain good health, through increased positive cognitive, social and quality of life outcomes.

"As well as contributing to healthy ageing and brain fitness, participation in bridge social networks and a sense of belonging to a wider community."

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## Social Media

### Facebook

New Zealand Bridge

- over 32,500 hits and over 470 shares

NZ Radio: The Bridge Zone

- 20 min radio interview (22 Aug 2018) + follow-ups (Dec/Jan)

<http://accessradio.org/ProgrammePage.aspx?PID=6379a3ce-8450-482c-badi-6b4cc2574313>

- regular updates 'Postcard from Scotland'

Mailbase list for research updates (twice a year) + advisory group

Sociology of Bridge twitter: @soc\_of\_bridge

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## Research Questions

- What are players' motivations for taking up the game?
- In what ways, if any, does bridge contribute to intergenerationality (specifically youth and 50-65 years)?
- How do players' bridge journeys, in the context of lessons to club, vary over the lifecourse?

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**Research Methods**

- Online Survey: UK Bridge clubs + teachers
- Ethnography of a new university Bridge club: participant observation  
<http://www.sociologyofbridge.wordpress.com>
- Life History Interviews: youth + 50-65 years
- Focus Groups – schools, universities, bridge clubs – may extend to teachers & parents

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**Sociological Theories and Concepts**

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**Why had you chosen to start playing Bridge?**

- “Keep the mind going”
- “Keep my brain active”
- “I think it will be fun and social”
- “My grandmother plays, and it would be nice to play with her, or talk to her about it”
- “My parents and many friends have played it and love it”

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**Expectations of Bridge**

- “Probably a game for old ladies”
- “The sort of game older people play”
- “Formal”
- “Complex”
- “Complicated”
- “Too mathematical”
- “Fun”
- “Meet people”

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**Being Reflexive: Dealing with the Researcher**

“At this stage, terms and turns are spoken but the definitions are lost. It does feel overwhelming. It is the third week and a breakout group has formed for new players that have missed the first couple of sessions. The room settles as a briefing and a flipchart are used to demonstrate examples. I hear the names of Bridge theorists, or a particular Bridge approach associated to an individual, and it is completely lost on me. We race through the examples, and the feeling of being lost does not improve. I appreciate that we need to understand how to communicate, we need to, in a coded format, provide information to our partners. We are trying to convey information to our partners, while two other competitors oversee and eavesdrop our intentions. It is an awkward situation, learning a language of play that is coded in discretion and deceit, and specifically directed towards the correct table-member to interpret.” (Fieldnotes, 30/10/2018)

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**Being Reflexive: Dealing with the Researcher**

“But, for the most part, we, the regulars, are impressed by our development. Slightly proud of our progress even. There are shared glances, raised eyebrows and the twitch of a smile as conventions and contracts are explained. To be honest, it is more of a grin by myself, but these reactions, or gives, all need to be put in perspective.” (Fieldnotes, 27/11/2018)

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- "A break from study and learning and teaching"
- "Making me tempted to join a local Bridge club"
- "Having something outside of work and PhD to focus on"
- "An antidote to hard study"
- "Reduces my stress levels"
- "Socialising with people from different walks of life"
- "Learning how to play will open new opportunities to join other groups in the future"

### Positive Experiences







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*"It's exciting to discover something new like this that is interesting and social, that you can develop and improve and potentially carry on playing for life."*









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- "Having the Saturday afternoons to play with a different support was of enormous additional value"
- Overall, speed of lessons, being tired at the time of lessons and trying to remember 'elementary' aspects of the game.

### Negative Experiences



*"Bridge is a game that you can play to relax and, at the same time, you could improve skills."*

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### Final Thoughts: From New Players to Future Players



- "continue playing bridge"
- "find somewhere that supports beginners or provides lessons"
- "it's worth learning and can be addictive"
- "It's a challenging game, addictive but great fun!"





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## Keep Bridge Alive

- shift image of bridge
- increase participation
- ensure future sustainability



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### Shifting the Image of the Mind Sport of Bridge






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