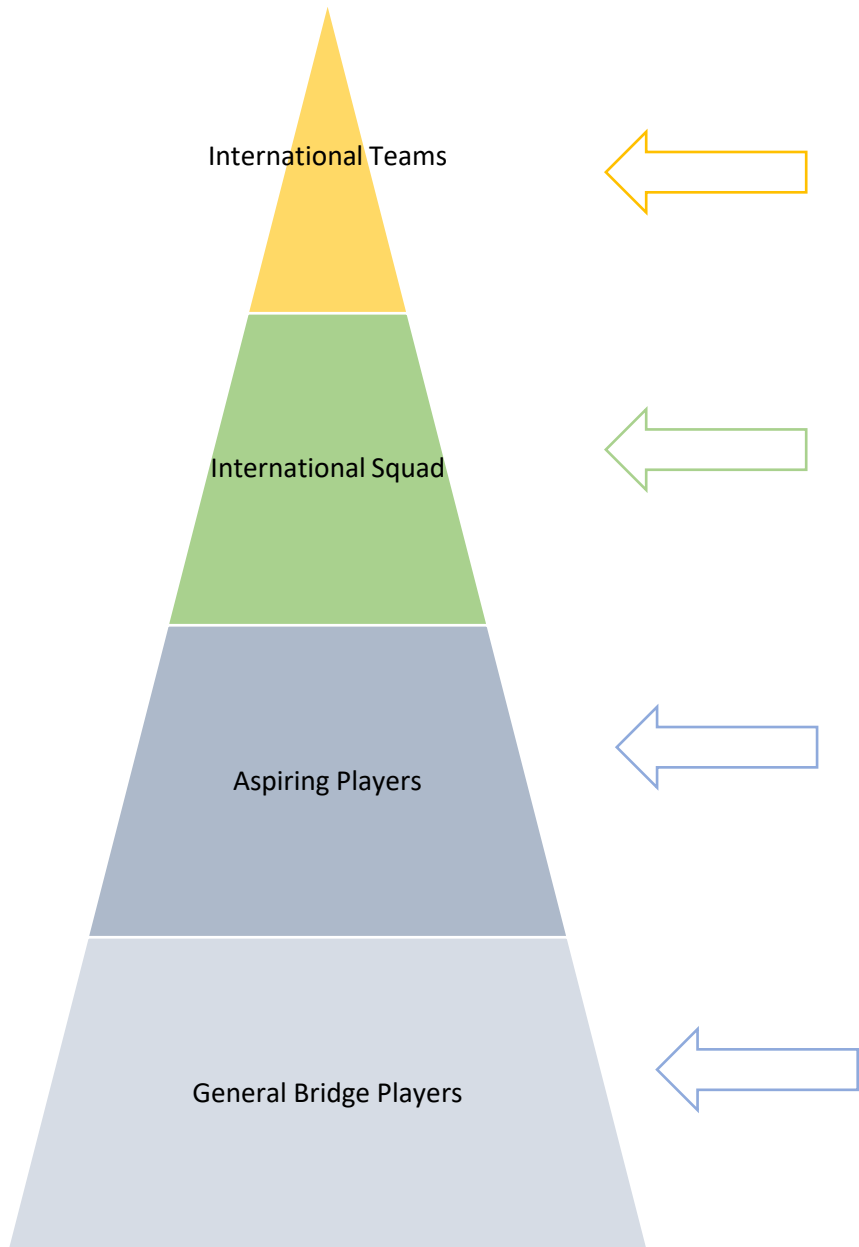


## The International Bridge Development Route: Example with Possible Risks and Issues



International Teams

Those selected from the squad by the 'International Director' (NB the squad is the only route into the team). Teams will be picked based on priorities and chances of success – e.g. may give a high potential pair a cap to gain experience for future years' benefit. A trial with squad members will inform selection.

International Squad

Those who are either deemed of international standard, or who have high potential to become so. Encompasses all categories prioritised by the NBO (Open/Women/Senior/Mixed – some NBOs focus on 1-3 of these) with teams being picked each year depending on best chances of success and prioritisation. Squad practices together regularly, with training weekends / trial events taking place. Expected to commit to certain amount of bridge and training, including NBO and international events. Top juniors can be both part of the International Squad, and the Junior Squads (separate).

Aspiring Players

People who wish to be considered for squad membership in future – make themselves known to the 'International Director'. Development supported by e.g. training resources available, possibly 'open squad weekend?'. Players in the squad encouraged to play with or help train the aspiring players to further their development. Players can play in any events (NBO and other) to build a bridge CV up for consideration for entry into the squad.

General Bridge Players

Not expected to be an active part of the International Development Route, but will include Schools and University Bridge, so need ability to link people into being aspiring players.

## FAQs: Criteria for International Committees to Consider

**How is a team selected?** The International Director picks a team, NPC and coach for events as required. Players' results over e.g. a 3 year period would be considered, but recent results, and those in squad trial events would carry more weight. The ID may decide the balance of automatic qualification vs 'wildcard' picks (similar to a Ryder Cup Captain in golf). For teams trials for long events the winning team would be consulted about the third pair. To be selected for a European event, Camrose/Lady Milne/Junior representation would have been experienced at UK-level first.

**How do you become part of the squad?** Players register interest, or are approached by the ID. Their age/level of experience and results are used to form an objective decision as to whether they should be invited to join the squad at that point in time. There are no specific trials to enter the squad – players who are interested are expected to play NBO national events, or equivalents in e.g. NABC, EBL, WBF.

**What is expected as part of the squad?** You would be expected to make a minimum commitment of time and development as a partnership. Much of the training will take place virtually to enable players to practice without unnecessary travel. The squad is also expected to occasionally play with aspiring players who are not yet squad players to support wider development. This can be in e.g. club or online bridge rather than national events. Alternatively, community contribution to the squad may be by offering training materials on specific topics.

**What about removing players from the squad?** The ID would be expected to revoke squad membership for any players who did not keep up their standards of play, or who did not meet training and development commitments and were no longer deemed 'high potential'. 1-2 warnings given first.

**Can you join the squad as an individual or multiple partnerships?** The focus is on partnerships, but our best players should be able to join regardless of partnership situation. Given the frequency of training and likelihood of full attendance, mixing of partnerships should be possible, but it may be taken into account in any selection decisions.

**How do we pick which categories to enter?** Based on the strength of pairs within the squad and the likelihood of success in an event, teams may be selected for any category. Each year certain categories will be prioritised (or a decision might be made which to focus on for 2-3 years).

**Is this fair?** As long as entry to the squad can be achieved within a one year timescale, we do not anticipate this discriminates against any top level players. The squad will operate on principles of Flexibility and Fluidity, but with a certain level of Discipline – both in terms of selection decisions, but also in terms of expected commitment from players.

## Issues for consideration

- Given that the International Director would have a lot of power, and that many situations would benefit from a benevolent leader, who ensures they remain benevolent? In due course, if there were regular internal coaches/trainers/NPCs, they could be consulted on team selection
- Squad trial events should be used with analysis and discussion afterwards so they form part of ongoing training and development. May consider all squad pairs having a mentor who could be involved in such discussions/analysis.
- Who decides the priorities of the teams ie if a pair is eligible for more than one category? To what extent would the players have some say, or would they be forced to play in the team that the ID decided on?
- The usefulness of squad training drops off at higher levels with internal trainers. It's useful for aspiring players, or partnerships new to the international squad, but to be of use to better players, the trainers would need to be top quality (e.g. Kokish, Martens, top pros) and likely external.
- It's OK to have individual players at the lower levels, but the higher levels need to have more emphasis on partnerships. There would need to be some flexibility (e.g. a player might want to attend with two partners from different categories), but having single players is of limited use other than for a short period whilst they are finding a new partner.
- The training would need to cover non-technical aspects as well, e.g. team behaviours.
- There is a danger that the system could result in team friction if pairs rather than teams are selected. Team trials from within the squad for long events could allow the winners to pick the 3<sup>rd</sup> pair (or at least have a say) - generates better team spirit (more important for a long event than for a weekend)
- There's a mention of giving a pair a cap for experience. There should be a hierarchy of events, e.g. Chairman's Cup, Camrose, European, and a pair would not normally expect to play in a high level event without having played at the level below.
- Pairs aiming for the International squad should demonstrate a willingness to gain experience, e.g. by having played outside Scotland in a decent event (e.g. Spring 4s, US nationals, European Open)
- A minimum level of commitment of time should be specified for all players otherwise this could create friction. However, there could be an a recommended level for the majority of players which is above that minimum, so the best players with good cause [families/jobs] might be allowed a slightly lighter training schedule temporarily or compensatory ways of practising with greater time flexibility. [So perhaps an expected range is given regarding commitment, and if a player is at the lower end of training requirements and it impacts results, that would be considered during selection]
- If one or two categories are not prioritised, can a team self-fund and how would they be selected?

## Risks for consideration

- There are several risks with a new approach, such as the International Director taking an approach which leads down an incorrect/unfeasible path, with a policy that does not work in the context of that NBO.
- Being wary of giving too many opportunities to younger players too soon as then it might not be appreciated nor worked for. E.g. juniors might not put in the work required if they are semi-guaranteed places in teams because of their age.
- It needs to be borne in mind that for some NBOs players may nearly all be amateurs, giving up time/money to play – encouraging motivation and sensitive approaches can be important where a small pool of players exists
- A risk that players are placed on uncompetitive teams, or teams with poor morale, when players may already be making a financial and time commitment to practice in international events as well as to play on national teams.
- There is a risk that a number of better players might not be interested in the squad, and players not involved in the squad drift away from serious bridge.
- There may be issues with players eligible for different events with different partners and how that fits with the squad.
- There may need to be a clearer distinction between sending teams and funding teams, when prioritising the budget
- Selection will need clear criteria – e.g. whether it is on potential or current success. There could be clearer guidance about when to pick the best available team, and when to pick pairs on potential.
- What is the point of the squad? Is its main role to focus on development, rather than selection or both? Having some definition of the purpose (development and selection) of the squad and how these roles are linked/separate could be helpful.
- See recommendations outlined in BAMSA ([www.bridgemindsport.org](http://www.bridgemindsport.org)) research: [Bridging Organisations](#)