



# Bridge: A MindSport For All

*Connects People, Challenges Minds*

## Training, Support and Development

### Perspectives of National Bridge Organisations (NBOs)

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## Introduction

*Bridge: A MindSport for All* (BAMSA) in partnership with the Scottish Bridge Union (SBU) has conducted research on National Bridge Organisations' (NBO) experiences of training and developing international players. The aim of this report is to present the survey findings on what works well, and the challenges and solutions faced by different countries.

A survey on junior and international training programmes was sent to all NBOs, via the World Bridge Federation. In total 28 out of 101 NBOs responded to the open-ended questions (see Table 1) including a mixture of junior squad leaders, team captains, coaches, and NBO administrators involved in the support and development of junior and international players. Some countries submitted multiple responses as various junior captains or trainers responded to the survey.

**Table 1: Size of NBOs who Participated in the Research**

Large NBOs		Medium NBOs		Small NBOs	
Country	Members	Country	Members	Country	Members
USA	120,675	Norway	7,488	Bulgaria	702
Netherlands	64,819	Japan	6,570	Croatia	593
France	56,322	Israel	6,302	Romania	471
Australia	33,722	Belgium	5,355	Latvia	316
Sweden	18,858	Poland	5,208	Czech R.	294
England	18,612	Scotland	4,991	Morocco	294
Denmark	18,612	Turkey	4,560	Slovenia	290
New Zealand	18,100	Spain	4,235	Serbia	170
		Greece	2,763	Monaco	135
		S. Africa	2,288		
		Austria	2,241		
<b>Large NBO Participants: 8</b>		<b>Medium NBO Participants: 11</b>		<b>Small NBO Participants: 9</b>	
Overall Country total (28)					
Overall Response total (42)					

For the purpose of this report, classification of 'size' of membership is as follows:

Large = membership >10,000, Medium = membership <10,000, Small = membership <1000

### Summary of different sized NBOs and number of survey responses:

Large NBOs (8): USA (3), Netherlands, France, Australia, Sweden (4), England (2), Denmark, New Zealand – total 14 responses

Medium NBOs (11): Norway, Japan, Israel, Belgium, Poland (7), Scotland (3), Turkey, Spain, Greece, South Africa, Austria – total 19 responses

Small NBOs (9): Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Morocco, Slovenia, Serbia, Monaco – total 9 responses

Total NBO survey responses per WBF zone: 22 EBL, 1 NABF, 2 SPBF, 1 APBF, 2 ABF

## Junior Scene

The following section provides examples, commentary and a summary which illustrate the key findings of the survey in relation to the junior bridge scene. The similarities, differences and insights into youth engagement across and between the large, medium and small NBOs (that responded) are discussed in more detail in the following sections. Table 2 (see below) outlines the approximate number of junior players per country reported by the NBOs.

**Table 2: Approximate number of junior players per country**

Large NBOs		Medium NBOs		Small NBOs	
Country	Juniors	Country	No.	Country	No.
USA	120-140	Norway	358	Bulgaria	50
Netherlands	160	Japan	100	Croatia	20-30
France	4000	Israel	150	Romania	40
Australia	300	Belgium	10	Latvia	50
Sweden	50-330	Poland	975	Czech R.	80
England	50-100	Scotland	20-30	Morocco	32
Denmark	150+	Turkey	200	Slovenia	40
New Zealand		Spain	20-30	Serbia	40
		Greece	137	Monaco	26
		S. Africa	10		
		Austria	12		
Overall Country total (28)					

### **Question 1: How many juniors do you have playing currently?**

#### **Large NBOs**

A large NBO is classified (for the purpose of this report) as having greater than 10,000 members (see Table 1). Larger NBOs that responded to this survey tended to have at least 50-100 (active) juniors, and as many as 4000-6000 in some instances (where numbers of children learning bridge in schools were included, see Table 2). The range of numbers given by respondents is broad, with the highest number reported by France (reduced from pre-pandemic figures):

*Before Covid we had 6000 playing bridge in school between 10 and 14 years old. Now I think it is more or less 4000. (France)*

Five of the eight large NBOs (USA, Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, and Denmark) have over 150 players. Although, many respondents note a difference between registered player numbers and 'active' players, for example:

*158 in active training; 45 temporarily out. (USA, 1b)*

*I think there are around 200 registered but only like 60 active ones. (Sweden, 5b)*

The discrepancy between registered numbers of junior players and those that are actively playing may indicate a possible disconnect between the administrative side of the NBOs and the 'on the ground' experience of trainers. It is also possible that trainers were speaking from their own perspectives and did not have a wider knowledge of current registered numbers. These issues are highlighted by the following examples, where multiple responses from the same NBO report vastly different numbers of junior players:

*Approximately 50 (Sweden, 5a)*

*I think there are around 200 registered, but only like 60 active ones. (Sweden, 5b)*

*330 junior members (Sweden, 5c)*

### **Medium NBOs**

A medium NBO is classified (for the purpose of this report) as having less than 10,000 members (see Table 1). Medium NBOs report having a broad range of junior players (10- 975). The highest number are in Poland: *975 (with active membership in PBU in 2022)* and the lowest numbers in Belgium, South Africa and Austria:

*Barely 10 affiliated. (Belgium)*

*About 10 (South Africa)*

*About twelve (losing some during the pandemic) (Austria)*

Similar to large NBOs, there are large discrepancies in the numbers stated when there are multiple responses from the same NBO, for example:

*I have around 300 juniors in my care (Poland, 13a)*

*I have 11 children in my care: 8 from my own and 3 from a different bridge club (Poland, 13b)*

*6 per each junior team (u16, u20, u26, u26 women) plus approximately 12 per each category of players trying out for the team, so altogether around 70 players (Poland, 13f)*

*975 (with active membership in PBU in 2022) (Poland, 13g)*

This suggests that accurate numbers are quite difficult to come by in terms of comparing the (official) registered numbers versus the numbers of juniors 'actively' playing, competing and being trained day to day. It also reflects different interpretations of the term 'junior' with some trainers only counting those who are training for the national teams (U16, U21, U26, U26W and in some cases U31). Other responses include the total numbers of children being taught in schools.

## Small NBOs

Small NBOs are classified (for the purpose of this report) as having fewer than 1000 members (see Table 1). Small NBOs generally identify having up to 50 junior players. Similarities (with large and medium NBOs) are observed in relation to a downward trend in the numbers of juniors post-pandemic:

*Around 50, but after Covid hit, it is going down. Apart from two junior camps for kids up to 20, juniors almost don't play anymore outside their school games. (Bulgaria)*

Some of the smaller NBOs (Slovenia and Monaco) have few current juniors but new initiatives planned or being rolled out in attempts to increase engagement at junior level, as shown in the following example:

*At the moment I am still giving lessons at one school for children 10 to 11. However, from this year onwards, the Monegasque Education Authority will start bridge lessons at the college level. Maths teachers will receive training and start this year with 14 year olds then extend the programme to all levels in the school. (Monaco)*

As with larger and medium NBOs, the downward trend in attendance for junior players post-pandemic appears to be evident, although perhaps more acutely felt by smaller NBOs who are already starting with drastically smaller numbers. The size difference in membership numbers is quite stark between some of the smaller and larger NBOs which may act as an immediate barrier in terms of recruitment opportunities and reach of smaller NBOs (to draw in new players). Smaller NBOs may also have inadequate funding in place to support growth and promotion of the sport in these areas.

## Summing Up: Numbers of juniors

Many differences are observed in relation to the number of juniors actively playing between large, medium and small NBOs. Given the difference in size of each organisation this may be expected, although there are several factors such as: available resources (financial and human); cultural and social relevance of bridge (in relation to the bridge culture of each country); the levels of engagement and support from educational and governmental organisations; and the reach of each NBO that may impact their ability to engage and keep juniors motivated to play. Some variation in responses may also relate to how the NBO has interpreted 'junior' - with some only focusing on those training for national junior teams, rather than including all those learning bridge in schools.

## **Question 2: What were the main routes into this junior group? (e.g. schools, university, family)**

Table 3 summarises the key routes described by the small, medium and large NBOs. Further examples and discussion regarding similarities and differences amongst the NBOs will be provided in the following sections.

**Table 3: The main routes into junior bridge**

Large NBOs		Medium NBOs		Small NBOs	
Country	Routes	Country	Routes	Country	Routes
USA	Word of mouth/family	Norway	Family/clubs	Bulgaria	School
Netherlands	Family	Japan	Universities	Croatia	School/Uni
France	-	Israel	School/elite projects/teams	Romania	Schools/family
Australia	Family/friends	Belgium	Family	Latvia	School
Sweden	Family/friends	Poland	School/family	Czech R.	School soon
England	Schools/family/camps	Scotland	School/clubs	Morocco	School/uni
Denmark	Schools/family	Turkey	Family	Slovenia	Events/camps
New Zealand	Family/school/local clubs	Spain	Family	Serbia	School/clubs
		Greece	Family/friends	Monaco	school
		S. Africa	Family		
		Austria	School/family		
Overall Country total (28)					

### Large NBOs

For many large NBOs, family and friends play a pivotal role in introducing young players to bridge, for example the Netherlands and Sweden state:

*Family mostly – their parents play. Most of them are starting because the parents are players. There are very few to come from outside bridge. (Netherlands)*

*There is not one clear route but family/friends are still the most common reason juniors start to play, I believe. (Sweden, 5a)*

However, a combination of family, friends and school recruitment are important for other large NBOs such as the USA, England, Denmark and New Zealand, as shown in the following examples:

*I'd say mostly through parents or grandparents who play, but there have also been some local, vibrant junior programs (Atlanta, Cincinnati, Seattle, and several others; SiVY in the bay area around San Francisco is the most stable I think and continues to thrive). I have no idea how many secondary schools include bridge, but I think it is few. (USA, 1a)*

*U16 - schools, junior camps, parents who play. We would take anyone who is interested into the junior squad, whatever the standard. Older groups will take university players - including a number of overseas players who become resident here. Have also recruited dual-nationality qualifiers from other Home Nations - although the first move hasn't always been made by us. (England, 6a)*

Overall, the cultural relevance of bridge (to a country) benefits larger NBOs in relation to recruiting juniors through cultural and social means (family, friends etc.) or via educational settings. These factors may enable a wider reach for the larger NBOs due to increased awareness of the sport amongst younger players, embeddedness of bridge in certain social situations, family environments, and educational settings.

### **Medium NBOs**

For medium NBOs, family is seen as the primary route into bridge, with nine out of the 11 countries (Norway, Belgium, Poland, Scotland, Turkey, Spain, Greece, South Africa and Austria) featuring this factor in their response. For example:

*The majority are relatives or friends with older bridge players. There are 4-5 kids who learnt to play in school. (Greece)*

However, whilst family is seen as a legitimate route of entry, the school programmes are also valued in terms of recruitment for Poland and (to a lesser degree) Japan:

*Various ways, there are a couple of junior programs in Poland, including Warsaw (a bridge class at school), Krakow (a bridge class for very young kids, a bridge camp), Poznan (a bridge class at school), Wroclaw (a bridge class as part of the curriculum, kids could attend a bridge class instead of taking gym). I was taught by my parents, there are a couple of other "bridge kids" in the scene, but most of them come from the bridge classes at schools. (Poland, 13f)*

*Currently 6 universities are offering a proper course (class) for two units which can be counted for the total units required for the graduation and over 400 students are taking course every year. However, this is not the main route for generating the youth players while almost all of them discontinue playing bridge afterwards. (Japan)*

Similar to larger NBOs, it is beneficial when younger players are introduced to bridge in a family context. However, introduction to the mindsport via a combination of cultural and educational settings appears to provide the greatest levels of engagement potential, particularly in relation to larger and medium NBOs.

### **Small NBOs**

In contrast to the responses for large and medium NBOs, only one of nine small NBOs mention the influence of family and friends as a factor in the recruitment process for junior players (Romania). This highlights a potential barrier for small NBOs (relative to larger and medium NBOs) as this stream of new recruits do not appear to be as easily available or accessible. Additionally, eight small NBOs recruit primarily through schools (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Serbia, Morocco and Monaco), with Slovenia focusing more on bridge camps and events. This difference in approach relative to larger and medium NBOs, may in part be due to the size of the country, and a lack of interest, engagement or understanding of bridge from an embedded cultural

perspective. In addition, limited financial and human resources may act as a barrier for expansion of smaller NBOs. They may struggle to find appropriate funding and put trainers and volunteers in place to run training, events and promote the sport to wider communities.

### Summing Up: Routes into junior bridge

There are several similarities regarding the routes into junior bridge amongst the large and medium NBOs. Seven out of the eight large NBOs and nine out of the 11 medium NBOs feel that introduction to the mindsport from family and friends is pivotal to the recruitment of juniors. School engagement is also seen as important by four of the eight large NBOs and four of the 11 medium NBOs. In contrast, only one of the nine small NBOs mentions these factors as an important recruitment strategy, with the focus largely on schools, bridge camps and universities as routes of entry to the sport. It should be noted that there is some general concern that as playing cards becomes less popular within families, the family route into bridge may decrease over time. If so, NBOs may become more reliant on the school route for recruiting younger players.

Table 4 summarises the responses for Questions 3, 4 and 5 in relation to the approximate number of schools (primary and secondary) and universities that teach bridge (per NBO). The following section will address these questions in turn providing examples from the survey, commentary and discussion.

**Table 4: Approximate numbers of schools and universities that teach bridge per NBO**

All NBOs	Primary schools	Secondary schools	Universities
USA	No idea	A few/no idea	20+
Netherlands	1000 children	Less than 5	Some (not specified)
France	-	-	-
Australia	0	0	1
Sweden	Very few, 2-3	There are some, 2	1
England	Very few, if any	About 20	6
Denmark	200	-	0
New Zealand	1	2	0
Norway	2, after school	2	0, 2 clubs
Japan	-	1	6
Israel	350 young players	50 students	0
Belgium	None	0	1
Poland	4 - several dozen	2-50	1-30
Scotland	3-4	1-3	1-3
Turkey	2	3	15
Spain	0	0	0
Greece	0	0	0
S. Africa	A dozen	A dozen	0
Austria	0	0	0
Bulgaria	-	2-3	1
Croatia	5	5	2
Romania	30	10	0



Latvia	2	2	1
Czech R.	2	2	-
Morocco	24	8	1
Slovenia	-	-	1
Serbia	-	2	3
Monaco	4	0	0

**Question 3: How many primary/elementary/middle schools do you have which play bridge? (in classroom time, during lunch time or after school?)**

**Large NBOs**

Six out of the eight larger NBOs (The Netherlands, France, Sweden, England, Denmark and New Zealand) have some form of primary school bridge programme either in class-time or outside/after school (see Table 3). Primary schools consist of pupils aged 7-11, but most bridge activity is with the older primary pupils aged 9-11. The Netherlands, France and Denmark mentioned having some success with classes in primary schools, with France noting strong support from educational bodies:

*We teach mini bridge in primary school and each year have around 1000 children learning mini bridge. It depends on a school teacher also being a bridge teacher and introducing bridge. Volunteers from local bridge club also go in to help with mini bridge. Schools offer music, dance, sport, and bridge is sometimes one of the choices but it depends on an active teacher who plays bridge. (Netherlands)*

*A few years, yes. The Ministry of Education is very, very interested in it. So they started to integrate it into primary school and we are still in a testing phase. It's essentially 8-9 year olds, but we started now at 6 and maximum 11. (France)*

*200, classroom time (Denmark)*

However, differing levels of success are noted in relation to primary school projects, with pre-covid levels of engagement (for primary school age children) mentioned as being higher for some. Some previously successful projects had come to an end during the pandemic, as shown in the example from England:

*Very few, if any. Pre-Covid there were a few who played and there were a few initiatives - the Stamford club in Northants had taught minibridge to over 2000, although they had then struggled to convert those to full bridge. That initiative has died - the driving force behind it retired from here position, there was a lack of momentum behind continuing and then Covid did the rest. I knew of a handful of schools in local counties (Beds and Herts) that had also looked at it and had visited one in Hitchin (Herts). That too has now stopped (to my knowledge) (England, 6a)*

Some respondents also note difficulty getting into public schools: *For one thing, it is hard in our system to get programs into public schools without a sponsor in the school you are targeting (USA,*

1a). Several respondents also did not know if there were any projects (USA, Sweden and England), did not answer the question (Sweden), or answered that there were no projects (Australia). This suggests that there may not be a 'joined-up' approach in terms of access to all necessary information to enable trainers to have a broad picture of the recruitment process. Generally, there are inconsistencies between answers from countries with multiple responses for example:

*Very few. There have been some school projects aspiring to this but so far it hasn't generated any success. (Sweden, 5a)*

*Don't know (Sweden, 5b)*

*Hard to say but more or less 0 on the schedule. 2-3 outside school time but in school (Sweden, 5c)*

This suggests the broader picture may not be fully known by all trainers. Additionally, funding from government bodies and support from educational bodies appears to be a possible barrier or enabler for success of junior programmes in primary schools and access to in-class training.

### **Medium NBOs**

Seven of 11 countries mention having some form of in-school, weekend or after school project in relation to primary school aged children. After school projects, or projects outside of class time are noted by respondents from Norway (*two both after school*), Poland (*50 additional activities after classroom time*), Scotland and South Africa. Primary school bridge projects taking place during class time (and after school) are reported by Japan, Israel, Poland and Turkey:

*Only one middle school has a bridge club for the after-school activity. (This is Japan's real top private and boys school for 6 years from 12-18.) In the past, one of the members from the middle school was selected for the U21. He is a university student now and has just started playing in the Japan League 2 (J2). (Japan)*

*We have the school programs where we have about 350 young players who learn Bridge but are not registered yet to the NBO. They usually learn during school hours. (Israel)*

*In my city (5th in terms of size in Poland), thanks to a program from the Ministry of Sports "Sports for all the Children", there are several dozen schools. The classes take place after school. I know of one school that conducts classes during classroom time (in Piechowice, which is in the Lower Silesian voivodship). (Poland, 13c)*

Four countries have no bridge projects currently in primary schools (Belgium, Spain, Greece and Austria), with some countries noting issues such as the pandemic (Greece) and lack of funding from education or government authorities (Spain):

*This period, due to the pandemic, we don't have any schools that play bridge. There is an effort to establish a bridge class in a middle school of municipality of Maroussi (suburb of Athens) and we try to approach more schools. The Municipality of Athens, 4-5 years ago, had a programme for elementary schools within which bridge (and other activities) was*

*introduced to the students after school. (Greece)*

*None, this is a great difficulty as bridge is not supported by government bodies (Spain)*

Similar to large NBOs, successful primary school projects have funding and/or support from government bodies (i.e. Poland, Denmark and France) which may enable greater access to setting up in-class activities, and a greater ability to promote events and attract engagement with students. Similar to previous questions, there are some inconsistencies seen in multiple responses from the same countries suggesting possible issues with how this information is communicated effectively to trainers.

### **Small NBOs**

Seven of the nine small NBOs note engagement with primary school aged children, although often not in a formal capacity, with there being a strong focus on 'who' the teacher is, in terms of level of engagement:

*They get recruited through schools, but more of the time, teachers get 5-10 kids from various schools and take them to the bridge club. (Bulgaria)*

*2 schools – it is all about the teacher in the school – a really tough job. (Czech Republic)*

*24, After school (Morocco)*

Whilst Croatia, Romania, Latvia and Czech Republic indicated having several primary school programmes in place, they did not elaborate on whether these programmes are run in-class or after school, making it difficult to establish whether these are supported by educational bodies or are voluntary programmes run after school. Slovenia and Serbia have not offered a response in relation to primary school engagement with bridge projects. Monaco has a singular project run in one school (10-11 children), with the intention for more programmes to be extended in the future.

Some countries experience difficulties in relation to the size of the country and a lack of resources (Monaco and Czech Republic). A number of potential issues have been identified in relation to limited resources and lack of funding/support from governmental bodies for smaller NBOs. These factors appear to be key features that are often present in successful primary school projects/initiatives run by larger and medium sized NBOs and may be an important barrier/enabler of success for smaller NBOs who inevitably have a smaller pool of resources available to them.

Many smaller NBOs have a strong focus on school recruitment versus organic recruitment (via social and cultural means i.e. family and friends). This means that wider support from school departments and governmental bodies may mitigate the reduced streams of new players relative to larger and medium-sized NBOs.

### **Summing Up: Numbers of primary schools**

There is a vast difference in relation to the number of primary school programmes run between large, medium and small NBOs. The most 'successful' programmes appear to have support from government and or educational bodies and have appropriate levels of trainers and or volunteers to run in-class and after school activities. For smaller NBOs, one of the greatest challenges appears to be a lack of available resources (financial and human), funding, and difficulty with gaining support from government bodies to enable wider reaching programmes to be consistently offered and to improve engagement with the sport.

**Question 4: How many secondary/high schools do you have which play bridge? (in classroom time, during lunch time or after school?)**

**Large NBOs**

Four of the eight larger NBOs have some form of bridge programme in secondary schools (Netherlands, England, New Zealand) or as after school activities (Sweden). These bridge programmes vary significantly in terms of size and scope, and whether they have access to in-class teaching or are run after school or at weekends. Secondary schools refer to pupils aged 12-18.

For example, the response from the Netherlands indicates that a limited number of school programmes (five) are active and are heavily dependent on the commitment of the schoolteacher. Potential issues are also highlighted in terms of card games (sometimes) being viewed negatively by schools or perceived as 'gambling':

*Fewer than five schools and again depends on an active school teacher who plays bridge. Most schools have an afternoon (sometimes Fri or Wed) where there is 1-2 hours of free time when children have to choose something developed by the school. It is called the Master Programme and for 1-3 months they can pick the option of playing bridge. Usually not during lunch time. Hans years ago played at school informally during lunch time, but cards were not allowed (seen as gambling). (Netherlands)*

This sentiment is also echoed by one of the responses from Sweden, in relation to the enthusiasm and the commitment of the school teacher driving the 'success' of these programmes:

*There are some high schools who has had bridge as an after-school curriculum, not organized by SBF but by teachers at the school who happened to be very enthusiastic about bridge. I have a few friends who were introduced to bridge this way as juniors. (Sweden, 5a)*

Additionally, one of the responses from England suggests that there used to be a higher number of school programmes than the Netherlands, but this number reduced over recent years (from three figures down to double figures). The programmes outlined by the respondent are based around school league and cup events. Significant changes and challenges for the school-based programmes are noted due to the pandemic, social distancing and a switch to 'home learning' during this period:

*Based on the School's league and School's cup and events like the Surrey Cup, it's probably only about 20. I don't know how each of these schools cover it. Again, Covid hit this as external visitors couldn't help with Bridge and the focus on home learning precluded playing much Bridge as a school activity. In my last year at school (1994), the number of schools would have been in 3 figures. There are a number of factors why this might be the case. (England, 6a)*

Three of the respondents had no idea whether there were bridge projects run in secondary schools (USA, Sweden and England), Australia noted there are no programmes and Denmark offered no response to the question. For the respondents who indicated they did not know if there were any school programmes being run, this may be due in part to the trainers not specifically working with juniors or it being outside the scope of their work (to know). Alternatively, it may indicate a lack of communication in terms of the broader set-up of the junior training programmes from the administrative side/ coordinator to the trainers in these countries.

Many larger NBOs appear to have significant programmes and engagement with in-school or after school activities. However, it is evident from responses that that these programmes are not without their challenges, particularly in light of recent events, such as the pandemic and difficulty with programmes being reliant (in many cases) on having the right people in the right places (i.e. enthusiastic teachers).

### **Medium NBOs**

Seven of the 11 medium NBOs have some form of bridge programme being run in secondary schools (Japan, Norway, Israel, Poland, Scotland, Turkey and South Africa). Norway stated they have a limited number of school programmes comprised of a mix of in-school and after school activities (two, 1 in classroom time, 1 after school).

Poland provided several responses, although many of these have quite different numbers or slightly conflicting information, with numbers of schools (offered) ranging from two school programmes to fifty. In the examples below, it is possible that each of these trainers is speaking from their own perspective (or what they have observed at events), rather than attempting to provide definitive official figures. Alternatively, it is possible that the official figures are not communicated effectively to the trainers on the ground:

*We teach in 2 high schools, after school. (Poland, 13a)*

*1, during classroom time. (Poland, 13b)*

*5 - 2 in Warsaw, 1 in Wrocław, 1 in Tarnów, 1 in Poznań. Classes take place in Poznań and in Wrocław during classroom time, others after school. (Poland, 13c)*

*40-50: Good guess I believe based on number of classified schools in national schools championships during past few years. Additional activities after classroom time. (Poland, 13g)*

Four of the 11 medium NBOs (Belgium, Spain, Greece and Austria) have no active programmes in secondary schools. However, no further elaboration was given in terms of why this is the case. This makes it difficult to establish whether this is due to lack of resources or that resources have been allocated to areas that are deemed to be more beneficial to recruiting and training juniors. After school activities are a common form of engagement at secondary school level for South Africa, Poland, Israel and Norway with online bridge classes also mentioned by Scotland:

*1-2 Lunch time activities with occasional after-school activity online bridge matches (Scotland, 14c)*

In general, medium-sized NBOs tend to use a combination of in-class, after school and online bridge activities with secondary school aged players. Whilst many medium sized NBOs appear to have active programmes (of varying size), it is notable that almost half of the NBOs reported little or no engagement with secondary schools. This may be due to limited resources, lack of support from government bodies or educational organisations, difficulty with accessing schools, or allocating time in classes, as alluded to in the responses from Question 3. Alternatively, it may be due to these NBOs allocating their limited resources to primary or university level programmes rather than secondary schools.

### **Small NBOs**

Seven of the nine small NBOs have some form of engagement at secondary school level with bridge events or programmes (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Morocco and Serbia). Monaco and Czech Republic state that expansion is planned in the future. Bulgaria note having a limited number of school programmes, driven primarily by teachers organising games outside of school - with several venues used for junior bridge players and events:

*Nowadays 2-3 and some teachers organise games outside the school. In a club for example. So there maybe 6-8 venues around the country where the game is played by young players (Bulgaria)*

Similarly, Latvia has two after school programmes. Some of the programmes are noted as being 'outside' or after school events (Bulgaria, Latvia), whilst it was unclear for other respondents due to the lack of information given in their responses. Generally, (where school programmes were present) for smaller NBOs, the numbers ranged between two and ten schools or events. Lack of resources to physically run the events or training were noted as issues by both Czech Republic and Monaco, with difficulty gaining access to schools (Serbia):

*Project ready to spread in 100 schools but need people to do that. Lacking the human who will go to the class and be physically there (Czech Republic)*

*Bridge is not a regular subject, approved by the Ministry of Education, in Serbian schooling system. But directors of the two best high schools in Serbia, Gymnasium "Jovan Jovanović Zmaj" in Novi Sad , and "Mathematics high school" in Belgrade, supporting bridge as a mind sport, and have established bridge courses. For now only two, mentioned above. (Serbia)*

It is evident that whilst small NBOs do run a limited number of secondary school programmes, (with varying degrees of success), there are many barriers to entry with regard to gaining access to secondary schools, including: support from education authorities, having adequate funding and personnel in place to offer training (at a widespread level). This may disadvantage smaller NBOs from gaining access to high numbers of in-school events, without extensive additional funding and support.

### **Summing Up: Numbers of secondary schools**

For large, medium and small NBOs, secondary school programmes appear to be a core part of their training and recruitment structure for juniors. However, there is a huge gap between the number of programmes run at secondary school level, due in part to differences in the resources available across the spectrum (large, medium and small NBOs) which may disadvantage smaller NBOs and (smaller) medium NBOs. The responses suggest that smaller NBOs often lack funding, human resources, have an over-reliance on individual teacher and trainers, and limited access to educational organisations.

### **Question 5: How many universities do you have which play bridge?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Six of the eight large NBOs indicated they have some form of university bridge programme or clubs actively run with university students, although many of these were of quite modest numbers (see Table 3). Several factors are noted as barriers or enablers to the success of university programmes. For example, the response from the USA suggested that often the university clubs experienced difficulties when critical students graduated:

*There seem to be a few dozen universities with some kind of bridge club, but they too struggle and often fail when a critical student graduates. The ACBL has a focus on Collegiate Bridge and someone there could likely give you better information about the number of schools where bridge has some presence. (USA, 1a)*

Similarly, the response from the Netherlands suggests a lack of engagement with the clubs and projects at university level, despite efforts made to re-engage students:

*We have university clubs. Not so many people from university playing there. Not in universities formally although some uni students play in their own time. So as part of a society of fraternity, where there is a student community and some play bridge, e.g. maths students. This year Sharon from the Federation made several attempts in the University of Utrecht to motivate students to join a programme of lessons, but there was not enough interest. One year 4-5 University of Utrecht students played in an international student championship and the university paid for them. (Netherlands)*

Two of eight of the large NBOs have no university programmes, although further elaboration was not given in their responses, making it difficult to draw conclusions regarding why this might be. One possible explanation may be that resources have been allocated to other streams deemed to be more appropriate for attracting new players in their countries, or that they have previously encountered barriers to gaining access to universities which in turn have led to a withdrawal from these streams of recruitment.

Whilst many large NBOs have active programmes in universities, many of these appear to be of quite modest numbers, with some larger NBOs having as many as twenty or as few as one (or zero). Additionally, several challenges were identified in terms of the fast turnover of critical students, and difficulty with maintaining engagement of students.

### **Medium NBOs**

Six of the 11 medium NBOs (Japan, Norway, Belgium, Poland, Scotland and Turkey) indicate they have some form of bridge programme or bridge social clubs operating in universities, although (similar to the larger NBOs) these were generally of quite modest numbers (see Table 3). The number of programmes ranged from zero to 40 and with varying levels of perceived 'success' indicated by respondents. Turkey (15 programmes). Poland has the largest number of university programmes, although the number of programmes varies quite significantly across the various responders:

*A dozen (Poland, 13c)*

*20 (Around that many teams take part in the university polish championships but most of them don't treat it seriously) (Poland, 13d)*

*At the Academic Championships I saw about 20-30 Universities (Poland, 13e)*

*We have a Poland universities championship which has about 30-40 teams each year (each team is from a different university). But only about 25% have training programs, with coaches and classes. (Poland, 13f)*

One of the responses from Poland also notes a decline in the number of programmes or clubs: *We teach at 1 university, but previously we conducted classes at 3 universities.* Five of the 11 medium NBOs have no active programmes or clubs at university level (Israel, Spain, Greece, South Africa and Austria). Israel suggests that difficulty with gaining access to universities has acted as a barrier to setting up university classes or getting programmes in place:

*We don't have any project in the universities. We tried a few times to get access but it was very difficult to open classes. (Israel)*

Similar to larger NBOs, the majority of medium-sized NBOs have some form of programme or club engagement at university level, although many of these appear to be limited to a few universities or involved quite modest numbers. Poland and Turkey had the most active programmes (15-40



university programmes) and appear to focus heavily in these areas for their junior recruitment and development.

### **Small NBOs**

For small NBOs, over half have some form of bridge programme in place at university level, although the numbers were quite small ranging from 1-5 universities (see Table 3). Successes were noted by Slovenia who has recently rolled out new programmes with bridge being taught as a side subject for course credit, resulting in a very good uptake and yielding promising prospects for the future.

*We managed to introduce bridge as a "side subject" at the University of Ljubljana. It is officially recognised with some credit points for the students. The courses begin next week, and we are thrilled since the interest was higher than expected - over 40 students applied. We translated training materials, published by Swedish colleagues and the course will follow them. (Slovenia)*

Two of the nine small NBOs have no active university bridge programmes or clubs at university level, although they did not elaborate on whether this was due to the allocation resources to other areas or due to a lack of engagement from universities.

### **Summing Up: Universities**

Large, medium and small NBOs appear to have several active programmes operating at university level. However, even for larger NBOs (who often benefit from having greater levels of funding and a larger pool of resources), the numbers of university programmes in place remains relatively low. There are a few exceptions to this, namely the USA, Poland, and Turkey, who have slightly higher numbers of engagement with university projects, although numbers vary significantly for Poland.

All NBOs regardless of size appear to struggle to engage universities with bridge programmes, with only a limited number of university programmes being run and maintained (relative to programmes run with younger age groups in schools). This may be due to difficulties with engaging students of this age group or because of barriers to gaining access through official channels that would both enable programmes to be put in place and allow NBOs to have the adequate resources to maintain them. Similar to teaching bridge in schools, teaching in universities tends to rely on a committed insider who can set up and run a bridge club. The regular turnover of students means that teaching the game needs to be a core part of a university bridge club and can be difficult to sustain.

### **Question 6: How are your potential junior players identified and recruited?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Three of the eight large NBOs rely on 'word of mouth' to identify and recruit junior players. For large NBOs, with wide-reaching communities, this appeared to be a common approach. The response from the USA states that players can apply via an online application which is found by 'word of mouth':

*Juniors can find the USBF training program from our website, where there is an application one can complete. I'm not sure how they find the website, but I think word of mouth from other juniors is important. (USA, 1a)*

The Netherlands indicated that players are spotted and identified by coaches by 'word of mouth' before being 'tested' in training sessions and developed:

*Usually the Federation hears about potential juniors via word of mouth – e.g. a parent tells them that their child is going to be great at bridge or someone points out a talented young player and asks for them to join the training programme. The criteria for recognising 'talented' players is vague but it is not difficult to spot. During training sessions, the trainers set some tests: for example, a hand with several lines of play. They can see when a player takes a good line, or when the young player suggests a different line from the one suggested. Or they ask questions that are above the usual level of questions. Talent can also be linked to hard work and dedication – a pair can work hard, practice and raise their game. (Netherlands)*

New Zealand states players are commonly spotted by teachers and trainers and that national bodies track active players to identify 'up and coming' new players so they can be developed further through official channels:

*School teachers and club advise national body of new players, national body track active players in database. (New Zealand)*

Three of the eight large NBOs use public events, camps or advertisements (exhibition or 'show games' in malls, streets etc.) to recruit and identify potential juniors:

*Junior bridge is for example arranged every Friday afternoon at one of the big clubs in Stockholm. People can just bring friends and come there to learn without prior knowledge. Sadly, this doesn't work in smaller cities where there isn't enough volunteers/money to make it work. (Sweden, 5a)*

One of the responses from Sweden reports proactive advertisement, via 'show games' in malls, streets and public places, is used to increase engagement and recruit new players:

*We advertise and most often set up "show" games, in malls, streets, squares etc to instruct and let them try play a little to kick of the interest. (Sweden, 5c)*

Denmark and England focus mainly on junior camps and *Junior Teach-in weekends*. Australia indicates the use of state youth coordinators is commonplace for recruitment, whereby experienced players find and work with junior players in an official (part-time) capacity:

*Through State Youth Coordinators - State Youth coordinators are appointed by the state or territory body (the ABF is a federation of 8 state-level organisations, and clubs belong to these organisations rather than directly to the ABF). They tend to either be experienced players who have recently left the junior ranks or someone who has been involved in teaching juniors over a period of time. Youth and junior are informally used interchangeably, generally to mean U26 but may include U31 depending on the context. Our competition categories follow the WBF gradations, and Junior will mean U26 and Youth will mean U21 in that context. But at other times we can be slack on terminology. We do not use the NZ meaning for “junior”, which is a new player of any age. I believe the National Youth Coordinator role is a part-time position with modest remuneration. All other positions are typically volunteer, although most states and territories will have a budget for youth bridge that can be used to reimburse expenses. Some players may pay mentors and coaches in a separate private arrangement. (Australia)*

It is evident that large NBOs use a number of different strategies in order to identify and recruit junior players. These include formal strategies involving coordinators, advertisement, staging of events and regular training camps. Organic methods via ‘word of mouth’ are also used to identify promising young players who are rising through the ranks, performing well in events, or have shown potential.

### **Medium NBOs**

Five of the 11 medium NBOs (Norway, Israel, Poland, Scotland and Greece) indicate juniors are identified and recruited via schools, including recruitment by teachers, or via bridge clubs, as shown in the following examples:

*1) Through schools. Bridge fits the curriculum, and short introduction courses during school time is our main area for recruiting new juniors.*

*2) Family (Norway)*

*We use our School Project to recruit new players. We teach the Bridge teachers how to identify potential players and how to recruit them to continue in a more professional framework. (Israel)*

Primary schools, secondary schools and universities are key points of recruitment for the Polish NBO where students can register for classes:

*At the primary and secondary school level, or by people from the older age groups. At the university level through the registration system for classes (at our university, bridge is a full-fledged university subject and additionally includes PE classes). (Poland, 13a)*

For the Japanese and Greek NBOs, bridge clubs appear to be the main point of contact for new recruits:

*Japan Contract Bridge League (JCBL) has offered the special Youth Programme every year. We’ve just closed an application for the next year. In 2022, we have 74 players who are joining this programme. We offer a regular practice session on Mondays and Wednesdays*

*at the bridge club in Tokyo. By this, even students who don't have bridge club in their universities can practice and find a partner. (Japan)*

*They attend lessons in bridge clubs either for adults either for U16 if there is an available group in a city or a bridge club. (Greece)*

Belgium and Austria rely more on 'word of mouth', with Belgium stating that good players come to the attention of officials quickly due to the small size of the country. Austria relies on introductions from friends and family of current players due to a lack of access to school programmes:

*Belgium is small. When a junior appears somewhere, our Commission knows it rather quickly. (Belgium)*

*During the last years we had no access to schools anymore because the bridge playing teachers all retired. Without the efforts of a bridge playing teacher schools refuse to organize courses. So now our only chance are young players whose friends or parents play bridge. (Austria)*

Spain and Turkey rely more on identification of players via teachers and through junior tournaments and selection trials. Like larger NBOs, a combination of strategies is often used by medium-sized NBOs including: engagement with schools and universities, events and tournaments, and 'word of mouth' in order to identify and recruit junior players. Although, as shown in the example from Austria, some of the routes may be susceptible to failure if there is an over-reliance on individual teachers, or trainers where they cease to be active in the bridge communities or are unable to continue providing support. Therefore, a joined-up approach, involving multiple streams of recruitment, is potentially preferable for sustained, long-term strategies for identification and recruitment of juniors.

### **Small NBOs**

Five of the nine small NBOs (Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Serbia, Monaco) depend on school programmes or activities to recruit and identify juniors, as shown in the following examples:

*Go to maths schools and invite kids to join bridge lesson. A few come from bridge families. (Bulgaria)*

*Schools, youth camp (Romania)*

*Entertainment in schools, after school activities, FB (Latvia)*

Additionally, Serbia and Morocco have seen some success, recruiting talented mathematicians and engineering students as junior players with the support of school officials:

*We choose them from the groups of best mathematicians the two schools above have to offer. This is supervised by the principal who himself had a say in picking the children from different classes. Then we hold a presentation for the students and all of them who took interest in our club join later on to attend bridge courses. This is how we made World*

*Champions in Pair play and the team who placed third in the Competition of Universities 2016. All the mentioned participants were pupils from the Gymnasium Jovan Jovanović Zmaj from Novi Sad. (Serbia)*

*Contact with the directors of engineering schools (Morocco)*

Slovenia similarly has had successes, identifying players and recruiting through university programmes (as mentioned above). Similar to larger and medium-sized NBOs, small NBOs use many of the same strategies in terms of engaging with school programmes, universities and events in order to identify potential juniors. However, these projects may be run on a smaller scale, and as shown in the example from Serbia, may be reliant on one or two individuals as gate keepers. This could lead to potential issues for longer-term success, if key people should leave their roles or new teachers are brought in that are not as passionate about identifying and training juniors.

### **Summing Up: Junior recruitment**

Large, medium and smaller NBOs broadly use many of the same strategies for identifying and recruiting junior players. However, larger and medium NBOs seem to have more flexibility, using a mix and match approach, including an ability to utilise organic 'word of mouth' strategies due to their larger network of players. Smaller NBOs may be more susceptible to failures in areas where projects have become over-reliant on one or two individuals as gatekeepers to recruitment avenues (i.e., schools and universities). The responses suggest that, when possible, a varied combination of methods may be preferable in terms of diversifying recruitment opportunities and points of entry for juniors for all levels of NBO.

### **Question 7: What does your junior set-up look like? (e.g. co-ordinators/NPCs/Coaches)**

#### **Large NBOs**

All the larger NBOs appear to have organised structures in terms of the junior set-up, with many having coordinators, coaches and mentors (USA, Australia, Sweden, England, Denmark, New Zealand) with the Netherlands focusing on a funded training programme. One of the USA responses outlined their set-up involving a coordinator, a committee, a number of mentors and expert players available as resources for both individual and partnership training and development:

*1 coordinator (me), 5 on USBF junior committee, 33 active mentors, 13 inactive mentors, dozens of expert players/partnership coaches. (USA, 1b)*

Australia appears to have a similar structure to the USA with coordinators, and support for juniors to develop.

*National Youth Coordinator, State Youth Coordinators (all except NT) Mentors/Coaches for international players Friends of Youth Bridge foundation which supports Juniors by funding activities. (Australia)*

Sweden offers an extensive mentorship programme and has a junior committee to match junior players with appropriate partners. There is also an application process for mentorship as a pair:

*There is a national mentor program to which juniors of all level and experience can apply for a mentor. The junior committee then try to find a suitable person, and when that is done it connects the two. After that, the mentor is in charge of the process. There is also a possibility to apply for a mentorship as a pair. (Sweden, 5b)*

England has a system that involves squad leaders who manage players' development, including training and budgeting. Expert players are also part of the system, and online coaching has recently been implemented:

*Squad leaders for each group (U16/U21/U26/U26W). Leaders are responsible for managing players (incl. player contracts), organising training, dealing with any budget. They usually do most of the coaching and often NPC - would get first refusal, else other NPC would be chosen by Selection Committee. It is quite regular to get guest expert players in to coach on training days. Most squads would have 4-6 training weekends pre-Covid per year. Remains to be seen how this will change with more online coaching happening. (England, 6a)*

Although slightly different approaches are taken by some larger NBOs, in terms of set-up (as demonstrated in the examples provided above), generally it is evident that coaches, mentors and training are core features of all the larger NBOs, with a mix of funded and un-funded programmes in evidence, dependent on resources available.

### **Medium NBOs**

Six of the 11 medium NBOs (Austria, Greece, Turkey, Scotland, Poland and Israel) have structures involving coordinators who assign resources and connect the junior scene to the broader network. This structure largely involved captains, coaches, training and mentoring. The example from Austria describes difficulties experienced with trying to find a replacement for their coordinator, and the support available to junior players:

*During the last ten years we had five different junior bridge coordinators on our board – young players who did the job max. for two years (moving to another country, becoming father etc.). Currently we are trying to find a new person for the job – without success yet. The sports captain and I – supported by a young player – try to support at least the young players we still have. There are two top players (my bridge partner and) who organize trainings, discuss the system with them, are always ready to answer their questions and so on) (Austria)*

The Greek response outlines how the structure of their NBO includes a youth coordinator, and coaches for teams and pairs, similar to Poland:

*This period I act as co-ordinator of Youth Program and as coach for U21 & U16. It is possible to have additional coaches for teams which participate to Major Events (e.g. European Championships) (Greece)*

*1 - coordinator, a few cooperating coaches, older players who come to the classes to the younger groups to help. (Poland, 13a)*

The response from Scotland outlines the role of the coordinator (who does not communicate with the school projects) in organising both coaching and NPCs, as needed:

*There is a Junior Coordinator who runs everything. As far as I can tell, this is largely disconnected from the Education team who are trying to run bridge classes in junior schools. The coordinator brings in coaches and NPCs as required. Often, with under-18s, their schoolteacher is heavily involved. (Scotland, 14c)*

Involvement of school teachers and school projects have been identified as part of the juniors' structure by three of the 11 countries (Poland, Scotland and Israel): *Bridge teachers for kids -> Youth coordinator -> Coaches that train in special Elite projects -> Coaches that train the teams.* (Israel). Some responses expressed that not enough was being done in terms of structure and support:

*Completely lacking, sometimes someone will come over once in a while from a bigger nearby city and will help with teaching (other than me), 3-4 years ago I had a player who had online and correspondence training with a renowned Polish coach. (Poland, 13b)*

Many of the medium-sized NBOs have an organised structure involving coordinators, mentors, and coaches. However, some countries expressed dissatisfaction with their current set-ups. In some instances, the geographical location of the player (in terms of the city they live in) may be a factor in whether they get support which is contingent on resources available (as shown in the example from Poland, 13b).

### **Small NBOs**

Three of the nine small NBOs (Romania, Latvia, and Serbia) have organised structures for their junior set-ups, involving coordinators, instructors and coaches:

*Co-ordinators, instructors, coach (Romania)*

*We have division in the board for junior bridge (Latvia)*

The response from Serbia outlines a structure that incorporates top players as coaches and professors as coordinators (in the school programmes) for the juniors. Whereas Morocco describes recently implementing a junior programme:

*The juniors are taken care of by the board of BSS and their commission for the junior bridge. The places of coaches are usually filled by our top players and as for the co-ordinators they are professors of the high schools and universities named above. (Serbia)*

*Our first project to build a junior team started in 2022 (Morocco)*

Bulgaria noted having issues with keeping a structure in place, meaning the young players had to find their own coach and pay for half fee out of own expenses:

*Used to have them all, but it went south big time. At the last Europeans, the kids assembled the teams themselves, then invited a coach and then paid half of their expenses. Absolute shame. (Bulgaria)*

Structures do not appear to be as well defined in smaller NBOs as in larger and medium sized NBOs. This is possibly due to lack of resources and limited reach. It is also notable that there was limited mention of the role of the NPC, suggesting this may not be a role that is often seen in smaller NBO set-ups.

### **Summing Up: Junior set-up**

It is evident that larger and medium NBOs have broadly similar setups in terms of their organisation, including key aspects such as: coordinators, coaches, mentors and training programmes, with some relying to a greater or lesser degree on certain aspects, depending on available resources. However, a lack of resources for smaller NBOs means that often there are not adequate funds to keep coordinators in post, nor to provide coaches and NPCs, as required.

#### **Junior Scene: Key Points**

- The number of juniors playing within large, medium, and small NBOs vary widely, with many survey respondents unsure of the exact figures
- Factors affecting an NBO's reach include: available resources (financial and human); cultural and social relevance of bridge (in relation to the bridge culture of each country); the levels of engagement and support from educational and governmental organisations; and the ability to engage and motivate juniors.
- For large and medium-sized NBOs family and friends are an important recruitment avenue for juniors alongside school engagement, bridge camps and universities.
- Primary school programmes vary significantly in terms of size, scope and access to resources. The most 'successful' programmes have support from government and/or educational bodies with appropriate levels of trainers and/or volunteers to run in-class and after-school activities.
- For smaller NBOs, one of the greatest challenges is a lack of available resources (financial and human), funding, and difficulty with gaining support from government bodies to enable wider reaching programmes to be consistently offered and to improve engagement with the mindsport.



- Secondary school and some university programmes are a core part of NBO training and recruitment for juniors. However, there is a large gap between the number of programmes between large, medium and smaller NBOs, due to resources available.
- All NBOs struggle to engage universities with bridge programmes. Similar to teaching bridge in schools, teaching in universities tends to rely on a committed insider who can set up and run a bridge club. The regular turnover of students means that teaching the game needs to be a core part of a university bridge club and can be difficult to sustain.
- Similar strategies are used for identifying and recruiting junior players by large, medium and small NBOs. However, larger and medium NBOs have more flexibility using 'word of mouth' approaches due to their larger network of players.
- Smaller NBOs may become over-reliant on one or two individuals as gatekeepers to recruitment avenues (i.e. schools and universities). A varied combination of approaches is preferable in terms of diversifying recruitment opportunities.
- Larger and medium NBOs have similar setups in terms of organisation: coordinators, coaches, mentors and training programmes. Smaller NBOs with fewer resources are not always able to keep coordinators in post, nor provide all coaches and NPCs as required.

## International Scene

This section provides a summary of responses and examples to illustrate the key findings of the survey in relation to NBOs' experiences of the international scene. The similarities differences and insights between the large, medium and small NBOs are discussed.

### **Question 8: How many of your juniors or ex juniors have made the step up to Open / Women category events? (approx. in the last 10 years)**

#### **Large NBOs**

Seven of the eight large NBOs have experienced levels of success with juniors transitioning to the open and women's category events in the last ten years. One of the responses from the USA states that most players under 45 years have transitioned from the junior categories. This suggests that the junior pathway functions well for transitioning players up the ranks into the higher categories:

*Firm numbers are tough. The USBF has had some sort of junior program for decades, one that is more formalized in some years than in others. Only for the past 8 years or so have we had a somewhat vibrant program. Many of our current international players, probably the majority of those under 45, had some experience in junior bridge. For example, all (I think?) the current Spector team were active in junior international bridge a couple of decades ago. (USA, 1a)*

Similarly, the response from the Netherlands signals that many players have made the transition: *Many but not immediately – takes around 6 years to transition from junior to open level.* Sweden also has high numbers transitioning from their junior programmes, with a mixture of both male and female players making the step-up to higher categories:

*A very large group percentage wise. Among female juniors in the last 10 years, it's about 6-8 individuals who have since played in the women's and/or mixed open category. Among the male juniors under the same period 5-6 individuals have played on the open or mixed national teams. (Sweden, 5a)*

*I can't count them all there are a LOT. 4x Rimstedt, Larsson, Övelius, Clementson, Hult, Stokka, and the list will go on. Then we can look at those who are about 50 like Fredin, who also started as a junior. Let's say about 20 if we count open and women in the recent years. (Sweden, 5c)*

In contrast, one of the responses from England states that only three players have transitioned in the last ten years and that the step-up from Under 26 to women's bridge is objectively easier relative to other categories:

*Talking World/Euro selection only (not home internationals, for which selection can be earned through Premier League results or a Women's trial with lots of irregular pairings) In last 10 years, only three current juniors have made step to Open/Women's - Norton/Wieczorek/Wiseman. Other juniors from previous eras to have debuted in last 10 years - Bell (M), Bell (S), Byrne, Handley-Pritchard, Green who were juniors in 2000s onwards. And from further back (80s/90s juniors) - Hinden, Jagger, Osborn. About 10/11!*

*There are others who have also played in the Mixed category recently. Step from U26 to Women's is smaller than the jump to Open (this is not a comment on Women's bridge, which has been addressed elsewhere!). (England, 6a)*

Different levels of success are reported by the large NBOs for players transitioning from the junior categories to higher categories. Generally, the majority of large NBOs report high levels of players transitioning and stepping up to the open and women's categories. This suggests that training strategies with juniors on the whole appear to be functioning well in these contexts.

### **Medium NBOs**

Ten out of 11 medium NBOs have seen positive results from juniors transitioning to the open and women's categories in the past decade. Japan notes success with the male category, although limited numbers of players transitioning to the women's category: *We have seen almost no girl players in the weekend proper games.* The highest numbers are reported by Poland (100-200) and Israel (50 -70):

*Depends on the team, more juniors have made it to the open teams than the women's teams. However, the current Poland Women's team has 4 out of 6 players that are former junior girl players. (Poland, 13f)*

### **Small NBOs**

Almost half (five out of nine) of the small NBOs have levels of success transitioning juniors to the open/women's categories.

The response from Bulgaria suggests that their NBO has experienced greater success in the past with up to 20% transitioning, however numbers have stalled recently. Serbia also have current success with juniors transitioning to the mixed and women's categories:

*This year, at the official 55th European Championship, the women's junior pair placed 5th and the junior mixed pair also competed in the Serbian mixed team at the same competition. (Serbia)*

Small NBOs seem to have good levels of recruitment from junior players into higher categories. Although there is evidence that for some NBOs there has been a decline in recent years of players transitioning. There are a number of factors that may have impacted recruitment from junior programmes into the higher categories, including the pandemic which undoubtedly interrupted training, and live events which could have hindered players being able to actively engage with new teams, training and development of partnerships.

### **Summing Up: Numbers of junior to top level players**

Large, medium and small NBOs are relatively consistent in reporting strong levels of players transitioning from junior programmes to higher categories. Although levels of decline in the numbers of players transitioning are noted by some NBOs relative to previous successes. For some

NBOs there is a perception that it is easier to transition from the U26W to the women's category but it is unclear how common this might be. It could be related to the lower numbers of female juniors and international women players, perhaps resulting in it being easier to get into the women's team compared with the higher numbers of male juniors competing for a place in the open team.

Issues such as the pandemic may have a bearing on the decline in numbers of players transitioning from junior to open/women categories as noted by some NBOs. Other factors must also be considered in relation to the structure of training programmes, ease of access to the higher categories and levels of engagement with players attempting to graduate from junior level to higher categories.

**Question 9: How are your international players identified/trained/selected? (see separate questions on training juniors below)**

**Large NBOs**

Many large NBOs mention trials and performance in events as routes to selection for international players. The USA indicates that their process for selection and training for international players involves training, trials, team selection and heavy involvement with an NPC once allocated to teams. England notes that open trials have been more successful in recent years, and summarise some challenges experienced:

*Selection methods have varied - pairs/teams trial formats (incl. preselection in some cases). Notable that open pairs trials have yielded more new players. There is no formal Open/Women's squad. I don't know how Open players manage/arrange their own training - presumably by personal preference. I don't know if or think that any Open players are formally coached. Identified - other pros ask to have them play on their teams - not by Selection Committee action. (England 6a)*

*Trials and national competitions. (England 6b)*

Similarly, the response from Australia outlines trials as playing a vital role in selection processes alongside a selection panel of players. Whereas the USA indicates that internationalists are generally professional players:

*National Youth Week held in January, there is a pairs qualifying event to select U26 team. Girls/U21/U16 are selected by a panel of qualified players. Once selected, pairs are allocated a mentor to help with training and practice. (Australia)*

*I'd guess the majority – perhaps the vast majority – of players who represent the US in international competition are (or sometimes are) professional players. It is a rare US top team that doesn't include a sponsor, and many of the top players make their living through bridge. (USA, 1a)*

In contrast, other NBOs favour invitation-only selection processes involving the Captain and an international committee:

*The teams are selected by the captain with some support from coaches and sometimes the SBF. We do not have trials but we normally have training camps and competitions where the players are observed. (Sweden, 5a)*

*Pairs are invited to join, we have selection committees. (Denmark)*

For larger NBOs several key processes are described in terms of identifying, training and selecting international players. Player trials by invitation, open trials and selection committees are relatively commonplace for some NBOs. Training and coaching are offered to varying degrees by NBOs dependent on resources, and the level of the player. For example, in the USA many international players are professionals and may not require the same level of training. Whereas for the Netherlands many of the players have stepped up from the junior level to higher categories and may require further development, coaching and mentoring. As such, the make-up of the NBO has a strong bearing on the type of recruitment, selection and training strategies used by large NBOs. There are many differences observed in the responses that suggest the importance of context and that a one-size fits all approach is not possible.

### **Medium NBOs**

For medium NBOs trials are commonly mentioned as a route to entry for international players, featuring in the answers of eight out of the 11 NBOs (Japan, Israel, Poland, Scotland, Turkey, Spain, Greece and South Africa):

*To become a team player, they need to play in national championships and make good achievements. They need to participate in the trials competitions, International experience, is important so if they played in open youth championship for example, this is an advantage. (Israel)*

*Through an event-specific tournament, before or after classes are held and a professional teacher takes care of it. (Spain)*

Various levels of training, coaching and mentoring opportunities (in a limited capacity) are also reported to be used as strategies by Poland and Norway (dependent on levels of resources):

*Those who get into the national team play in international competitions as the Polish national team. If we send the club team, I choose the team myself. Due to financial reasons, we usually do not send players to international tournaments. They must qualify for the Polish national team so that their trip will be financed by the Polish Association or be good enough that they will almost certainly bring a World Cup or European Championship medal, then we will subsidize their trip from the club. (Poland, 13a)*

Norway notes that players are often expected to train themselves:

*The teams (open, women's, juniors) are selected by the captain. Mixed + seniors: trials. The players train themselves. (Norway)*

For medium NBOs many of the same training and selection processes are in place relative to larger NBOs. However, financial restraints appear to be more significant in some cases leading to a reduced level of commitment for NBOs to offer training.

### **Small NBOs**

Generally, for small NBOs very limited support appears to be offered in terms of player development due to financial constraints and limited resources. Some countries run trials and have selection processes as shown in the responses of Croatia, Romania, Latvia and Serbia:

*We have qualifications (teams or pairs, depending on year) for all selections. Selection mainly train on their own, except of junior selection and juniors in general who have coaches. (Croatia)*

*They train by themselves, usually pair selection. (Latvia)*

*They are selected from the groups of registered bridge players, by holding a filter competition before every big event. The members who are the best are selected to be on the team. It is done the same for the junior and the open teams. (Serbia)*

It is evident that smaller NBOs face acute challenges in terms of prioritising limited resources. The responses from smaller NBOs indicate that largely it is viewed as the responsibility of the player to develop their own skills. Trials and selection processes take place, however minimal wider support appears to be available in many smaller NBOs.

### **Summing Up: Identifying international players**

Large, medium and small NBOs appear to favour trials, selection committees and selection events in terms of identifying international players for team selection (particularly players that have not come up through the 'junior scene'). Responses suggest that medium and small NBOs struggle to allocate adequate resources to the individual training element associated with developing international players. Whilst some training opportunities are offered within team environments in larger and medium sized NBOs these opportunities are scarcer in smaller NBOs. Training and support is then more likely to be offered on an irregular basis. As a result, it is often seen as the players' responsibility (outside of a team environment) to train themselves, which can lead to frustration for both the players and the NBOs.

### **Question 10: What proportion of your international players are professional bridge players?**

Table 5 summarises the approximate proportion of international players that are professional bridge players for small, medium and large NBOs.

**Table 5: Approximate number of international players who are professional bridge players**

Large NBOs		Medium NBOs		Small NBOs	
Country	Professionals	Country	No.	Country	No.
USA	Vast majority	Norway	3	Bulgaria	50% in past almost 0 now
Netherlands	Many (most of the open team)	Japan	Approx 10	Croatia	0
France	-	Israel	Very few	Romania	Maybe 50%
Australia	About 10	Belgium	0	Latvia	1
Sweden	50-75% of internationalists	Poland	70% of intls, 2-4 juniors	Czech R.	-
England	Very high	Scotland	0	Morocco	3
Denmark	Very few (max 5)	Turkey	Vast majority	Slovenia	-
New Zealand	-	Spain	-	Serbia	-
		Greece	0-5%	Monaco	-
		S. Africa	-		
		Austria	2-3		
Overall Country total (28)					

### Large NBOs

Five of the eight NBOs indicate that there are high numbers of professional bridge players playing at international level (See Table 5):

*Most at the very top. Out of the six Open Squad pairs, five are full-time pros. The other pair – one is still studying at uni, the other works 3 days a week to fund his bridge and they are aspiring to be full-time bridge pros. However, for the women this is not the case – much harder for them to make a living from bridge. Most women need to earn a living that is not bridge. (Netherlands)*

*More than 50%, roughly 50-75% play exclusively professional bridge. (Sweden, 5a)*

*Very high - in the Open. Often the entire side will be professional. (England, 6a)*

The response from Sweden suggests that many players identified as ‘professional’ could be viewed as ‘part-time’ professionals. Whereas a response from England indicates that numbers of professional players are lower in the women’s category:

*I think 5 or 6 of them. Then there are another group who has civil jobs and combine it by maybe working 50%. That group is almost as big (Sweden, 5c)*

*Women's less so but still a few. This may be evolving as some of the veteran Ladies pros may be coming to a point where they are retiring from major events. (England, 6a)*

Denmark, in contrast notes that there are very few professionals, although they do not elaborate on why this may be the case. For large NBOs a significant proportion of international players are

professional bridge players, except for Denmark. However, there are some discrepancies in terms of the numbers of professional players in relation to multiple responses offered by the same NBOs. One explanation for these discrepancies may be regarding how trainers interpreted the definition of a 'professional' player. For some, part-time professionals may count, whereas others may consider a player as a professional only if it is their primary source of income.

### **Medium NBOs**

Six of the 11 medium NBOs (Norway, Israel, Japan, Poland, Turkey and Greece) have professional players playing at international level (see Table 5), although the numbers are low and very few professionals are playing in the women's and junior categories: *3/6 open team, 0/6 women's team, 0/6 mixed team, 0 juniors* (Norway). In contrast, Turkey has high numbers of professional players at international level (*the vast majority*). Belgium and Scotland have no professional players in their country.

There is a broad mix within medium NBOs of the extent to which their national teams involve professional players, ranging from those that have a significant amount to those with no professional players. It is possible that NBOs with higher levels of professional players may possess an advantage in terms of having easier access to coaches, trainers, and mentors. In addition, professionalisation of bridge may provide a pathway to allow more time for intense training and an incentive for new or prospective players who wish to build a professional career in bridge.

### **Small NBOs**

Only four of the nine small NBOs report having any professional bridge players playing at international level (Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia and Morocco - see Table 5). It is evident that (with the exception of Romania), smaller NBOs do not have a significant number of professional players at international level. It is possible that limited resources have acted as a barrier for players in terms of provision of adequate support or training to develop international players to the highest levels of the game. Alternatively, it is possible that smaller NBOs struggle to hold on to the top players that turn professional. Aspiring pros may decide to move to countries where there are established paths for turning professional and more opportunities for being paid to play in tournaments. There are also some instances where players have moved early in their playing careers to countries where there are more resources available to provide training, coaches and development with top players.

### **Summing Up: Professionalisation**

Overall, the responses suggest that large and medium sized NBOs have significantly more professional bridge players playing at international level. Smaller NBOs have very limited numbers of professional players, which may act as a barrier in terms of having enough top-level players with international experience who can contribute to the development or training of players from junior to elite level. Additionally, a lack of a professional pathway in smaller NBOs may lead to some of



the best players leaving to seek paid opportunities to play which may result in them representing a different country (on the grounds of residency). Many amateur players may struggle to undergo an intensive training regime and playing schedule if they have a non-bridge full-time job. A lack of professional opportunities to develop a professional bridge career may act as a disincentive for some players.

### **International Scene: Key Points**

- Junior programmes are the greatest source of recruitment avenues for international players across all NBOs with some recent decline, largely due to the pandemic.
- A number of differences between the uptake of the open, women and mixed categories is evident, partly due to different investment in the categories, types of training offered and levels of youth engagement.
- Large, medium and small NBOs regularly use trials, selection committees and selection events to identify players for their national teams.
- Opportunities for individual and partnership training are limited for developing international players. More possibilities are available in larger and medium-sized NBOs, which can lead to frustration for the smaller NBOs and their players.
- Large and medium-sized NBOs have significantly more professional bridge players. For smaller NBOs the very limited numbers of professional players may act as a barrier in terms of having enough top-level players with international experience who can contribute to the development of junior players.
- There can be a player drain in some smaller NBOs where better players leave to seek paid opportunities elsewhere. Many amateur players may struggle to undergo an intensive training regime and playing schedule if they have a non-bridge full-time job.

## Building a Pipeline of Players

This section provides a summary, commentary and examples to illustrate the key findings of the survey in relation to how NBOs Build a Pipeline of Players. The similarities, differences and insights between the large, medium and small NBOs are discussed in more detail followed by a brief discussion.

### **Question 11: How do you support junior players who have potential?**

#### **Large NBOs**

For large NBOs, mentoring is seen as an important form of support for junior players deemed to have potential (New Zealand, Sweden and Australia):

*Encourage them to play a lot. Informal coaching and mentoring. (New Zealand)*

*There is a national mentor program to which juniors of all level and experience can apply for a mentor. The junior committee then try to find a suitable person, and when that is done it connects the two. After that, the mentor is in charge of the process. There is also a possibility to apply for a mentorship as a pair. (Sweden, 5b)*

*Giving them good mentors! (Sweden, 5c)*

*State Youth Coordinators will help and encourage them to establish a partnership and help them to find an experienced player to mentor them. (Australia)*

Training camps and training sessions are mentioned as important forms of support offered by four of the eight NBOs (USA, Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark):

*Get them into training. Let them develop with their partners. (USA, 1b)*

*This is the job of the captains of the junior teams to spot mainly. Most juniors will first be "discovered" at a junior camp or at a festival when getting the opportunity to play with better players/juniors. There is no clear system for discovering them, but you rely on good players to pass the word forward to the coaches and captains of the junior teams. (Sweden, 5a)*

*We have 5-8 training sessions a year. We invite them to stronger teams. We try to pair them with stronger players (Denmark)*

Limited financial support to cover expenses is raised as an issue by the USA who rely on privately raised funds in addition to the ACBL paying for travel expenses to junior championships. The Netherlands use some of their funding from TopSports to pay trainers to run monthly training events for juniors:

*So far, we have been able to raise privately the funds we have needed over the years. We do get \$50,000 each year from the ACBL; those funds are dedicated to expenses for juniors representing the US in international competition. That is about enough to send 5 teams to*

*the WYBTC every other year when it is held; we are eligible to send 8 teams but that is not feasible financially. The online training program runs with volunteers only, thanks to Alex and a cadre of outstanding mentors who donate their time. So, bottom line is that we have no funding for the junior program per se, just for travel expenses for juniors competing internationally. (USA, 1a)*

*The youth are together and there is a good dynamic. 7-8 Sunday training days where ABC all train together and 4 Sundays for just that category e.g., U26s together Payment for Sunday trainers: 8 hours preparation (of topic, hands to bid, hands to play etc), the Sunday training day, 4 hours afterwards (Netherlands).*

Coaching and developing individuals and partnerships are mentioned as forms of support offered by several larger NBOs (USA, Australia, Sweden, and Denmark):

*Get them into training. Let them develop with their partners. (USA, 1b)*

*State Youth Coordinators will help and encourage them to establish a partnership and help them to find an experienced player to mentor them. (Australia)*

Some youth trainers favour more individualised and tailored support to individuals or partnerships:

*I don't actually believe in the concept of talent as might be suggested here. When people talk about someone being 'talented', all they really see is a snapshot of someone's current level of achievement. There is no concept of how hard someone may have worked or how experienced they may really be, or if that person has transferable skills from other gaming experience. As a result there are any number of juniors who might well get overlooked. The key characteristic I look for is whether they love the game and are addicted to it - then I know they will put the hours in and we will get there eventually. The actual ceiling difference in players is mostly pretty small - the ceiling difference 'talent' makes is there, but it is nowhere near as big as people believe. Of course, the ego of the top players is such that they have to believe it is their talent that has got them there - it's essential to their performance mindset. However, what we do see is how much of that ceiling players have actually realised through work - most players (including many very successful ones) are incredibly lazy and haven't taken many of the gains that could be made from methodical and analytical training. In terms of support... I believe every player is an individual and may need a different method to unlock them or gain their skills in a different order. (England, 6a)*

According to the survey responses, for large NBOs, the most common forms of support offered for juniors who have potential are: mentoring; training camps and training sessions alongside coaching and development of the individual player and partnerships. In addition, limited financial support is sometimes offered by NBOs that have the resources in the form of subsidising training or expenses to events.

### **Medium NBOs**

Medium sized NBOs have a strong focus on providing training, captaining, and mentoring for juniors who showed potential. With seven out of 11 of the NBOs featuring these factors in their

responses (Norway, Israel, Poland, Scotland, Turkey, Greece, and Austria), as shown in the following examples:

*Some are offered mentoring through one of our clubs. Mainly through private initiatives – top experts enjoy playing with juniors with great potential. U26W and U16 captains includes players with potential – also in championships. Young women are invited to train with the women’s squad. (Norway)*

I organize classes with coaches with recognized achievements in training top juniors, I organize winter and summer training camps which last for several days, I organize club trips to significant bridge events in Poland (1-2 times a year), I organize trips to the open World Championships and European Championships. (Poland, 13c)

*The SBU sends them to European events when they are available. We try to help them find a mentor. We provide NPCs for online events. (Scotland, 14c)*

*Calling for training, adding pairs to strong teams as support for their participation in national major tournaments (Turkey)*

The response from Austria also noted disruption to the schedule due to the pandemic:

*We try to find good players who play tournaments with them, we organize trainings (last time before the pandemic), we discuss hands with them (Austria)*

Some NBOs are able to offer limited financial support for expenses (Japan, Israel, Poland and Scotland) and in some cases scholarships for promising juniors:

*In addition to the regular joint practice sessions (which are not necessarily well attended), JCBL provides some financial support for the travel/accommodation for those who requires long travel, free participation in the major games etc.) (Japan)*

*We allow them 50% discount in all IBF events / tournaments and festivals. We give them free trainings in our Elite projects and teams. We give a financial aid if they are participating in an open youth championship. We cover all expenses if they play in U16 / U21 / U26 EBL / WBF championships. When they go to the army, we help some of the top players to get a special status which allows them to be released for trainings and tournaments. For good achievements (medals in international championships) they get a monthly scholarship paid by the Ministry of Sports. (Israel)*

*I organize funds to cover the costs of trips, I look for partners from competitions, bridge league, I write them slips to release them from school duties for the duration of the competition, I apply for awards and scholarships for players with achievements, I solve/help solve conflicts amongst peers. (Poland, 13b)*

The NBO’s role of progressing promising players into stronger teams and partnerships is noted as an important factor by three of the 11 NBOs (Poland, Scotland, and Turkey):

*The SBU sends them to European events when they are available. We try to help them find a mentor. We provide NPCs for online events. (Scotland, 14c)*

*Calling for training, adding pairs to strong teams as support for their participation in national major tournaments (Turkey)*

For medium sized NBOs it is evident that there are several key strategies utilised by NBOs to support juniors who show potential, namely: training, captaining, and mentoring. Helping to progress players into teams by finding appropriate pairs also featured in responses. In addition to provision of limited financial support (where available) to help juniors play in key events, or by offering discounts to juniors on fees.

### **Small NBOs**

Five of the nine small NBOs imply that they actively support potential juniors through clubs, training, bridge camps (Croatia, Romania and Morocco) and coaching (Latvia and Serbia):

*Federation, clubs, private (Croatia)*

*Free courses, free trainings, free competition fees, support of travel costs (Romania)*

*Training and financial aid (Morocco)*

*I coach them (Latvia)*

*We support them by having our best players and coaches work with them on the daily basis. And often send them to open competitions. During the last year the club NS1 from Novi Sad participated in the whole Serbian league with one junior pair. NS1 became the champion of the country, and those juniors were categorised as the top players of the nation. (Serbia)*

Some NBOs also offer limited financial support in the form of covering expenses to attend events. Whilst Bulgaria notes previously organised bridge camps that are no longer operating. Free training and limited support in terms of expenses is offered by some NBOs (in a limited capacity) in terms of sending players to larger events. Coaching features mainly in relation to players working closely with top players in order to develop their skills further.

### **Summing Up: Supporting juniors**

Large, medium and small NBOs utilise various strategies in order to support junior players that show potential. Mentoring, coaching, individual and pair development and (limited) financial assistance (fee discounts, expenses for junior championships) as well as subsidised or free training are common across all sizes of NBOs. However, medium and smaller sized NBOs may have fewer financial resources (in the absence of private funding) that sometimes limits their ability to offer support as extensively as larger NBOs.

## **Question 12: How do you support potential international players who are not juniors?**

### **Large NBOs**

Some limited support is offered to aspiring women international players who are not Juniors in the form of a training programme (Australia):

*The ABF set up an in-depth training program for Women's team players about 5 years ago, which increased participation in Women's events by about 50% for two years. International players receive a subsidy when traveling to international events, but no other significant support is provided to potential or current international representatives. (Australia)*

Most large NBOs pay expenses for the national team when playing in top-level championships. Other than financial support, there tends to be little support offered by six of the eight large NBOs in relation to internationals that are not juniors (USA, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, England and New Zealand):

*Not my worry. They are mostly professional players. (USA, 1b)*

*Doesn't exist coming via non junior routes, all come through that route, apart from Magdalena Ticha who is a very good player from Czech Republic. (Netherlands)*

*They are free to aspire to play in the open/mixed/women teams by assigning to be part of the troupe. In recent years, mainly because of Covid, there hasn't been a lot of activities arranged for the whole group though. Before, we used to have training weekend and tournaments just for aspiring pairs to show off their abilities to the selection committee/captains. (Sweden, 5a)*

*Nothing particular (Sweden, 5c)*

*Not much (Denmark)*

*Many others who make Open/Women's selections are players who have come in from abroad and earned English representation. It is very rare for an English-born/raised player to make the side for a major if they didn't come through the junior program. This is also probably a reflection on our tournament structure which doesn't really provide a focus to developing aspiring players. (England, 6a)*

*Poorly. Some attempts made to provide a path and some recognition as potential internationals but not well done (New Zealand)*

Generally, the larger NBOs rely on their junior training programmes to support players to improve their game and after that, players are responsible for their own development. Little is done to support players that do not come via the traditional junior routes. This is noted as an area that is not handled well by a couple of the responses.

## Medium NBOs

Very limited support is offered by medium sized NBOs in relation to aspiring international players that are not juniors. Seven of the 11 medium sized NBOs state they do not offer support (Norway, Poland and Turkey):

*We offer no support. (Norway)*

*We do not support them. If they are good, they will manage on their own. (Poland, 13a)*

*Unfortunately, we cannot support (Turkey)*

Greece and Belgium offer some training for the open team:

*No extra support. Only if there are members of the team it is possible that a coach is hired by HBF (Greece)*

*No support except the Open Team training for EC and WC. (Belgium)*

Some countries pay expenses for some categories of national teams to play in European or World championships, but only pay the entry fees for others, such as the newer categories of U31 and the mixed. For example: *For U31 and Mixed teams, we pay registration fees only, (Israel)*. One response from Poland suggests that some coaching and development is offered, although they do not elaborate on whether this is dependent on the player being part of a national team:

*Work with a psychologist, hire a good coach to work with pairs and get bridge sponsors for player development (Poland, 13e)*

Like larger NBOs, medium-sized NBOs demonstrate a culture that suggests it is not their responsibility to support and develop players outside of the scope of their junior programmes. On some level it is possible this is due in part to limited resources being required more acutely elsewhere (i.e., junior programmes). Alternatively, it may just be that members of the NBOs are following the old ethos of the 'cream rises to the top' and not providing additional training resources beyond junior level.

## Small NBOs

Similar to large and medium sized NBOs, smaller NBOs offer limited financial incentives or expenses:

*We support them by participating and sharing their competition expenses as much as we can. (Serbia)*

*Federation pays a part of costs for European/world championships. (Croatia)*

*They can get money, if the result is good. (Latvia)*

*By the organization of training sessions, coaching, payment of stays and transport for international competitions. (Morocco)*

However, Bulgaria (*Not supporting them*) and Romania (*Nothing*) report that no support is offered. For smaller NBOs, some attempts are made to subsidise or offer financial incentives to international players (who are not juniors). As many small NBOs may not have well established or extensive junior programmes the importance of keeping international players (that are not juniors) engaged may be more pertinent. However, for many small NBOs no support is offered, in line with the general trend observed for larger and medium sized NBOs.

### **Summing Up: Supporting internationalists**

Responses from large, medium, and small NBOs suggest that there is a consensus that international players (who are not juniors) do not get a significant amount of support. Whilst NBOs pay the entry fees when representing the national team and varying amounts of the travel/accommodation expenses, broadly the culture appears to be consistent. It is not viewed as the NBOs' responsibility to develop players outside of the established junior programmes. For smaller NBOs (where they may not have widespread or well-established junior programmes) it was evident that some attempts were made to incentivise non junior international players using limited financial subsidies.

### **Question 13: How do you help junior (or other) players transition to top level bridge?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Mentoring and training are mentioned by several large NBOs in relation to assisting junior players to gain access to top level bridge (USA, Australia, Sweden, England and New Zealand):

*Training, plus have top players (including myself) play with juniors as often as possible. This year I have played on teams at regionals/nationals with junior players Emma and Finn Kolesnik, Jacob Freeman, Bruce Zhu, Harrison Luba, Michael Xu, Olivia Schireson, and many former juniors. (USA, 1b)*

*Top Level players mentor junior players hoping to transition to a higher level after Juniors. Most juniors prefer to play top level bridge in Australia anyway, so little encouragement is required. (Australia)*

*Education with camps and as previous mentioned mentorships. (Sweden, 5c)*

*Mentoring and training. (England, 6b)*

Although, some NBOs note that often the transition does not follow a 'formal' programme (New Zealand) and that the transition period can sometimes be poorly managed (England, 6a):

*We have no formal programme. It is about senior players mentoring. (New Zealand)*



*We are absolutely terrible at this. To transition to top level Bridge from juniors, there is absolutely no substitute for contact time (at and away from the table) with top players. But we just don't achieve this for a number of reasons:*

- *Very few strong bridge centres with lots of juniors and strong players together. Where it has happened (Manchester, YC, Cambridge) an odd junior has suddenly made massive improvement*
- *Professional players play for their living and often within their in-group*
- *Competition structure that doesn't get all the best players out and in formats that doesn't give much direct exposure of the juniors to the best players - we don't then artificially create enough opportunities for them*
- *Lack of mentors - I have tried this in the past (while with the U26s) but it is very difficult to get a good mentor. They are either too busy to do enough work, not organised enough (professional purely in the sense that they get paid to play, not in the manner of how they go about their business) or ultimately too disinterested. To do it properly does require work from all parties. I'm sure this is an area other nations do much better. (England, 6a)*

The Netherlands also comment that the ease of transition from junior to top level players is often mitigated depending on which category players transitioned to:

*Transition from juniors to open. From leaving U26 team, the debut of a young player in the open team is 31-32 years. As the level of the open team is much higher. The transition might be slightly easier for the women going from U26W to women's category. (Netherlands)*

The responses from larger NBOs suggest that mentoring and training are the most common forms of support offered to juniors (or other players) transitioning to top level bridge. Some NBOs refer to several challenges faced due to there being no formal programmes or training provided to assist with the transition, and that (in their opinion) the transition could be handled more effectively.

### **Medium NBOs**

Three of 11 of the medium sized NBOs state they provide no support for the transition of players to top level bridge:

*Every man/woman for himself. We treat every member equally. We offer no special support. (Norway)*

*They need to know the paved way to become a champion and lead them along this marked path. (Poland, 13a)*

*We don't. (Scotland, 14c)*

Limited discounts or financial support is offered by some NBOs in ways of support for players transitioning (Japan, Israel, Belgium, Poland, Scotland and Austria):

*Send them to the international games with some financial support. (Japan)*

*We have a special tournament for top level players, and the winners get a significant financial aid, which they can use only if they participate in an EBL open championship (Israel)*

*The R.B.B.F. doesn't help particularly except low entry fees. Juniors meet easily other (good) players in our clubs. (Belgium)*

*Encourage to play in open events. Secured agreement for free or reduced entry fees for juniors (Scotland, 14a)*

*We don't have enough. According to European or World championships we give financial support, also if they participate in other big international events. (Austria)*

Informal training is also offered by other NBOs such as Poland:

*I teach them how to play better. I also use my experience from playing mixed and teaching m mixed partner. (Poland, 13d)*

*I create bridge tables where we work on every aspect in bridge, prepare matches against strong teams along with analysis, also create presentations on interesting topics about bridge. In addition, books and individual work with each player on the game (Poland, 13e)*

Like larger NBOs, there does not appear to be a joined up or formal strategy in place for transitioning players (junior and other) to top level bridge. Whilst some training and financial support is offered by some NBOs, this does not appear to be widespread or in a formal or structured capacity.

### **Small NBOs**

Three small NBOs offer training or coaching to facilitate the transition to top level bridge (Croatia, Romania and Morocco).

*Best players play with them. They have regular coaching. Best players discuss boards with them. (Croatia)*

*Training with a coach (Romania)*

*Training and organization of competitions with high-level players (Morocco)*

Serbia notes that financial support in the form of expenses are offered: *We support them by participating and sharing their competition expenses as much as we can.* Whereas Bulgaria state no special support is offered and Latvia comment that: *We do not have top level bridge.* For smaller NBOs, coaching and training are reported (more frequently) as being offered at some level to support players transition to top level bridge. As previously mentioned, this may in part be due to smaller NBOs having less well-developed junior programmes, fewer 'top players' available (to act as coaches, mentors and trainers), or smaller membership numbers. This may incentivise smaller NBOs to be more willing to develop players who have the desire to reach higher levels of

the sport. However, several smaller NBOs also indicate that no support was currently being offered.

### **Summing Up: Transitioning to top level**

The majority of large, medium, and small NBOs engage to some extent with offering training, mentoring and coaching to support a player transitioning from junior (or other) level to top-level bridge. However, this support tends to be unstructured, informal, and often a case of 'potluck' depending on where the player plays and who they engage with. From the responses it is evident that there may be a culture (particularly in larger and medium-sized NBOs) that encourages players to carve their own way to the top-levels rather than being guided down a structured path. Higher levels of informal training and attempts to incentivise players with a desire to reach the top-levels of bridge are observed in some small NBOs. However, this is not the majority view and there do not appear to be formal training structures in place to support this.

### **Question 14: How do you communicate with youth players, and what are their preferred ways of communicating? (e.g. F2F, email, zoom, or?)**

#### **Large NBOs**

Generally, email is regarded as the least effective communication method for communication with juniors (Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark):

*Donny communicates mostly with them, used to try emails but they rarely respond, so What's App is better. Captains, coaches and system trainers communicate directly with them too. (Netherlands)*

*My experience is that e-mail is the worst. We hardly ever get replies in time, especially from the younger category (12-18 yr). We still mainly use it but can also use Snapchat, Facebook and other social medias depending on what kind of communication we are talking about. (Sweden, 5a)*

*Serious problem, since young people read e-mail once a year or something like that. SMS or Messenger are the best ways. (Sweden, 5c)*

*Email (juniors – Facebook & messenger). (Denmark)*

Responses suggest that on the whole trainers favour social media and messaging apps for communication with juniors, with Zoom and face-to-face preferred for training (Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, England, and Denmark):

*Mostly Facebook Groups, Email & Face to Face. (Australia)*

*We still mainly use it but can also use Snapchat, Facebook and other social medias (Sweden, 5a)*

*WhatsApp groups, Zoom, email (England, 6b)*

The responses for large NBOs indicate a shift toward using messaging apps, social media (to communicate with juniors) for day-to-day communication and video conferencing tools for training.

### **Medium NBOs**

For medium sized NBOs emails are also regarded as the least effective communication method with juniors – with social media, messaging apps and video-conferencing tools also being favoured by trainers in these contexts:

*Various ways. Usually Messenger and e-mail, giving information during my classes. These are my preferred means of communication. I am not interested in their preferred methods of communication. It's supposed to be convenient for me and not for them (Poland, 13a)*

*Messenger groups most effective. Email reaches 50 %. Phone. (Norway)*

*When I was still a junior we would communicate mainly via Facebook on one-on-one chats or group chats for the entire team. If it concerned important information (documents needed to travel to an international event) coaches would send emails to the players. The last year I was a junior we switched more to zoom. (Poland, 13f)*

The results from medium NBOs are similar to larger NBOs. Although, emails and phone calls are identified as important forms of communication, particularly in relation to official documentation, or where trainers do not have the desire to alter their typical methods of communication.

### **Small NBOs**

Phone and face-to-face communication methods are more commonly used by small NBOs alongside emails, WhatsApp, social media and video conferencing apps:

*Local teachers communicate with them by phone. (Bulgaria)*

*FTF trainings. Some trainings on BBO or other platforms when juniors are not in Croatia. Email – some analyses Email & WhatsApp – for information purposes (e.g. info about tournaments, meetings, etc.) (Croatia)*

*WhatsApp, zoom, email, messenger but they preferred face to face. (Romania)*

*The junior commission of BSS is in charge for the communication with the juniors. They constantly communicate by e-mails, phone and video calls. And when there is a chance, they hold in person meetings. (Serbia)*

For smaller NBOs phone and face-to-face sessions are more commonly used, complemented by a combination of messaging apps, social media, and online platforms. Interestingly the issue with emails noted by larger and medium sized NBOs is not noted to the same degree by small NBOs.

## Summing Up: Communication

For large, medium, and small NBOs, email is largely considered to be the least effective way of communicating with juniors. Juniors favour social media and messaging apps for day-to-day communication, with face to face, video-conferencing and online platforms preferred for training. Despite this, many NBOs appear to still be reliant on emails and phone calls to transfer official information to juniors, or (in some instances) do not appear to be willing (or have the desire) to adapt to changing behaviours among younger players.

### **Question 15: What keeps them interested/in touch when they have competing priorities (e.g. work/family/other interests)**

#### **Large NBOs**

Several of the responses from large NBOs centre around the social aspects of bridge keeping players engaged (USA, Australia and Sweden), for example:

*Bridge is the social group for many of these players. (USA, 1b)*

*Social aspects of the game. Free Pizza at youth nights. (Australia)*

Travel, training and having events to play in also featured prominently in responses:

*Travelling and live bridge with other juniors are always two strong incentives for people to return to the game. (Sweden, 5a)*

*Hans says it is not difficult to keep them engaged for the 5-6 pairs in each ABC category they are keen to play – in particular they like the travel and playing the tournaments, especially the Euros and Worlds, so it is not difficult to engage them. (Netherlands)*

*Regular training and events to play in (England, 6b)*

However, one response from England indicates the loss rate is very high, suggesting some NBOs may struggle to keep players engaged: *Unless Bridge is their job, the loss rate is very high* (England, 6a). For large NBOs, the social element of bridge is seen as significant in terms of keeping players interested. Whilst other responses suggest that the benefits of travel, training and regular events play a factor. In contrast, one response outlines several challenges with keeping players motivated and increased dropout rates.

#### **Medium NBOs**

Social aspects of the game are also mentioned as an important factor for keeping players engaged by several responses for medium NBOs:

*Social relationships and friendships. (Turkey)*

*The advantages of belonging to a group play an important role. Ergo these players are regularly in touch with friends who still play a lot, are part of discussion about bridge problems. (Austria)*

*For the school bridge club, the main appeal is hanging out with their friends – you need a group of at least four together to make it work. (Scotland, 14b)*

*Fascination with bridge as a mental sport. The community created within the club that becomes a group of friends. (Poland, 13c)*

The competitive nature of bridge, free games, love of the game and internal drive as athletes also feature significantly in responses:

*I guess it's the competitive atmosphere and the strive to achieve medals, trophies, prizes, respect, becoming a team member, representing Israel in international tournaments, that keep them interested. Also, they have friends who play Bridge, whom they want to meet, they have social gatherings so eventually this becomes their second family. (Israel)*

*We made Competitive League every 15 days only for Junior (Under 25) and youth (Under 35), and invite the Top to participate in National tournaments (Spain)*

*Internal drive. (Norway)*

*Motivation to become a national athlete. (Turkey)*

Like large NBOs, the social element of bridge is seen as an important feature that keeps players interested. Whilst other responses promote internal drive, motivation of players, a competitive environment, free games and 'a love of bridge' are core components of keeping players active interested and motivated to continue in the mindsport.

### **Small NBOs**

Like larger and medium sized NBOs, smaller NBOs note that the social and community aspects of bridge kept players engaged:

*The friendships they build. (Bulgaria)*

*Crazy old people that we are, unlike their parents? Engagement in club life. They know we are proud of them. They know we will do whatever it takes to help them. They know they can count on us. We are a community. (Croatia)*

*Socializing (Romania)*

Love of the game is also mentioned as a motivating factor for players (Latvia and Morocco). For smaller NBOs, the social and community element plays a central role. Most responses indicate that love of the game and having a sense of community (being part of the bridge world) are core

principles that keep players engaged, motivated and coming back regardless of conflicting priorities.

### **Summing Up: Keeping players engaged**

Socialising and the sense of community gained from involvement with bridge appears to be central to the majority of the answers in relation to what keeps players interested. The benefits of travel to (international and national) events, free training, a love of the game and having a competitive atmosphere to flourish are also noted as key components that keep players on-board and motivated in the face of competing priorities.

### **Building a pipeline of players: Key Points**

- NBOs use multiple strategies to ‘build a pipeline of players’ with junior players having the greatest level of opportunities to develop overall: training, coaching, mentoring and financial aid. Support tends to be unstructured, informal, and dependent on the geographical location of the player. However, online platforms have facilitated easier means of practicing with top-level players as well as virtual training sessions.
- Training opportunities and support are sparser for smaller NBOs who have fewer resources.
- For aspiring international players that are not juniors, training opportunities are significantly more limited (though most NBOs offer some financial contributions when representing the country).
- Communication methods vary: email generally viewed as the least effective for juniors who prefer social media and messaging apps.
- Socialising and the sense of community is a central component to keeping players interested in bridge. Travel, playing at international events, free training, a love of the game and competitive events help to motivate juniors.

## Training and Development

The key findings of the survey in relation to the training and development offered by large, medium and small NBOs are explored in this section, including the similarities, differences and insights between NBOs of different sizes.

### **Question 16: What does your training set-up look like?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Three of the eight large NBOs report a move to online training sessions or a mix of hybrid, in person, and online bidding sessions (USA, Sweden and England):

*The online training program runs with volunteers only, thanks to Alex and a cadre of outstanding mentors who donate their time. So, bottom line is that we have no funding for the junior program per se, just for travel expenses for juniors competing internationally. We have managed to raise privately funds we have needed, at least so far. (USA, 1a)*

*Training bidding in partnership: Some live bidding on BBO and then using non-live tools such as correctcontract.com and nowadays Cuebids (which I think is great). Playing in partnership: Some live and some online, both club games and weekend tournaments. Individual training: Reading and practising Bridge Master (this mainly before bigger tournaments as warmup). (Sweden, 5a)*

*Mostly online now. Twice per week. I'll also do other supplementary material for reading - because they won't automatically go and get the books. Bidding sessions via apps/BBO. Answering questions via email. We will go back to some F2F training, but most will be online. We can do so much more volume. We will get guests in to do sessions and also look to schedule practice against appropriately matched opponents. We will also try to sort an appropriate programme of F2F competition based around availability and national events. And try to sort some online international practice. (England, 6a)*

*U26W have training weekends, masterclasses, and regular challenge matches. Age groups have training weekends plus weekly RealBridge and Zoom coaching. (England, 6b)*

Two of the eight large NBOs (Australia and Sweden) comment that training is often not formally structured and could be tailored to the needs of the group, whilst The Netherlands extensively outlines a structured, funded training programme incorporating peer learning and face-to-face training sessions:

*Open Squad – Fridays. This is funded by Top Sports (pays for Hans, and Ton Bakerran and for other trainers) and training takes place on Fridays. However, they are not allowed to pay the players to attend this training (condition of the funding). The funding can be used for open and women, but not for mixed and seniors. Similar format to youth prog Start with Bid72 – bid more deals than youth in advance and discuss. Bid 24 hands in advance. Ton can see who has done it or not. When all bid, then can see everyone's auctions – peer*



*learning. Topic – presented and discussed. This can include players bringing recent hands to discuss. (Netherlands)*

For larger NBOs a mixture of online and in person training events appear to be commonplace. Some NBOs have structured (and funded) coaching in place, whereas other NBOs note that this is more tailored to individuals, partnerships, or teams. The type offered may be dependent on the level of resources each NBO has, types of players engaged with mentors and availability of trainers and coaches.

### **Medium NBOs**

Like larger NBOs there seems to be a shift towards using online tools in training regimes with four of the 11 medium-sized NBOs (Scotland, Poland, Belgium, and Turkey) stating they use online tools in combination with live training sessions and a more hybrid style of coaching:

*Mainly me organising training sessions, F2F or online, and trying to get them to attend. (Scotland, 14a)*

*Once a week online (1h), once a week a live workshop (1h), once a week a tournament live (22-26 boards), 2-3 times a year a weekend workshop, a summer camp (10 days) and a winter camp (7 days). (Poland, 13c)*

*By now, sometimes on B.B.O. Recently, in 2 cities (Ghent & Antwerp), young players are attracted by Facebook. (Belgium)*

*1 training tournament per week international match or tournament once a month. Staying in constant communication with online tools, question and answer. (Turkey)*

Five responses from (Israel, Poland, Scotland and Austria) indicate a focus on the technical aspects of bridge (in training offered):

*In the team's training the coach will talk about a specific Bridge topic, they will play the premade boards, then analyse the boards, learn from mistakes. If it's an Elite project, then it will also have an empowering lecture not related to Bridge, but to self-esteem, competitiveness, dealing with failures etc. (Israel)*

*It varies. The young players come to my classes/ workshops very irregularly. We often try and find solutions to bridge problems reported by those present or we discuss hands from previous tournaments. (Poland, 13b)*

*I have a lot of resources in my classroom but don't normally have enough time/organisation to use them properly, especially as people drift in and out the classroom during lunchtime and there's often a few absolute beginners there too. In theory I have - 30 or so prepared deals on particular topics (e.g. establishing tricks, Stayman etc) - booklets with questions and answers for them to fill in – I do this when there are 'spare' kids - google quizzes, that they sometimes do on my computer - the pupils have iPads, so I can set up bridge base games - the SBU course which I sometimes do bits of - PowerPoints and other handouts. (Scotland, 14b)*

*If we have training, we play pre-duplicated hands and discuss afterwards. Last junior training: signalling, competitive bidding, declarer play. (Austria)*

Scotland note that: *The SBU does not have a formal training setup*, and Japan reports that no training is currently offered to adult players:

*Unfortunately, JCBL is not interested in considering training system/programme. In the past, JCBL invited for instance Eric Kokish as a coach and I was lucky to take his private lessons with my partner while we had no problem with language. Because of the poor interest shown, JCBL has stopped considering training system/programme for adult players. (Japan)*

Like larger NBOs, medium-sized NBOs have moved towards a more hybrid model for training. In contrast to larger NBOs, many of the coaching initiatives offered within medium-sized NBOs do not follow fixed or formal structures. A focus on teaching the technical aspects of bridge through a combination of in person and online platforms is commonplace. Many responses from medium-sized NBOs describe utilising teaching methods of guided discussion, lectures, playing practice, alongside analysis of bridge topics and playing techniques.

### **Small NBOs**

Similar to medium NBOs, two of nine of the small NBOs describe training activities that focus primarily on practicing the strategic and technical elements of the game:

*Bridge tests, seminars, play with analysis. (Bulgaria)*

*Monday – theoretical trainings and analysis of the boards / tournaments; Tuesday – practical play in the club; Wednesdays – play on BBO; Weekends – tournaments (not all weekends, of course). (Latvia)*

A combination of in-person and online events is commonplace (Romania) and Croatia describes a relatively structured programme consisting of tailored activities for children (up to 14 years), young people (14-18 years) and university students:

*We have three types of junior trainings. 1. For little ones (up to 14). It is during the bridge class in their school, they play a little, talk a little, very friendly, very unserious. (5 coaches at 5 different schools in Zagreb) 2. For secondary school (14-18) Once per week in the school + once per week outside the school. In the school is more like lecture, outside is only play and some analysis during the play. (One coach) 3. For big ones – university +. (two coaches + lots of volunteers). The training usually has some topic that is analysed. Additionally, interesting hands are discussed (often provided by juniors). (Croatia)*

Like medium-sized NBOs, many of the training initiatives implemented by smaller NBOs centre around teaching the technical aspects of the game in a variety of in-person and online settings. For smaller NBOs with active school programmes, these are a key focus for resources and attention of trainers and teachers.

## Summing Up: Training set-up

For large, medium, and small NBOs, responses demonstrate a recent shift towards hybrid style training programmes (post-covid). NBOs increasingly use online tools and platforms, in combination with face-to-face and live events to train bridge players. For medium and small NBOs there is an indication that guidance tends to be relatively unstructured. This could be more easily tailored to individuals and teams, with many of the training materials focusing on technical aspects of bridge, analysis of cards and providing a forum for discussion and practice with trainers.

### **Question 17: What do you expect from players in the training? (e.g. time commitment, attitude)**

#### **Large NBOs**

Player 'commitment' is mentioned by four of eight responses from large NBOs (USA, Netherlands, Australia and England) in terms of expectations of player behaviour. Additional expectations of high levels of attendance (Netherlands and Australia), focus and good attitude (USA) and contracts for player behaviour (England) are drawn up in some instances:

*They have to show up, be focused, and have a good attitude. Most fit the bill. (USA, 1b)*

*You are expected to be at the training (could miss two out of 12, but if miss 6 then not in the team) Expected to be in the training; bid on Bid72, be in contact with the pair's system trainer, and play in the national league (in 2nd or 3rd division); and if live in the same area as their partner they are expected to play in a bridge club regularly together; and to play in arranged matches on BBO In April the dates are released for the training starting from Sept for the following year, so there is plenty of scope to arrange personal events around the training. (Netherlands)*

*International Youth Players are expected to practice with their partner weekly with their mentor overseeing practices once a month. They are expected to attend team practices when scheduled. (Australia)*

*We have squad contracts that constitute an agreement with the player in terms of behaviour and commitment. These need to be signed by the parent/guardian for U16s. If a player doesn't commit sufficient effort (not turning up for training regularly, not practicing in enough events) their contract can be removed. In return, we supply training and provide other benefits (e.g. free entry to some events). Most behavioural things are typical of teenagers/young adults. I've realised that some of this is teaching life skills through the medium of Bridge. There will be some bumps, but if we can flex and correct, we get a better person out the other side - which is more important than the Bridge. (England, 6a)*

In contrast, some NBOs illustrate a more relaxed attitude to expectations of junior players:

*Not much from non-juniors. From juniors to join our training sessions and spend time on bidding and play up to tournaments. (Denmark)*

The core element that appears to be desirable for player behaviour across the majority of larger NBOs is 'commitment'. Players are required to put in the hours, work hard and turn up to training. These features are relatively consistent across responses, with some NBOs writing player contracts so that they are aware of expected behaviours, whereas other NBOs take a more relaxed approach, especially with juniors.

### **Medium NBOs**

Similar to larger NBOs, being prepared (Belgium), time commitment and focus (Israel and Austria), promoting bridge (Japan) and having fun (Greece) are seen as important by three of the 11 medium NBOs. A slightly more relaxed approach is displayed by the response from Greece:

*Time commitment, attitude, discipline, tolerance etc. (Israel)*

*Presence, willingness to work, willingness to work with a partner, taking responsibility for their decisions, independence in organizing their transportation to classes. (Poland, 13b)*

*Engagement, concentration, interest, friendliness. (Austria)*

*Youth - we are hoping that they would continue playing bridge and promoting bridge in the societies they will be in. (Japan)*

*We don't press them since we believe that the most important is to enjoy playing. If they are ambitious and they have the skills to be members of National teams, they must be consistent in following time schedule. We emphasize in their behaviour since we want our future players to be athletes-example. Zero tolerance in ethics issues. (Greece)*

For medium NBOs, multiple responses from Scotland also demonstrate a relaxed approach (due to so few juniors), 'low expectations' or just having players attend sessions and engage with training is 'good enough':

*To turn up twice a year and once a week online. (Scotland, 14a)*

*I have pretty low expectations – just to be nice to each other and look after the equipment. My laissez-faire approach is partly out of necessity, as I'm often doing something else at the same time so can't supervise closely, but also just to create a relaxed atmosphere. If I am running a classroom session of bridge (e.g., around Xmas time instead of a maths lesson) I expect them to listen and learn as they would in a lesson. But at lunch time everyone just chills out. Some do bridge for their Duke of Edinburgh skill so have a target and have to attend for six months. (Scotland, 14b)*

*There are so few juniors that we are happy if they just show up to arranged matches and training sessions. (Scotland, 14c)*

For medium-sized NBOs, whilst many of the player expectations regarding commitment, attendance and focus are desirable, the enforcement of these principles in practice is less rigorous

than described by the larger NBOs. As smaller NBOs may struggle (more than larger NBOs) with gaining and keeping players engaged, or attracting new players, it is evident that competition for places and training may be lower. As such, contracts for behaviour or disciplinary procedures do not appear to be as commonplace compared with larger NBOs.

### **Small NBOs**

For four of the nine small NBOs, time commitment (Croatia and Morocco) and attending sessions regularly (Bulgaria and Romania) seem to be an important factor, whilst commitment and focus of players features as a key element in the response from Serbia:

*Time commitment (unless valid reason). Homework Play online. Play competitions organized by Croatian Bridge Federation. (Croatia)*

*Nothing specific, but play as much as possible, read your system and attend the camps. (Bulgaria)*

*Seriousness, curiosity, available time. (Romania)*

*We expect them to be committed and pay full attention to classes. (Serbia)*

For smaller NBOs (like larger and medium-sized NBOs), desirable qualities in a player are time-commitment (turning up for training and events), focus (to drive improvement) and learning. Most of the NBOs are relatively relaxed in terms of implementing formal player-contract agreements.

### **Summing Up: Player expectations**

For large, medium, and small NBOs, players are expected (to varying degrees) to possess qualities such as commitment, hard work, focus and willingness to learn. However, many medium and smaller-sized NBOs (with fewer or limited number of juniors) appear to be slightly more relaxed in terms of policing student attendance and enforcing written agreements for student behaviour. For larger NBOs, where places are likely to be competitive, there are more disciplined views on the types of behaviours deemed appropriate for players. Often written contracts are implemented to ensure players abide by expected standards of behaviour.

### **Question 18: How do you support training and development to be high quality?**

#### **Large NBOs**

For large NBOs, four of the eight NBOs report that strong players and squad leaders (England), having good teachers (Sweden and Denmark), and mentors (USA and Australia) can support training being 'high quality':

*Use great mentors. (USA, 1B)*

*Training of international junior partnerships are overseen by mentors. (Australia)*

*By getting the best teachers we have available. (Sweden, 5c)*

*We try to find good subjects and better teachers to our groups. (Denmark)*

Two of eight of the large NBOs suggest that ‘trainer reflection’, flexibility in adapting training to needs of players (England and Sweden) and documentation (Sweden) are important features of ‘high-quality’ training:

*I do reflect on my sessions and create new exercises and sessions based on user need rather than a strict programme. I have an idea of where the players need to be to compete appropriate and have planned ahead to generate the necessary material. I am also always looking for new tools to help my presentation and coaching. I'll do play and discuss of random and pre-generated deals (I have a method for dealing with cardplay sets), BBO bidding sessions (with live Zoom), answer endless email questions on sets people have played. Practice auctions on Bid72/Cuebids. If they want the knowledge, I'll give it. I'm never disappointed in mistakes and try to encourage people to 'go for it', to experiment and to not fear failure. Having a positive atmosphere and culture is vital to encourage players to do those things but also to reassure the parents that it is a safe space. Most importantly it has to be fun for everyone. (England, 6a)*

*For online bridge to be high quality I think it's important to both be present (i.e. close down all other tabs etc) and to document what you do. For instance, take notes for yourself about the hands/situations that comes up and the system stuff you need to fix whilst playing. This keeps you on edge looking for learning opportunities during an online game, which I otherwise can find hard sometimes. (Sweden, 5a)*

Responses from large NBOs suggest that the role of good quality teachers and mentors is vital for ensuring ‘high quality’ tuition is provided. In addition, several responses indicate that self-reflection is viewed as an important ‘professional practice’ for trainers. This ensures that they are being flexible with their training programmes having assessed retrospectively if they are providing the right types of training to the right types of players.

### **Medium NBOs**

Four of 11 of the medium NBOs indicate that good players (Belgium), good coaches (Poland), expert mentors, coaches (Scotland and Turkey), and follow up questionnaires (Poland) are the main ways of ensuring ‘high quality’ training content:

*Trying to include good players to play with juniors. (Belgium)*

*I work with good trainers, and I constantly enrich my teaching and coaching workshop. (Poland, 13c)*

*Using expert players to coach/mentor. (Scotland, 14a)*

*hiring a professional coach. (Turkey)*

*I take questionnaires from players about all parts of training in 3 ways: difficulty, enjoyment, and progress. (Poland, 13d)*

Two of 11 of the medium NBOs (Scotland and Norway) believe that quality control is not in place. Some responses (Israel) show that the training is decided and structured by their committees with feedback from coaches:

*Our Youth committee supervise the trainings. Also, the coach has to send a report after each training. (Israel)*

For medium NBOs, responses suggest that a combination of good players, good coaches, expert mentors, and adequate reporting procedures are deemed necessary to ensure 'high quality' training is delivered. However, some responses show dissatisfaction with current procedures, particularly in the case of Scotland and Norway.

### **Small NBOs**

Small NBOs echo similar statements in relation to the importance of having good teachers (Bulgaria and Morocco), volunteers (Romania), and coaches (Croatia, Latvia, and Serbia) in place to ensure 'high quality' training is delivered:

*By assigning good teachers. (Bulgaria)*

*Do we? We employ the best players as trainers. Many of younger good players devote voluntarily time and teach/play with juniors. (Croatia)*

*We do that by taking the best players and setting them up as coaches. (Serbia)*

These statements are relatively consistent with those observed for large and medium NBOs, although smaller NBOs may rely on a smaller pool of coaches, mentors, and players in order to provide tuition. This may constrain their ability to be flexible with their approaches to training materials due to limited human resources.

### **Summing Up: High-quality training**

For large, medium, and small NBOs, a common feature deemed to be necessary to support 'high quality' training is good teachers and mentors. Trainer reflection (large NBOs), planning and documentation, flexible coaching, procedures to validate the success of training (questionnaires etc), and commitment from instructors to develop high quality materials is also noted. The lack of resources for smaller NBOs may hinder their ability to draw on high level coaches. Additionally, they may rely heavily on a small pool of coaches and trainers with limited time. Many NBOs mention they are dissatisfied with the level of quality control in place, suggesting this may be an area for improvement.

**Question 19: What opportunities has online bridge provided for training and development? And did any of this change or develop during Covid-19?**

**Large NBOs**

For one of the eight larger NBOs online tools were already in use pre-covid (USA). However, six of the eight larger NBOs (Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, England, Denmark and New Zealand) report that playing online and the use of online training became more commonplace during the pandemic. Many responses suggest there are benefits to moving aspects of training online. Benefits include more opportunity to play (Australia and New Zealand) and being more convenient or easier to practice (Sweden and England) with many of the developments during Covid still in place currently (Denmark, Netherlands and England).

The following responses (England and Australia) describe in more detail some of the benefits experienced of online tools developed during the Covid period:

*Revolutionised the training game. Covid forced us into it, but now you won't win a medal without it. We can get so much more contact time and the software/platforms are evolving features that make the experience better and allow me to create sessions that (hopefully) work better for skill retention. RealBridge was the game changer, allowing me to video chat live rather than text chat with all the confusion and delay that brings on BBO. I still use BBO alongside Zoom for bidding rooms, but I'm now looking at apps like Bid72/Cuebids to get much more volume into those types of practice. (England, 6a)*

*There are more opportunities to practice without needing to all be in one place. New online platforms developed during Covid-19 enable mentors to oversee online practice and provide feedback easier. Online bridge has facilitated new interstate partnerships, including one which just came second in the world U31 championships. (Australia)*

**Medium NBOs**

Six of the 11 medium NBOs note that opportunities have arisen from changes implemented during Covid-19 in terms of online training (Japan, Norway, Israel, Belgium, Poland and South Africa) and reaching wider audiences online (South Africa):

*Online bridge has brought huge flexibilities especially for practicing and playing games. Youth Trial has been done using BBO with a careful monitoring by the coaches who can always trace the records. While the demand for F2F lessons was decreasing under Covid19, professionals can survive by offering on-line lessons. These are just a couple of examples. (Japan)*

*Great opportunities, with high quality tournaments. Also new apps for partnership bidding are great. The development of these arenas speeded up during covid. (Norway)*

*Online Bridge has offered great opportunities for trainings, especially during Covid, but not just. We used the online trainings even before Covid but we preferred less online trainings. However, during covid these trainings were suddenly acknowledged as important*



*to maintain in touch and in shape, so now they are a legitimate part of the trainings.*  
(Israel)

*Remotely, you can very conveniently train in every aspect of the game of bridge, and I use it often. However, the greatest advantage of bridge is the social aspect, so you cannot conduct classes only online.* (Poland, 13a)

*Thanks to Covid-19 we were forced to move training to online platforms and zoom which meant we could reach a wider audience.* (South Africa)

Three responses from the medium NBOs (Scotland and Turkey) outline that using online platforms and tools has made it easier to organise and run practice and training sessions for players. In contrast, many of the responses from Poland strongly suggest that both online and face-to-face training remain important, highlighting several issues experienced (with juniors) in online training sessions that have reduced attendance and productivity whilst working in online environments.

*In theory, a lot of great opportunities. In practice, in the case of my club, it's training sessions with a few individuals. Young people do not always log onto BBO at the agreed times, they often play their video games during online meetings. During the pandemic training in any form had a significantly lower attendance rate, including online training.*  
(Poland, 13b)

### **Small NBOs**

Four of the nine small NBOs mention the benefits of online tools for allowing players to compete against other players who do not live close or in the same country (Croatia, Latvia and Morocco). In contrast, the responses from one of the small NBOs (Romania) suggest that although a low-cost alternative, players prefer face-to-face meetings and training. However, two of the remaining small NBOs mention that 'online environments' make the game more accessible (Bulgaria) and are a great place to practice and communicate with other players (Serbia):

*Most of players prefer live play. Online bridge is great when players do not live in the same country and was useful during the pandemic. We shifted back to FTF in September 2021.*  
(Croatia)

*Good – you can play against players around the world; Bad – the players are not focused enough. I think F2F bridge decrease due to lock downs.* (Latvia)

*The obvious that the game is more accessible. Bulgarian junior bridge deteriorated organisation-wise the last few years. The only thing left are the two junior camps a year. Used to have up to 100 kids at those, down to 40 nowadays.* (Bulgaria)

*Online bridge has provided great possibilities for the players to practise and keep in touch with other members. It provided them to take place in training and games when they had time and also to play a large number of boards in a short amount of time. These advantages were especially handy during the time of Covid 19 lockdown.* (Serbia)

## Summing Up: Digital bridge

Many of the large, medium and small NBOs relay several benefits due to the greater number of online training and practice sessions offered during and post Covid-19. Some larger NBOs previously offered online training sessions, which were largely unaffected by the Covid lockdowns and related complications. However, several NBOs report positive changes observed (with the use of online platforms) including greater engagement and ease of practice. Many of the changes (such as utilisation of online platforms for practice and training), and new online events have remained in place post- Covid.

In contrast, there are a strong number of responses (particularly from medium and small NBOs) that suggest face-to-face sessions are still preferred by many, and that the online environment could not replace the 'social' aspects of the bridge community and live playing events. Given the 'new normal' of hybrid working and what the NBOs appear to be describing in terms of 'hybrid' bridge playing, these modes of working and playing are still largely untested with many strong positive, mixed and negative feelings expressed towards these post-Covid developments to bridge communities.

### **Question 20: What is your approach to developing individuals vs partnerships?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Seven responses from large NBOs suggest that resources for developing (non-junior) players are almost exclusively focused on developing partnerships (USA, Netherlands, Australia, England, Denmark, and New Zealand) except for individual players that are beginners (Australia and England) or where mentors are brought in to help players (Sweden). The following examples (Netherlands, England and Australia) demonstrate a number of these sentiments from several large NBOs:

*The focus is mainly on pairs. Some play can be done with individuals. For U16 the focus is on having fun, so they never intervene with setting up partnerships. They do sometimes split pairs up in the U21 and U26 categories if one player is better than the other. The trainers can see a difference in level, and they discuss the situation with the pairs. It is not easy, but a lot of time and money is invested in the training to work towards getting the best teams. (Netherlands)*

*At U16 level, we impose a system on the players in line with teaching the range of techniques, methods, and tactics. Pairings will often vary in training sessions depending on availability so having standard methods helps. To be successful at this level, you need to do the basics well - you don't need to be too clever. You can pick your best 4/5/6 and have a competitive side. There will be a few preferred combinations based on friendships/personalities/styles, but you do have some flexible options. In the older age categories, there is an increasing requirement for good and personalised agreements. I would definitely want to work with pairs from U21 level up. (England, 6a)*

*We have a higher focus on developing partnerships for our top-level junior players. Individual development is more of a focus for our beginner-intermediate players. Both are ad-hoc. (Australia)*

## **Medium NBOs**

Seven responses from medium-sized NBOs (Israel, Belgium, Poland, Scotland, Greece and Austria) assert that a focus on partnerships is prioritised over individual work with players. However, three of the 11 medium NBOs focus on individual player development (Poland and South Africa) or on both individuals and partnerships (Poland). Some responses indicate a different approach dependent on the ages or experience level of players, with juniors (or less experienced players) being developed as 'individual' players more frequently. This is shown in the following examples:

*Anyone who wants to develop their skills can count on my help. For individual players I look for an experienced partner from whom they can learn during club and other tournaments. There are few older, experienced players who have the patience to play with young people. However, there are also those, only a few, who fulfil the role of a bridge guide very well: they teach, show solutions, prepare problems for solving, transport juniors to tournaments. The coaches at the national level are in charge of coaching partnerships. (Poland, 13b)*

*Developing individuals is a very effective way to learn. Training is individualized so it is easier for players to improve their skills. (Poland, 13a)*

*In terms of organizing best National teams partnerships are necessary though we try to find best combinations. But for the younger players it is better to have them all playing the same system in order to have the opportunity to test more combinations which may work better. (Greece)*

## **Small NBOs**

Five of nine of the smaller NBOs (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Latvia, and Serbia) focus on partnerships for player development. Serbia notes that there is a shift from individual learning (at younger or inexperienced stages of development) to development of partnerships mediated by experience. The following examples demonstrate some of the issues expressed by smaller NBOs in terms of having a weak pool of players to make up partnerships (Bulgaria) and the importance of individual players learning the same systems before developing partnerships (Serbia):

*We have a very limited pool of players. The usual strategy is to put one good player with one weaker player. Nowadays the players arrange that between themselves. (Bulgaria)*

*All of the players are trained as individuals by having them all learn the same system and conventions. After then we let them pair up with people who are compatible with their personality types. (Serbia)*

## **Summing Up: Individuals or partnership training?**

For large, medium, and smaller NBOs, the focus in terms of developing players is almost

exclusively on developing partnerships over individual players. However, this is not always the case when discussing the development of junior players (or less experienced players) who are regularly trained individually (with technical skills and bridge-based knowledge) as novice players before developing their skills in partnerships. Partnerships are developed or put together (in many cases) with the help of NBOs or under self-direction. However, there are several dissenting voices to these sentiments (particularly from Poland) where numerous responses champion developing both individuals and partnerships as equally significant factors to consider in approaches used.

### **Question 21: How is your junior programme funded?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Five of the eight larger NBOs indicate that their budget (partially) stems from funds received from their federations or governing bodies (from membership fees and charitable donations) (USA, Netherlands, Sweden, England and Denmark). Three of the eight NBOs report that funds primarily stem from general revenue and monetised events (Australia) or charitable trusts to fund junior programmes (New Zealand).

*The Junior USBC this year will cost about \$100,000, and we have no funding for it. So far, we have been able to raise privately the funds we have needed over the years. We do get \$50,000 each year from the ACBL; those funds are dedicated to expenses for juniors representing the US in international competition. That is about enough to send 5 teams to the WYBTC every other year when it is held; we are eligible to send 8 teams but that is not feasible financially. The online training program runs with volunteers only, thanks to Alex and a cadre of outstanding mentors who donate their time. So, bottom line is that we have no funding for the junior program per se, just for travel expenses for juniors competing internationally. We have managed to raise privately funds we have needed, at least so far. (USA, 1a)*

*Most funding for the junior program comes out of general revenue. Junior teams have raised additional funds to support their teams through events such as trivia nights at major tournaments. The Friends of Youth Bridge provides additional funds upon request by the players or teams. This fund is separate from the ABF and managed with no visibility to the ABF. (Australia)*

Partly by the Federation's budget (originating in member fees and voluntary donations), partly by funds with donations from individuals and partly by the (wealthier) clubs who in turn are funding it with member fees etc. (Sweden, 5a)

*There is an annual budget for training that comes from funds allocated to the Selection Committee out of the overall EBU budget. This international fund has reduced since Covid. To send junior teams to the recent Euros needed additional funding was required from outside donors which required a lot of effort on the part of the squad leaders which could have been better spent elsewhere. This is a sore point, as priority was given to events like the Lady Milne/Teltscher trophy which are not a major event and include Pro-Am pairs. Personally, I think this was very short-sighted. (England, 6a)*

## Medium NBOs

Nine of the 11 medium-sized NBOs state that they receive some form of funding for their junior programmes from local federations, projects or clubs (Japan, Norway, Poland, Turkey and Spain), from their own governing bodies (Israel, Belgium, Poland, Scotland and Greece) or from government funding (Poland):

*The local authorities in Warsaw provide grants based on the number of juniors in training and their successes. Player fees and funding from schools that decide to host bridge training. (Poland, 13a)*

*There is a programme funded by Polish Ministry of Sport "Sport for all kids" – this is mainly for primary schools – basic courses. There are a lot of people teaching youth voluntary or with local support (schools / sports clubs / community centres). (Poland, 13g)*

In contrast, South Africa and Norway do not have traditional junior programmes, and Austria report a significant reduction in their budget, although they do not specify where these funds came from:

*Our yearly budget includes some thousand Euros for junior players. It has been shortened two times (as well as the budget for international players) during the last five years. (Financial losses because of the pandemic and the big amount of money we need for renewal of IT infra structure). (Austria)*

## Small NBOs

Two of the nine small NBOs express that their junior programmes are partially or largely self-funded (Bulgaria and Romania). Like larger and medium-sized NBOs, four of the remaining nine smaller NBOs receive support from local government organisations (Morocco) and Federations (Latvia), their governing body BSS (Serbia), or from wealthy donors or sponsors who are members of the bridge community (Czech Republic) as shown in the following example:

*Luckily, even now in the world and among bridge players, there are so many nice people who just want to help, because they had a nice life, you know, they can afford, so they sponsor from time to time somebody because they see, you know, the potential or an effort or they just want to do something good. And that's why I love the bridge community, that's why I like the streaming because you just meet these people. (Czech Republic)*

## Summing Up: Funding

Large, medium and small NBOs face several challenges in relation to raising capital to support their respective junior programmes. The most common form of funding comes from local Federations, local governing bodies, private funding from events and membership fees. In addition, in some cases sponsorship and charitable donations are sought from wealthy donors. Particularly for medium and smaller NBOs, there are gaps in available income. As a result, the community requires self-funding or a higher reliance on donations and private sponsorship deals to develop young

players. Successful junior programmes appear to benefit from support across the spectrum (of sources of subsidisation) in relation to educational authorities, government organisations, local governing bodies, Federations, and private donors.

### **Training and Development: Key Points**

- Many changes have occurred to developmental practices as a result of the recent pandemic and other economic factors (i.e. the cost-of-living crisis across Europe). These have impacted levels of funding and support offered to bridge organisations.
- All NBOs have adopted a hybrid style approach to training and practice sessions. At the same time, many NBOs emphasise the community aspect of bridge, alongside the benefits of face-to-face training and in-person play, especially in relation to junior programmes.
- Many NBOs share a preference for high levels of attendance, willingness to learn, commitment, hard work and focus. Nevertheless, very few (with the exception of some larger NBOs) enforce strict policies for these practices or player behaviours via formal contracts.
- Common features deemed necessary to support 'high quality' training include: good teachers and mentors; trainer reflection; planning and documentation; flexible trainers; procedures to validate the success of training (questionnaires); and commitment from trainers to develop high quality materials.
- The lack of resources for smaller NBOs hinders their ability to draw on high level coaches, and they tend to rely heavily on a small pool of instructors and trainers with limited time.
- Many NBOs mention dissatisfaction with the level of quality control, suggesting this may be an important area to improve.
- The focus in terms of developing well-practiced players is almost exclusively on developing partnerships over individual skills. However, at junior level training on individual technical skills works alongside partnership development.
- Subsidising junior programmes is a relatively contentious issue for NBOs, as there are often significant gaps in financing for bridge-related activities. The most common funding route is from Federations, local governing bodies, private funding from events and membership fees. However, sponsorship and donations from wealthy donors are also commonplace. Successful junior programmes tend to benefit from multiple sources of support.
- Limited financial support can lead to a culture of self-funding, a higher reliance on donations and private sponsorship deals to develop young players or a reduction in the amount of training and development resources that can be offered to juniors and new players.

## Gaining Top Level Experience

This section provides a summary, commentary on responses and examples to illustrate the key survey findings in relation to the support offered by NBOs for players gaining top level experience. The similarities, differences and insights between the large, medium and small NBOs are discussed in more detail below. Table 6 summarises key events aspiring internationals are encouraged to play in by NBOs.

**Table 6: Events aspiring internationals are encouraged to play in**

<b>All NBOs</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>USA</b>	We let players choose their division	Our national and regional tournaments.
<b>Netherlands</b>	National and/or regional level events. Team and pairs national leagues.	The Neighbours Challenge – Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Netherlands Channel Trophy vs France, Belgium and UK KO Cup. Open euro and world events
<b>France</b>	-	-
<b>Australia</b>	National and/or state level events.	Major events, which are required for entry into and seeding in the playoff events
<b>Sweden</b>	National and/or regional level events.	The NABCs and the Open Championships (Europeans and/or World Championships). ALT, OBCL
<b>England</b>	Any – all national events and adult trials	Spring 4s, Premier League The KOs do get good teams, but it can be difficult to stay in long enough to play many of them
<b>Denmark</b>	International events	Any international events with tough competition
<b>New Zealand</b>	All major national events	National youth events in Australia and WBF youth events.
<b>Norway</b>		Nordic championship.
<b>Japan</b>	National and/or state level events	JCBL offers financial support for sending a national team for the major regional and world events.
<b>Israel</b>	National and/or state level events	All international EBL/WBF championships, ACBL nationals. White House tournament at the time.
<b>Belgium</b>	National and/or state level events	Channel Trophy, all EBL and WBF events
<b>Poland</b>	National Championships, European Championships and World Championships.	Polish Children championships, Polish Junior Championships, Polish Championships for Youth in Schools, Youth Bridge Festivals, Lower Silesian Championships for Juniors, Summer Bridge Congresses, regional and occasional tournaments.
<b>Scotland</b>	National and/or regional level events	SBU Winter Fours, EBU Spring Foursomes, Sweden’s Chairman’s Cup and any other event outside Scotland.

<b>Turkey</b>	Due to economic conditions, we cannot encourage any international organization.	-
<b>Spain</b>	All of them.	-
<b>Greece</b>	Attend open events even when they are still novices	-
<b>South Africa</b>	Send teams that qualify to the World Bridge championships, other tournaments are left to the individuals to decide	-
<b>Austria</b>	-	Pula, Budapest, Wachauer Bridge Week, German Bridge Trophy
<b>Bulgaria</b>	-	-
<b>Croatia</b>	National and/or state level events	European and world championships. NBO championships. Established cheating-controlled international tournaments. Local fun tournaments.
<b>Romania</b>	International events	European Championship
<b>Latvia</b>	National and/or state level events	All the major ones + those which are near to Latvia: Tallin festival, Vilnius festival
<b>Czech R.</b>	-	-
<b>Morocco</b>	National and/or state level events	Zonal championships and the world championship and international tournaments
<b>Slovenia</b>	-	-
<b>Serbia</b>	National and/or state level events	Bridge festivals across the country and in neighbouring countries, after that we encourage them to visit international championships.
<b>Monaco</b>	-	-

**Question 22: What events do you encourage aspiring internationals to play in? (NB Not just juniors)**

### Large NBOs

Half of the NBOs encourage aspiring international players to play in national events (USA, Australia, England and New Zealand) (See Table 6). Five responses (from four of the NBOs) indicate a mixture of national and international competitions (USA, Netherlands, Sweden, England) and facing tough competition (USA, England, Denmark and Sweden) as a benefit to aspiring players. The following statements suggest that facing tough competition should be a key consideration for aspiring players seeking experience at national and international events:



*Spring 4s, Premier League are obvious - best chance of decent opposition. Try to play as many of the bigger national events as possible. The KOs do get good teams, but it can be difficult to stay in long enough to play many of them. (England, 6a)*

*In general, we let players choose their division; sometimes we have encouraged a talented youngster to play U21 instead of U26, but I don't think anyone would want to discourage a talented woman from playing in the open events. (USA, 1a)*

## **Medium NBOs**

Responses from four of the 11 medium NBOs endorse national events to be of benefit to aspiring international players (Japan, Norway, Poland and Turkey). However, the responses from Poland and Turkey note several potential issues regarding constraining factors (for getting players involved with events) such as economic constraints (Turkey) and lack of support in terms of personnel for trips to events with juniors (Poland). This is shown in the following examples:

*I hope that the youth in my care would meet their peers to play bridge. I can say that I try to have them participate in all the events organized in Poland for juniors: Polish Children championships, Polish Junior Championships, Polish Championships for Youth in Schools, Youth Bridge Festivals, Lower Silesian Championships for Juniors, Summer Bridge Congresses, regional and occasional tournaments. We are also organizers of local intergenerational and regional tournaments. There is too little support and in total no support from the school/schools – there is no support in the form of a guardian from the school during trips (I often have to involve my family members), there is no emphasis on players' successes in schools, their achievements are even diminished or not taken into the assessment of subjects on their yearly report cards. (Poland, 13b)*

*Due to economic conditions, we cannot encourage any international organization. (Turkey)*

Five of the 11 NBOs (Israel, Belgium, Poland, South Africa and Austria) suggest international events to be of greater benefit to aspiring international players. Two of the responses also mention that playing against strong players could help develop skills:

*I invite everyone to tournaments where strong pairs play because this way you can raise your level of play. (Poland, 13e)*

*I think the most valuable experience is when you play against a strong field, so whenever you can play against good players. On average the level of play in Poland is pretty high at both local and nationwide tournaments so I wouldn't exactly discourage people from playing in those. (Poland, 13f)*

National and international events are preferred as recommendations by four of the 11 remaining NBOs regarding the progression of aspiring international players (Poland, Scotland, Spain and Greece).

## Small NBOs

Two of nine of the small NBOs (Croatia and Romania) agree that international events are of benefit to aspiring international players. Three of the remaining small NBOs (Latvia, Morocco and Serbia) propose a combination of national and international events. The response from Bulgaria comments on the financial restrictions of NBOs and the responsibility of private sponsors to fund players to travel to events: *That is up to private sponsors – they would take the players wherever they want. But much less the last several years.*

## Summing Up: Recommended events

Responses from the large, medium, and small NBOs indicate that environments where players can test their skills against strong players are favoured (USA, England, Denmark, Sweden and Poland) as recommendations for aspiring international players to attend. The preference for national and international events is mediated by financial resources and the level of 'quality' competition available in the areas local to NBOs. Many NBOs across the spectrum note the financial or personnel limitations in relation to organising events with juniors. Support from private sponsors is highlighted as benefiting aspiring international players by giving them the 'freedom to choose' appropriate events to attend to further develop their skills.

## Question 23: Is there any support provided to do this?

### Large NBO

Six of eight of the large NBOs offer some form of support (for aspiring players) in the form of funding (USA, Sweden and New Zealand), assistance with getting sponsorships in place (Netherlands and Sweden) or help with discounts and expenses for players invited to play at events (Australia and England). The following examples discuss issues with finding sponsorship for players and subsidies offered to youth players as support:

*For open tournaments they try to find players sponsors, e.g., Oscar and Tim are 22 years and recently came second in the open World teams in Wroclaw (Aug 2022). It does mean they play a lot and do not study much – one is due to finish undergrad degree soon, but they think their studies have taken a back seat. (Netherlands)*

*Junior squad members get free entry to selected national events. There may also be support if invited to play in a foreign (non-junior) event. (England, 6a)*

One of the responses from Sweden also express an interest in more support being offered to players from the (major) governing bodies such as the WBF/EBL:

*I think the WBF/EBL could help sponsor new players coming to their tournaments by giving a discount to teams consisting of players who didn't play in their open events before (and give a junior discount, of course. (Sweden, 5a)*

## Medium NBOs

There is a (near) fifty-fifty split in the responses from medium-sized NBOs that are/are not able to offer support for aspiring international players (including juniors). Nine responses from five of the medium NBOs (Poland, Scotland, Turkey, Spain and Greece) report that little or no support is offered to aspiring players. Conversely, nine responses from five of the medium NBOs suggest there is (limited) support offered in the form of expenses or assistance with travel and accommodation (Norway, Israel, South Africa and Austria). Additionally, several responses express concern over the lack of support and the subsequent drain on their own personal resources (to fund trips and to support players:

*There is too little support and in total no support from the school/schools – there is no support in the form of a guardian from the school during trips (I often have to involve my family members), there is no emphasis on players' successes in schools, their achievements are even diminished or not taken into the assessment of subjects on their yearly report cards. (Poland, 13b)*

*We have no such support. I have to organize everything from my own resources, help from friends (Poland, 13e)*

*The SBU rarely provides support for juniors to play in non-representative international events, like the Chairman's Cup. It does not support non-juniors. (Scotland, 14c)*

## Small NBOs

Four of the nine small NBOs report offering some (or limited) support in the form of partnerships and sponsorships (Morocco), funding from Olympic boards (Croatia) or expenses and discounts for players (Croatia, Latvia, and Serbia). Of the nine NBOs, two (Bulgaria and Romania) suggest no support is offered and the remaining countries offer no response to the question. The most extensive response (and structure for funding present) of the small NBOs is reported by Croatia, who had funding from the Olympic board in place, alongside subsidies and discounts available to players at events:

*Yes, the Federation pay part of the costs as we get support from Croatian Olympic board. Mostly clubs. It is rather cheap whatsoever. Some tournaments invite players or juniors, but mostly players pay themselves. Usually cheap and entries go for food/drinks. (Croatia)*

## Summing Up: Support for events

There is a split evident in the hierarchy of the large, medium, and small NBOs in terms of the support they are able to offer aspiring players. Larger NBOs have a wider range of options available regarding assisting players to find sponsorship (Netherlands and Sweden) or helping to pay for expenses (Australia and England). For medium and small NBOs, sponsorship deals for players appears to happen infrequently, although many medium NBOs are still able to offer limited expenses and financial aid where available. For small NBOs, the opportunity for support

tends to be scarcer with only three of the nine small NBOs reporting assistance as offered. There are also several responses that highlight more could be done to improve this area, offering greater endowment to aspiring players in conjunction with the governing bodies.

### **Gaining Top Level Experience: Key Points**

- For large NBOs (with ample resources and strong support from external organisations or private funders), players are more likely to be able to access sponsorship, financial help, and a variety of opportunities to play at a wide range of national and international events. This facilitates the development of skills and relationships with other top-level players.
- Such opportunities decrease for players in medium and smaller sized NBOs (where provision of sponsorship is almost completely absent) as funding and assistance becomes scarcer.
- Countries with less well-established bridge communities and financial structures have greater difficulties accessing funding and sponsorship. Aspiring players may have to contribute significant personal finances in order to play which may act as a deterrent to many.
- For large, medium, and smaller NBOs, besides Federation support, many of the financial enablers are privately financed with only a few NBOs noting support from sporting or educational bodies.

## Challenges and Opportunities

This section summarises the responses from Questions 24 to 28 of the training and development survey addressing 'other' issues or challenges faced by NBOs. Concerns addressed are: Key challenges and barriers to success for NBOs; Key enablers and opportunities; Gender issues; Advice for small NBOs; and Final thoughts on support offered to international players. Answers to a follow-up question relating to fees for annual memberships are also summarised, with commentary and examples from the survey provided throughout.

### **Question 24: What are the key challenges or barriers to success? (regarding above issues)**

#### **Large NBOs**

Three responses from two of the eight large NBOs (USA and England) mention 'funding' as a key barrier to success. England and Australia discuss challenges relating to the recruitment of new players too. Five of the remaining large NBOs also address 'players' short attention spans' (Netherlands and Denmark), lack of time commitment (Denmark and England) and too few opportunities for engagement with and recruitment of new players (Australia, England and New Zealand). The difficulty surrounding the age gap between younger and more experienced (older) players is also noted by the response from Australia. It can be hard to keep players engaged which can be exacerbated in partnerships with large age gaps between the players. One NBO (Netherlands) focuses on the need to review training approaches and keep teaching methods up to date due to changing behaviours of younger players. The following examples provide a selection of the responses outlined above:

*Cost of getting to all these events. Accommodation, food, travel. Lack of contact time at the sharp end. Ideally, we'd have a lot more people playing, but to be honest, there is enough 'talent' in any single school in the country to win a medal at a major championship. We have so few actual players that getting any single school involved fully would match that easily. It is simply a case of doing the hard yards and training, training, training. At the younger age groups, we've realised so little of their ability at that stage. This is attainable for any nation - if you are actually prepared to commit to it. And it can be very low cost if you're smart. The resource is people. (England, 6a)*

*Two things: 1) Need to adapt to what youth players need/like/want and use more apps for teaching youth. Youth are always on their phones, they need shorter bridge-related things they can do quickly on their phones, and progress to the next level – so a ten-minute activity and progression, like other digital games. They are no longer going to go to clubs to learn bridge in 10 lessons. If they cannot make 4 lessons, they need to catch up online – but most NBOs are not able to offer this. Bridge learning is not easy so make it more like a game, and more fun*

*2) Need to review teaching methods. We tend to teach based on traditional approaches – such as reading from books. For youth – start with a 3-card game – making all the tricks, when done, then progress to a 4-card game (someone in India developed this). Bidding is boring, they need to start with play: how to take tricks, finesse, so it's more fun. Methods need to be redeveloped to teach youth to play. More apps instead of books. Need more online approaches, and much more flexibility, and fun. (Netherlands)*

*Having a continuous flow of junior players coming in. Keeping all players engaged when there are gaps in abilities. Keeping all players engaged with age gaps in partnerships. Once systems/initiatives are put in place, keeping them going long term. It is an ongoing challenge to keep young players interested in bridge when the typical bridge player is of a different generation. It relates to the bridge population in general rather than their mentors. (Australia)*

## **Medium NBOs**

Four of the 11 medium NBOs (Belgium, Poland, Turkey and Austria) mention financial limitations as a barrier to success. One NBO (Norway) notes that the differential between ‘the best and second-best players’ is significant, leading to frustration for aspiring players: “It is hard for aspiring players to imagine that they will get a chance any time soon”. Like large NBOs, three responses (from two of the medium NBOs) refer to the commitment of players as a barrier (Poland and Scotland), in addition to there being limitations around ‘having a small pool of juniors’ and a lack of competition for places (Scotland). Three of the 11 medium NBOs also suggest ‘popularity’ (or lack of popularity) of bridge in their geographical area may act as a barrier to success (Japan, Poland and South Africa) with one response (Poland) endorsing that more school programmes could be of benefit to address these issues. They also refer to a lack of resources acting as barriers:

*Having a very small pool of juniors is very difficult. They do not have to provide any commitment in order to play international junior bridge. There is practically no competition for places. The main challenge with a small number of juniors is availability and commitment. They all struggle balancing their education and/or multiple jobs, so even getting time to play international events is difficult. None of the juniors live in the same area, so face-to-face games and training are a real challenge. (Scotland, 14c)*

*No bridge classes in school, bridge is not popularized very well, no cooperation between the Polish Bridge Federation and the Ministry of Education and Board of Trustees. There is a complete lack of information on the education websites about bridge events, there is even no honorary patron of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sports and Tourism or provincial curators over the Polish Championships or Voivodeship Championships. I think that experienced players should be obligated to share their knowledge and play with young people. (Poland, 13b)*

*As other minor sports like skateboard etc have succeeded recently, good news about the Japanese players in the international competitions could be an effective content upon promoting bridge. (Actually, JCBL has had no concept of ‘marketing’ and proper promotion activities until very recently) (Japan)*

*I think the number of programmes in schools to teach bridge should be increased, I think making bridge a mandatory class at school would be a good idea. Both in terms of benefits for the kids (developing analytical skills, etc.) as well as the bridge community itself since the total number of people which would stay in the community and/or drift into the more competitive field would increase. (Poland, 13f)*

*Here in South Africa, we are an aging and diminishing group of bridge players in a country where Bridge is not seen as an African game. All I can tell you is that we battle on. (South Africa)*

## **Small NBOs**

For the smaller NBOs, over half (five of nine of the small NBOs) note that financial pressures are the primary barrier to success (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia and Monaco). Four of the remaining small NBOs raise practical issues, including: a lack of support from schools, universities, trainers, and coaches (Latvia), difficulty with keeping players engaged (Czech Republic), the perception of bridge as a 'game of chance' (Morocco) and too little proactive action from their bridge organisations over the years (Slovenia). These significant barriers are shown in the following examples:

*Money is needed to have more pros who play in higher profile events. Our Federation has no money and there almost no private sponsors anymore. (Bulgaria)*

*Too many European/world championships of different kinds and too expensive for events without prizes. They decrease the value (inflation) and simultaneously hurt tournaments organized by NBOs or private organizations. EBL and WBF create unfair competition because they are, by definition, more prestigious than tournaments and provide masterpoints. (Croatia)*

*Most difficult is to retain youth players – not hard to attract them and teach them. But need to create connections and friends in order to keep them – but takes time investment, and no clear outcomes about how many numbers we will end up with. Expensive to attend youth camps. (Czech Republic)*

*The main obstacle is that this sport of the mind is considered by a large majority of people as a game of chance and that we cannot popularize it. (Morocco)*

## **Summing Up: Key challenges or barriers**

For large, medium, and small NBOs, funding (or lack thereof) is seen as a significant barrier to success. However, the number of responses that mention this as an issue increase (progressively) for medium and smaller-sized NBOs, with 36% of medium-sized NBOs (Belgium, Poland, Turkey and Austria) and over half of smaller NBOs (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia and Monaco) citing financial stressors as their primary barrier. Lack of support from educational and government bodies also feature in responses in relation to areas where funding and communication could be improved (Poland). It is evident that, whilst all NBOs appear to some extent to have difficulties with securing and accessing adequate finance, medium and smaller NBOs experience the consequences of this more acutely in their day-to-day activities. As a result, this may impact their ability to recruit and retain new players (to the same level of larger NBOs), have implications for competitiveness of training and events, and limit resources available to expand current programmes. In turn this may constrain the development of new revenue streams for their organisations.

Player commitment and the changing behaviours of players are also frequently mentioned by large NBOs (50% of responses) and medium NBOs (18% of responses). Small NBOs cite more difficulties with getting and keeping players engaged (Czech Republic), and a lack of support from bridge organisations (Slovenia) contributing to the suffering of financial hardship. Whilst many players refer to the 'short attention' span or changing behaviours of younger players and the adoption of new technologies (APPs, new training regimes) to engage younger players appears to offer a promising solution in the short to midterm (Netherlands). Any changes to training, however, commands ample financial and human resources that many medium and smaller-sized NBOs may struggle to acquire and manage within their current budgetary limitations.

### **Question 25: What are the key enablers and opportunities regarding the above issues?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Two of the eight large NBOs report that technology (England), events and online resources (USA) act as key enablers for their organisation. Three of the remaining large NBOs note that 'people' were their most important resources in the form of coordinators, the 'individual efforts' of players and trainers to grow the sport (Australia and England) and 'having the right people to do the jobs' (Denmark). One of the large NBOs (Netherlands) also suggest that 'changing the image of bridge' acts as a strong enabler as many people do not know much about the sport (in their country) and therefore there is room to make it more appealing to a greater number of people. These issues are outlined in more detail in the following statements from Australia, England, and the Netherlands:

*State-based youth coordinators, which are most effective when the juniors have already been identified and need opportunities to improve. Individual efforts. Some of these people have run programs which have attracted 10+ players over a period of a couple of years, which leads to a concentration of youth players for some time. (Australia)*

*Technology obviously. The advent of the U16 squad has been without doubt the best thing to happen to Bridge in recent times. It has also redefined what I thought was possible in young players. When U21 was the youngest group, we used to get players at 16-17 and they'd be OK at 18-19 (usually). Now we get players at 10-11 and they start to click at around 13. I've looked at Youth development models - they exist for physical sports (e.g. LTAD), but nothing exists for mind sports. The best I could find related to how mental development occurs as children grow up and mature. It takes a while to develop all the cognitive processes and 13 appears to be the age that lateral thinking skills begin to develop. Bridge has some maths and logic, but it is an imperfect game - being able to manage that imperfection requires lateral thinking and innovation and I think this mental development step is critical to the maturation of young players. (England, 6a)*

*Most people (90%) do not know what bridge is in Holland – so there is an opportunity to change the image of bridge. Poker is sexy, quick, easy to learn, and you can earn money. We need to do something similar for bridge, but I don't know how. (Netherlands)*



## Medium NBOs

Two of the 11 medium-sized NBOs mention additional training (Belgium) and mentoring (Norway) could act as enablers for success. Three responses from two of the remaining NBOs emphasise technology as an enabler in terms of using online platforms such as BBO (Scotland), using communication tools (used by younger players) to adapt programmes to their needs (Scotland), and the ability to set up more (online) events to engage players (Greece). Promotion and advertisement of bridge organisations to grow revenue streams are also suggested as enablers for success by four responses from three of the nine medium NBOs (Japan, Poland and Turkey). Improved funding (Poland and South Africa) and a reduction in fees for events (South Africa) are also noted. The following statements outline these issues in more detail in relation to: promotion of bridge organisations to increase revenue (Poland); more funding required (Poland); adapting to players' needs and new technologies (Scotland); and the need for fee reductions (South Africa):

*Send the presidents of the voivodeship Federations to the Board of Trustees, arrange patronage, present the winners of each bridge event on education and local government websites. Promote bridge activities at meetings with school principals. Teach young teachers how to play bridge and integrate the basics of bridge into the curriculum. Extend voluntary work into Retirement Homes to teaching and playing bridge. (Poland, 13b)*

*I think the key is the funds to support junior programs, encouraging both private sponsors as well as government officials to invest money in developing bridge players and bridge programs. (Poland, 13f)*

*The junior coordinator needs to be a good communicator and show a roadmap of how the young players can develop and the opportunities that are available to them. Then they need to get buy-in from the juniors to do this. Use the technology used by the juniors to communicate with them. Develop a common bidding system so that juniors can play in any partnership. Take advantage of free tools to build competition and engage the juniors: for example, cuebids.com is a mobile app for bidding practice. Build a competitive junior community around this. (Scotland, 14c)*

*Financial support would be good: perhaps the WBF could reduce its fees for poor nations such as ourselves? But on a more practical note, the setting up of regular tournaments online of top players from around the world would be very attractive for us and definitely inspire and improve the level of bridge at our top end. We hold regular matches (1 every month or two) against Scotland with 6 or 7 teams participating and I am amazed how popular this is. What if we could hold these more regularly with teams from other countries involved? Perhaps set up an international league and have 1st and 2nd divisions etc. like football? (South Africa)*

## Small NBOs

Two of the nine small NBOs mention 'funding' as key enablers for success (Bulgaria and Serbia) alongside training of teachers and marketing strategies (Bulgaria and Morocco), collaboration with tournaments and monetary prizes as incentives, and better cheating controls (Croatia). One NBO

(Romania) also considers (like the response from the Netherlands) that 'rejuvenating the image of bridge' is a key enabler for success:

*Preparing teachers. Setting up a strong marketing campaign. Get in touch with schools. Win projects to fund bridge teaching. First, get more people to play the game and help for the self-funding of the Federation and create marketing interest from corporate sponsors. None of this is happening right now. (Bulgaria)*

*Introduction of bridge as an extracurricular activity in schools and universities. Promote bridge as a sport for company staff and create teams within companies. (Morocco)*

*One event in two years. Money prizes corresponding to entries. Better cheating control. Collaboration with tournaments (dates etc.) (Croatia)*

### **Summing Up: Key enablers and opportunities**

Technology is highlighted as an enabler for success by 25% of the large NBOs (England and USA) and 18% of medium-sized NBOs (Scotland and Greece). No mention of these factors is present in the responses received from smaller NBOs. Adequate funding is a key enabler for NBOs, with 27% of responses from medium-sized NBOs and 22% from smaller NBOs featuring this in their answers. In contrast, 'funding' is not viewed as a key enabler in the responses received from large NBOs. These favour 'people' as a resource (38% of responses) as their most prominent enabler for success.

For medium NBOs, 'marketing' and 'advertisement' feature prominently in responses, with 27% of the medium NBOs featuring this as an enabler in their answer (Poland and Turkey). For smaller NBOs, the answers are relatively consistent (with some of the responses from larger and medium NBOs) with funding (Bulgaria and Serbia), people as a resource (Bulgaria), marketing and rejuvenating the image of bridge (Romania) all seen as key enablers by small NBOs.

### **Question 26: What, if any, are the gender issues regarding the support and development of international players?**

#### **Large NBOs**

Differences between the perceived quality of the women's category (relative to the open and mixed categories) are noted by three of the eight large NBOs (USA, France and Sweden). The response from the USA suggests it is viewed 'as a second-class category', and the response from Sweden emphasises that often women are pushed towards the women's category due to low numbers of top women players despite 'being good enough' for the open category. Many responses from large NBOs (five of the eight) allude to there being fewer players who are women (Netherlands, Sweden, USA and New Zealand) and higher dropout rates for women (Australia). In contrast, two of the large NBOs note that they see no gender issues at all (Denmark and Sweden). The following examples from the USA, Sweden and Australia outline these issues in more detail:

*I don't see gender as a big issue in our junior program, but there is a lot I might not know. I do see a trend of the most talented young women opting to play in the open junior category, rather than the young women's division. I welcome that personally, but it does further the impression that women's bridge, even at the junior level, is somehow second class. In our upcoming Junior USBC, the four teams entered U26W are weak (but they are playing and, I hope, many will continue with bridge); the strongest young women players are on open junior teams. (USA, 1a)*

*There are certainly many gender issues. For one, it's very easy to quickly start considering female bridge juniors as material for the young women's category rather than the open category. There has been plenty of cases in the past where more merited and skilled female players haven't been elected to play in the open categories because they were "needed" to compose a young women's team. For some years now Sweden hasn't had a participating team in the young women's category. On the other hand, many female players have played in the U16/U21/U26 category. It is hard to know if enough female players have been given the chance they deserve, however, and if they have been properly encouraged to participate in the open category. It's possible that the open teams should have had even more women on them. (Sweden, 5a)*

*Women are more likely to drop out of serious competition when leaving juniors. We do not have a clear understanding of why, but anecdotal evidence includes: Lack of professional opportunities for women; Career; Starting a family; Difficulty in finding open teammates. (Australia)*

## **Medium NBOs**

Seven responses from five of the medium-sized NBOs (Belgium, Poland, Scotland, Turkey, and Austria) state that they saw no issues in relation to gender, support and development of international players. South Africa do not offer a response to the question, however seven responses (from five of the remaining large NBOs) imply that women have less time to commit to playing (Poland), that there are not enough female players (Israel and Poland), fewer opportunities available for women to play with good players (Poland) that girls do not have the same development as boys, and 'struggle to compete at the same level' (Greece). Scotland raise the issue of higher costs incurred regarding accommodation: "The only issue is cost associated with additional hotel rooms when numbers are not balanced and the mix of accompanying/supervising adults." Additionally, one response from the medium-sized NBOs (Norway) highlight that outspoken sexism is still an issue that is a barrier for women. The following examples from Norway, Greece and Poland offer accounts of the issues reported in more detail:

*It's an ongoing debate of which of the junior teams talented young girls should play for. At the moment I think we solve this quite well. Outspoken sexism (i.e., women are not as intelligent as men, and thus would never reach top level in the open category) from some of the open team members is a barrier. (Norway)*

*It is true that girls don't have the same development as boys, although they start from the same basis, since there a lot of factors (e.g., family environment, maternity, etc). It is a challenge to find ways to help them compete at the same level. (Greece)*

*I think there are fewer women who play professionally, in Poland girls have fewer opportunities to play with good players and get noticed. However, this may be due also to the issue of fewer women's tournaments, if there were more events dedicated to girls, I think more girls would be tempted to stay in the bridge community. (Poland, 13f)*

### **Small NBOs**

Two of the nine small NBOs state there are no gender issues (Serbia and Romania), whereas two of the remaining responses suggest that often 'women compete more than men', and that there are more male international players than women (Bulgaria). Furthermore, the response from Croatia suggests that women have better opportunities to get to events and pick their partners, although girls are 'less interested in cards' than boys (Croatia):

*Playing strength. The gender doesn't matter but so it happens that almost only men become internationals, just because they play better. However, for a period of 15 years a woman was among the best and she was always playing in sponsored teams internationally. Everyone is judged by how good their game is. (Bulgaria)*

*Girls have better chances than boys since everyone wants to play with 20-year-old girl, and not necessarily with 20 year old boy. Also, it will be easier to find transport to the tournament/club if you are a girl. Since there are not so many of them in bridge, girls are always in focus and treasured. As it should be. However, more often than boys, girls stop to play because of maternity and other home obligations, and it may be difficult to come back. Also, girls are generally less interested in card games than boys. In adulthood, at least in Croatia, it is better (easier, more convenient) to be a woman. Besides the open, woman can enter the women and mixed competitions. When it comes to mixed, lady is the one who chooses partner, and he will usually adjust to her wishes regarding system, style etc. He may as well buy drinks and drive to the competition. (Croatia)*

*Gender issues do not exist in BSS. If anything, there are competitions where women participate more than men. In Serbia there are the Women's only championship, the Mixed championship, and all other competitions for open class where women can participate. On the other side there are no "Men's only championships". (Serbia)*

### **Summing Up: Gender issues**

In the sample for this study, 25% of larger NBOs and nearly 50% of medium and smaller NBOs state that there are no issues in relation to gender and the support and development of international players. Where issues are reported, these commonly refer to the differences between the quality of the women's category relative to the open and mixed category, with 38% of larger NBOs mentioning this as a factor (USA, France and Sweden). In contrast, 50% of large NBOs (Netherlands, Sweden, USA and New Zealand) mention there being lower numbers of female players.

Similarly, 45% of medium-sized NBOs note issues (along gender lines) with women. These are reported as having less time to commit to playing (Poland), fewer opportunities (Poland), higher costs incurred regarding accommodation (Scotland), too few female players (Israel and Poland),

and that women ‘struggle to compete at the same level’ as men (Greece). Small NBOs provided several mixed opinions in conflict to large and medium NBOs, suggesting that women played more than men (Bulgaria) and that women have better opportunities in many cases (Croatia). Interestingly, one response from Norway suggests that outspoken sexism is still an issue that is a barrier for women. Israel have recently introduced a training programme targeted at aspiring young women players in order to address gender inequalities in bridge. Generally, the majority of (large, small, and medium-sized) NBOs do not overtly address sexism in their responses. However, it may be that some gender issues are ingrained and normalised so are not necessarily considered as problematic. There is recent research which discusses gender inequalities, sexism and neurosexism in relation to bridge (Punch et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2022).

**Question 27: What advice would you give for a small NBO, with limited resources, regarding how they should focus their efforts for developing international players?**

### **Large NBOs**

Two of the responses from the large NBOs suggest that smaller NBOs could borrow the models from larger NBOs (USA) or align themselves with a large NBO (New Zealand) to help them make the most of their resources and develop international players. Three of the remaining large NBOs consider good strategies to include: seeking private funding (Sweden), focusing on talented players, improved training and mentoring (Australia), and getting top players involved (England). Two of the large NBOs (Denmark and Netherlands) suggest increased online events and international events could prove a useful resource for small NBOs, as shown in the following examples:

*Holland is in a luxury position – we are a small country, with reachable geography and are well resourced via government/national lottery funding. Small NBOs need to focus on what the possibilities are, instead of focusing on what’s not possible. They need to have a positive view and look for solutions – what can we do? Use a lot of online training, and get people to support it, it’s cheap. Take advantage of the possibilities. Do exercises by zoom, discuss hands over zoom after play. (Netherlands)*

*Identify and focus on a core group of talented players (somewhere around 10). Require commitment to facilitate continuous improvement. Make it easy for new and dedicated players to join. Provide learning and competition opportunities for players. Mentoring from top players. Use available resources to shape learning sessions. (Australia)*

### **Medium NBOs**

Three of the 11 medium-sized NBOs recommend that getting top level players (Norway), coaches and trainers (Poland and Turkey) involved could benefit smaller NBOs. Four responses from three of the medium-sized NBOs advocate that the most important factor for aspiring smaller NBOs is ‘getting young people involved’ (Israel, Poland and Scotland). The social and ‘fun’ element of bridge is stressed by two of the medium-sized NBOs (Scotland and Greece) to engage more players

with the mindsport. Additionally, collaboration with other NBOs and managing Human Resources are seen as important by others:

*Hire a good coach. It's only this or as much as this. If you have properly conducted training, you will have many players and successes. In addition, encourage juniors to travel so that they can gain contacts and an opportunity to compete with young people from other cities and countries. (Poland, 13a)*

*The most important thing is human resources. A group of people involved in this task should be recruited and trained in this process – recently it has been very difficult (many players have not returned to the club since the pandemic) and young bridge players are still a rare phenomenon. Look for active teachers to train children in schools. (Poland, 13b)*

*We are such a small NBO, and apart from financial resources to support players efficiently, one of our biggest problems is to find volunteers working for the Federation or supporting their projects. All our efforts to find sponsors were not successful because of too few members. Our bridge community (apart from some exceptions) is not interested in spending money for a small group of players (juniors or international players). As we could not solve these problems of a small NBO sufficiently we do not want to give any advice to any other NBO. (Austria)*

### **Small NBOs**

For small NBOs, three of the nine NBOs mention getting 'the best players' (Serbia), volunteering and training in schools and universities (Morocco), and coaching (Romania) as important aspects for small NBOs to consider in their strategies. Additionally, 'playing big events' (Bulgaria), developing a strong bridge community (Croatia) and having enthusiastic and dedicated people involved (Latvia) are also deemed to be important:

*By becoming a big Federation. It is nonsense to develop international bridge when you don't have mass bridge. The latter supports the former, not the other way around. To build international players they need to play several big events every year, like the US nationals. For that you need private sponsors. For more sponsors, you need mass bridge. Simple. (Bulgaria)*

*To make strong solidary bridge community where it will come naturally to help each other. (Croatia)*

*We would advise them to try and do the same as we did. Focus on getting the best players from all over the country to represent their club. (Serbia)*

### **Summing Up: Advice for small NBOs**

Large NBOs infer that borrowing models from larger NBOs (USA and New Zealand), seeking private funding (Sweden) and improving training and mentoring opportunities (Australia and England) are good strategies for small NBOs to utilise to improve. Similarly, improved involvement of 'top players', coaching and training is mentioned by 27% of the medium-sized NBOs in their responses and 33% of smaller NBOs responses.

For medium-sized NBOs, 27% of responses relate to 'getting young people involved' (Israel, Poland and Scotland), whereas this does not feature as prominently in the responses from the large and small NBOs. The importance of collaboration with other NBOs and people as a valuable resource are noted by large (USA and New Zealand) and medium NBOs (Poland). The responses suggest there are multiple avenues smaller NBOs can take to develop international players, regardless of financial limitations. However, greater financial support may facilitate a greater level of opportunities to expand programmes, recruit appropriate trainers and coaches, and to provide a variety of events and programmes to engage younger players.

**Question 28: Any other thoughts or comments on how you best support people to become international-standard players?**

**Large NBOs**

Two of eight of the large NBOs state that non-technical skills (sports psychology, resilience training) are as important as technical skills when it comes to bridge training (Netherlands and Denmark). Three of the remaining NBOs consider the importance of having top players as mentors (USA), improving incentives for players by linking commitment shown by players to access to training (Australia) and greater utilisation of online tools (England) as important additional features of note:

*Non-technical training is also important: some mental training, sports psychology, takes place with top juniors, open and women teams – perhaps 20 hours in total. Supported also by the Dutch Olympic Committee – more with pairs or individuals in the open team. They talk with them and the outputs of that are private, not shared with the Federation. Mental issues such as resilience for long events, coping with bad boards and bad results, arguing with partner, not liking playing against a particular opponent, how to prepare well, team skills etc. (Netherlands)*

*Link access to resources to demonstrate player commitment – there should be an expectation that the governing body supports players who commit their own time and effort to improve. In my view, the ABF should prioritise funding and training effort towards those players rather than just looking at who does the best in a selection trial. (Australia)*

*Got to be smarter with use of online tools/training, better data analysis (this is starting to happen - see LoveBridge) and how it challenges preconceived ideas within the game. (England, 6a)*

**Medium NBOs**

Medium-sized NBOs express several opinions in relation to supporting players to become international standard players. Two of the medium-sized NBOs suggest a level of inequality in bridge in terms of a need to focus on women players (Israel), and in terms of the economic conditions of each country and bridge organisation (Turkey). In contrast, many responses address

the need for more sponsorship and additional funding (Poland and Scotland), difficulties with balancing family, work, and bridge activities (Poland) and a decrease in numbers of members due to the pandemic (Austria). This is shown in more detail in the following examples:

*Note that these comments are based on my experience from 5-10 years ago. The main problems I encountered were: 1) Funding. A small NBO is unlikely to have a decent budget for Junior development. 2) Getting commitment from juniors who often had many other things in their lives to give their time to. Also unwilling/unable to spend money on bridge. (Scotland, 14a)*

*You can play bridge at any age. To become a high-class player, you have to sacrifice yourself to bridge. Reconciling professional and family matters with high-level bridge is extremely difficult. Your family life can suffer. As a youth coach, I emphasize the unique qualities of bridge, but I am not a fan of putting bridge before my family and work. It is then difficult to talk about support here, rather professional bridge. (Poland, 13c)*

*As in almost every sport, there is an inequality of opportunity in bridge. It is easier to find support in countries with good economic conditions. That's why countries that are less likely to find sponsors should focus more on younger age groups. It's a little easier to keep the motivation of the younger ones warm. (Turkey)*

*Currently our Federation has one real big problem: We lost a sixth part of our members during the pandemic. The bridge clubs don't have enough players during their club tournaments. Some of them live from their financial reserves. Some clubs have been dissolved. We lost players to online bridge. We try to help the clubs for instance with a new and interesting competition – especially focussed on non-experienced players – from April 2023 to October 2023, organized by the board of the federation – to encourage analogue bridge. That's why our focus cannot be on the international players now. But we want to start with a series of tournaments in January 2023 (two times a month) especially for young players up to 35 also including the participation of top and routine players and the opportunity to discuss interesting boards after the tournaments. (Austria)*

### **Small NBOs**

For small NBOs, having a resilient bridge culture is noted by Bulgaria as vital for success (Bulgaria). Free participation in competitions and adequate training and analysis (Romania) are also seen as important. In addition, two NBO suggest changes to the national selection procedures (Croatia) and WBF led conferences (Morocco):

*I am not sure what international-standard means? To play regularly for a national selection? I don't even think it is good idea, I think players in national selections should change. Bridge is so much more than playing for a national selection, and if you play regularly, you may forget what an honour it is. (Croatia)*

*Free participation in competitions, then analyse the results together with a coach and of course, training, training. (Romania)*



*Organization by the WBF of conferences and round tables on the subject on the side-lines of all international WBF competitions. (Morocco)*

### **Summing Up: Final thoughts**

For large, medium, and small NBOs, a variety of responses are offered in terms of how best to support players to become international players. Several from large NBOs focus on the psychological, or non-technical aspects of bridge training (Netherlands and Denmark). For smaller NBOs, the importance of 'bridge culture' is stressed for building an environment for players to succeed (Bulgaria). For medium NBOs, difficulties with balancing family, work, and bridge activities (Poland) and a decrease in numbers of members due to the pandemic (Austria) are raised as concerns. In addition, the requirement for increased levels of sponsorship and additional funding are discussed (Poland and Scotland).

### **Challenges and Opportunities: Key points**

- Lack of funding is a significant barrier for the success of all NBOs.
- Smaller NBOs struggle to manage limited resources and lack access to educational and government support.
- Cooperation of educational and government bodies benefits funding opportunities, recruitment of players and training opportunities for NBOs.
- NBOs have struggled to adapt to changing player behaviour (amongst younger audiences), with technology and online platforms a successful strategy employed by some NBOs (underutilised by smaller NBOs).
- Proactive marketing and promotion of bridge can have positive benefits for player recruitment and engagement.
- Gender issues are a contentious issue. There are fewer female players and no proactive (joined up) strategy across NBOs to address the divide between the open, mixed and women's categories.
- For smaller NBOs to succeed, 'pooling resources' with and borrowing models from larger NBOs could be useful avenues to explore.

### **Question 29: How much does it cost a player to be a member of your NBO each year?**

Table 7 summarises the results from a follow-up question sent out to respondents and provides a snapshot of current annual membership fees for NBOs.

**Table 7: Annual fee membership of NBOs who participated in this study**

WBF Zone	Country	Membership (official)	Cost in £	Size
NABF	USA	120,675	£42	Large
EBL	Netherlands	64,819	£26	Large
EBL	France	56,322	1 euro per pair each time (86p)	Large
SPBF	Australia	33,722	£9 (ABF) Plus £5.60 (state Association)	Large
EBL	Sweden	18,858	£21.50	Large
EBL	England	18,612	£33	Large
EBL	England	18,612	£0.42 per play plus 7p for county	Large
EBL	Denmark	18,100	£46	Large
SPBF	New Zealand	12,649	£12	Large
EBL	Norway	7,488	£22.50	Medium
APBF	Japan	6,570	£59.73	Medium
EBL	Israel	6,302	£26	Medium
EBL	Belgium	5,355		Medium
EBL	Poland	5,208	£36	Medium
EBL	Scotland	4,991	£8	Medium
EBL	Turkey	4,560	£13	Medium
EBL	Spain	4,235	£22	Medium
EBL	Greece	2,763		Medium
ABF	South Africa	2,288	£10	Medium
EBL	Austria	2,241	£41	Medium
EBL	Bulgaria	702		Small
EBL	Croatia	593		Small
EBL	Romania	471	Only 1 euro/month = £10.32	Small
EBL	Latvia	316	£9	Small
EBL	Czech Republic	294		Small
ABF	Morocco	294	£35	Small
EBL	Slovenia	290		Small
EBL	Serbia	170		Small
EBL	Monaco	135	7 euros per play = £6.02 each time	Small
Total	28	8 Large, 11 Medium, 9 Small NBOs		

The annual membership fees range from between £8 (Scotland) and £59.73 (Japan). Four NBOs charge fees over £40 (Japan, Denmark, USA and Austria), three over £30 (Poland, Morocco and England), five over £20 (Netherlands, Israel, Norway, Sweden and Spain), three over £10 (Turkey, New Zealand and Romania) and four NBOs charge less than £10 (South Africa, Australia, Latvia and Scotland). Additionally, France and England mention having a ‘pay to play’ system in place (see Table 7) where players pay a small fee each time they play. For most players this is likely to end up more than the average NBO fee.

Nine NBOs (Large - USA, Sweden, New Zealand; Medium - Poland, Scotland, Turkey, Spain, Austria; Small - Romania) offer some form of discount to juniors or on a stepped scale depending on player age. Several NBOs also have a more complicated split, involving a combination of fees for their Federation, for a regional organisation, payment for events (Australia, Sweden, England, Latvia) and pay to play systems (France, Monaco, Israel). As such, fees can vary depending on the regulations that are in place for each region. Discounts offered (i.e. to juniors) are often determined at the club level to offer incentives for youth players. Other NBOs also replied to this follow-up question and their fees are summarised in Table 8.

**Table 8: Annual fee membership of NBOs who did not participate in this study**

WBF Zone	Country	Membership (official)	COST in £	Size
EBL	Hungary	551	£26	Small
CAC	Bermuda	165	£148	Small
APBF	Korea	293	£38	Small
CAC	Guatemala	22	£83	Small
CAC	Trinidad and Tobago	32	£19	Small
CSB	Chile	688	£10	Small
EBL	Wales	1,357	£10	Small
EBL	CBAI	5,270	£10.75	Medium
CSB	Argentina	953	£2.50 per month - £30	Medium
NABF	Canada	4,220	£12.50	Medium
Total	10	3 Medium, 7 Small NBOs		

Please note that a follow-up Practice Implications Report can be found on the [BAMSA website](#). It provides an overview of the implications of these findings for national bridge organisations.

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