

Training and Development: NBO Implications for Practice

Scottish Bridge Union (SBU) Strategic Objective

Support players, develop players, and select teams so that results in international competitions rank highly relative to comparable NBOs.

SCHOOL BRIDGE

The research from 28 NBOs indicates that to achieve this Strategic Objective, one of the critical success factors is to build a critical mass of young players who learn bridge during their years of education. Consequently, one of the **SBU's Goals must be to have a strong school programme**. The NBO research indicates that:

Preconditions needed to achieve that Goal are

- Access to a large volume of children and youth players aged 10 -21
- Engagement with primary and secondary schools
- The availability of sufficient school coordinators, bridge tutors and committed insiders
- Available finance to support necessary activities
- Social/cultural/family engagement including promotional materials for teachers and parents

Highly recommended

- Support from Government/Education Authorities/Universities (desirable as a longer-term goal)

Activities and deliverables needed to achieve these preconditions

- Coordinated lobby of Government and Education Authorities
- Recruitment of committed insiders, school coordinators and bridge tutors
- Initiate clubs at as many Scottish Universities as possible
- Produce training material and programs for use in schools (possible collaboration with New Tricks)
- Train the trainers and volunteers in appropriate ways of teaching and engaging children/youth
- Help to run school clubs and university/school regional and national competitions

YOUTH BRIDGE

The research shows that NBOs lose players as they move from primary to secondary to university education. One of **SBU's Goals must be to focus on transitional pathways and creating a youth community of players**.

Preconditions needed to achieve that Goal are

- Access to youth aged 10 -26 and finance to support youth activities
- Liaison with primary and secondary schools, universities and parents of youth players
- The availability of sufficient youth coordinators, tutors for supervised play and coaches
- Social/cultural/family engagement

Activities and deliverables needed to achieve these preconditions

- Build a youth bridge community offering a safe, protected space for playing F2F or online (e.g. weekly/monthly informal game on RealBridge only open to 12-17 year olds and another for 18-25 year olds across Scotland, with supervised play available and/or group discussion after the game)
- Run youth camps, summer camps focusing on intra-generational social interactions (recognising that friendship groups are a key motivator for learning and playing)
- Run family events focusing on inter-generational interactions (e.g. bring a grandchild Sunday gatherings or encouraging parents to learn at the same time as their children)
- Foster peer-to-peer bridge teaching and support, by facilitating youth approaches to training peers (such as encouraging youth to set up university clubs or online youth games/training)
- Joined up approach with communication and activities linking school, youth and junior coordinators

JUNIOR TRAINING PROGRAMME

The research from 28 NBOs indicates that to achieve the SBU's Strategic Objective, a vital success factor is a strong junior set up. One of the **SBU's Goals must be to have a strong junior development programme**.

Preconditions needed to achieve that Goal are

- Access to a large volume of juniors aged 12-25
- Good communication and liaison with school and university bridge coordinators
- The availability of sufficient junior coordinators, coaches, mentors and squad leaders
- Available finance to support necessary activities

Highly recommended

- Use of communication methods preferred by juniors could be beneficial for junior engagement.

Activities and deliverables needed to achieve these preconditions

- System to identify motivated young players (note that enthusiasm and hunger for the game is important for cultivating potential juniors) and invite them to join a junior squad
- Recruitment of committed junior coordinators and coaches, with a squad leader for each junior category: U16, U21, U26, U26W and U31 (to work with coaches to train and select)
- Pairing of partnerships with a mentor largely for system work (mentors could work with two pairs)
- Produce training material and programs for use by junior squads (some used across categories and some age-specific cohort sessions) focused on both individual technique & partnership development
- Help to run junior practice, training and competitive events (both F2F and online via RealBridge)
- Develop collaboration with other NBOs for friendly junior matches (& participate in RB junior events)
- Adapting communication strategies to help with junior player engagement (messenger apps cf. email)

BUILDING A PIPELINE OF INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS

The research shows that adequate procedures need to be in place to support the development of potential international players (coaching, mentoring, financial assistance). One of SBU's Goals must be to focus on **transitioning ex-junior and non-junior players to international level** players. The research indicates that:

Preconditions needed to achieve that Goal are

- Effective Junior Programme is required for improved recruitment of international players.
- Trials, selection committee and results in wider events combined for identifying international players.
- Use of online platforms and training to allow juniors and potential internationalists to practice more and to play against top-level players. (eg friendly practice matches against other NBOs)

Activities and deliverables needed to achieve these preconditions

- Training and workshops in face-to-face and online environments for ex-junior and non-junior players with potential (for both individuals and partnerships to assist development to international level)
- Utilising online platforms (for training sessions and practice events) to provide opportunities for players (regardless of geographical location) to engage with top-level players and coaches.
- Tracking efficacy of the junior training programme to improve outcomes for internationals.
- Increased opportunities for juniors, ex-juniors and other aspiring players to engage with professional and top-level international players (e.g. encouraging play in ALT, OCBL, EBL, WBF & intl events).
- Transparency of criteria to enable aspiring players to achieve selection for the international squad.
- Building up a database of players' bridge CVs and results in key national/international events.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL SQUAD

One of SBU's Goals should be to have a **strategy for training, selection and development of top-level players: the international squad**. The research indicates that:

Preconditions needed to achieve that Goal are

- Expanding and finding a good balance between online and face-to-face training and practice events.
- Greater use of technology, digital tools and online platforms
- Developing players' desire to improve via good attendance at training, willingness to learn, commitment, hard work and focus.
- Available finance to subsidise external trainers

Activities and deliverables needed to achieve these preconditions

- Improving training opportunities (internal & external) for non-junior players could serve as a short-term to mid-term solution for improving competitive level of players' transitioning to international level (whilst the junior level training programme is developed and built-up over a longer period)
- High quality training to be delivered by invited top-level players or professionals from other countries (e.g. top coaches if affordable or pros from England) with preparation in advance
- Increased access to international events (in-person and online) to enable players to practice against top-level players (e.g. EBU, EBL, WBF F2F events and ALT, OCBL, WBT, MMT online events)
- Use of digital tools such as Cuebids, and Bid72 for partnership training (possibly with subsidise rate via an agreement between the SBU and the app)
- Drawing up contracts for expectations and behaviour to enable players to understand the commitment and level of participation in training required to succeed.
- Using multiple methods to select players to represent Scotland (a combination of selection based on prior results and squad trials)
- Collaboration with other NBOs to pool resources and share high-level training opportunities

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

One of SBU's Goals must be to **seek greater funding opportunities, cooperation with government and educational bodies and enhance inclusivity**. The research indicates that:

Preconditions needed to achieve that Goal are

- Expanding available funding sources (corporate sponsorship, fundraising events, member fees)
- Cooperation of educational and government bodies improves training potential and sponsorship
- Recruiting and retaining a wider diversity of players by addressing inclusivity and gender issues
- Shifting the image of bridge in Scotland

Activities and deliverables needed to achieve these preconditions

- Financial incentives and fee discounts to improve player opportunities for seeking top-level experience.
- Prioritising funding opportunities: (1) sending teams to represent Scotland, (2) subsidising costs for external trainers, and (3) subsidising fees for practice at some international events
- Promoting the importance of a structured Junior Programme and increasing SBU membership fees
- Seeking support from sporting and educational bodies to enhance additional training and growth of SBU international teams
- Joined up approach with SBU, government and educational bodies is vital for improving recruitment and training opportunities.
- Implementing the EBL Gender Policy and introducing unconscious bias training for coaches and squad leaders (to create a more inclusive environment and increase numbers of top-level women players)
- Creating innovative opportunities to market and promote bridge (e.g. demonstrating bridge in shopping malls, libraries, public spaces; involving younger players in proactive campaigns)
- Using a multi-faceted and joined up approach to recruitment, retention, training and development.
- A flexible and adaptable approach until a critical mass of top players is built up.

This BAMSA/SBU Report (2023) was compiled by Prof Samantha Punch and Claire Toomey in discussion with Phil Morrison, Alan Goodman and Mike Ash based on NBO research:

[Training, Support and Development: Perspectives of National Bridge Organisations \(NBOs\)](#)

For further training and development research by Bridge: A MindSport for All, see [Bridging Organisations](#).

APPENDIX: Challenges and Questions to Consider

| Context | Challenges and Issues |
|---|--|
| School Bridge | <p>Many free online materials for young players (such as New Tricks tutorials or the Tricky Bridge free app) are based on 5 card majors and strong NT. Does it matter? However, if we did decide to switch basic system, most of our trained bridge teachers are more familiar/comfortable with Acol (4 card majors and weak NT).</p> <p>Sustainability at universities is dependent on an inside proactive junior studying at that university. This will get easier as the numbers of school children playing bridge grow. But a high turnover of students makes club sustainability difficult. Unlike schools, university success is more dependent on peer-to-peer learning rather than staff/teacher-led, though an inside staff member can help, but an inside junior is essential.</p> <p>Who are the gatekeepers to government and educational support? Can models be borrowed from other NBOs? (eg. Poland who has good engagement and support from Olympic and educational depts)</p> |
| Youth Bridge | <p>Safeguarding of under 18s is an important issue to address when creating a youth bridge community.</p> |
| Junior Bridge | <p>How can the SBU motivate, recruit and make it appealing for coaches and mentors to give up their time to support the junior programme?</p> <p>There has been a decrease in juniors transitioning to international level across many NBOs due to the decreasing popularity of cards in general and bridge specifically, the social and economic impact of the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis. These have impacted funding available to NBOs whilst players may have fewer resources to finance travel, training and fees for international events.</p> <p>Recognising the need to focus on individual technical skills alongside partnership development at junior level in particular.</p> <p>Player contracts improve player engagement and commitment but if too rigorously enforced with little flexibility, this could lead to a high-drop out rate in the context of a small junior pool.</p> |
| Building a Pipeline of International Players | <p>There is a lack of consensus amongst players and trainers regarding the benefits of online versus in-person training/events. The in-person social elements of bridge appeal to many trainers and players.</p> <p>Adapting communication strategies to the preferred methods of juniors has the potential for alienating older players who prefer more traditional methods of communication.</p> <p>It is worth noting from the NBO research that practice international events tend to be self-funded by aspiring players. Priority for NBO funding is usually for sending representative teams to WBF or EBL championships, and for training (by paying for coaches to deliver specific sessions).</p> <p>Given that a new junior training programme alongside greater recruitment of players via schools, could take several years to produce results, could provision of training to non-junior players provide an effective short to mid-term solution to improve SBU's performance at international level?</p> |
| Training and Development | <p>Behavioural contracts may serve as a useful metric for NBOs to establish player engagement and commitment. However, these methods are generally used by larger NBOs that have competition for places and wide bridge networks. For medium and smaller sized NBOs (that struggle to recruit players) this approach could diminish player engagement particularly if other financial support and incentives are not available. Until critical mass is built up, perhaps best to be flexible with enforcing contracts.</p> <p>To enhance quality control of training, it could be useful to seek feedback after coaching.</p> <p>The NPC and Coaches report can be used to help train people new to these roles.</p> |
| Challenges and Opportunities | <p>There are barriers to recruiting juniors without support from government and educational institutions. Marketing strategies (i.e. street shows, exhibition events and online marketing) could be adapted by SBU to recruit juniors using more extensive online marketing strategies (Tik Tok, Instagram, You tube). This could be a cost-effective alternative to in person marketing to engage younger audiences.</p> <p>How can the gender divide be addressed in terms of fewer women stepping up to international level?</p> <p>How can the SBU promote the open, women and mixed categories to improve uptake and balance resources?</p> <p>Are there opportunities for new sponsorship for the SBU? (eg corporate sponsors of team shirts, individuals who might support an online pro-am tournament - if well publicised this can involve various levels of paying to play in the event)</p> |