



Bridge: A MindSport For All

Connects People, Challenges Minds

The Landscape of Youth Bridge in Scotland:
Requirements, barriers, and success strategies of
school bridge implementation

BAMSA Report (2025)

Marina Milosheva and Samantha Punch

Summary

Scotland has an exciting opportunity to nurture the next generation of bridge players through targeted youth development initiatives. Youth participation is currently growing and there is tremendous potential for further growth through innovation and strategic partnerships. Schools with thriving bridge programmes benefit from passionate internal champions who bring enthusiasm and dedication to teaching the game. These successful programmes emphasise hands-on learning and social engagement, making bridge both accessible and enjoyable for young players. When supported by strong institutional leadership, they can create lasting positive impacts.

Recent analysis reveals several encouraging success factors that can guide future development, alongside some challenges to consider:

Success factors

- Successful programmes consistently rely on committed internal advocates within schools
- Effective teaching methodologies prioritise immediate hands-on engagement over theory
- Programmes that incorporate social and competitive elements show higher retention than those focusing solely on competition
- Administrative buy-in and institutional support are crucial for programme sustainability

Primary challenges

- Limited volunteer capacity and teaching resources tailored to youth
- High turnover of key people leading successful programmes, and lack of succession planning
- Poor transition management and retention through educational transitions, such as primary to secondary schooling, or school to university
- Multiple activities compete for students' time and attention
- Educational system pressures and timetabling challenges

Recommendations and strategic opportunities

- Build an evidence base demonstrating the educational benefits of bridge
- Align bridge with educational frameworks and forge school partnerships
- Create standardised, age-appropriate teaching materials
- Develop youth-friendly digital platforms and gaming interfaces
- Engage diverse communities through intergenerational initiatives
- Set up transition support programmes between educational stages
- Build structured pathways from school clubs to national representation
- Train and recruit volunteers in a sustainable manner
- Establish thriving university bridge societies and competitions
- Connect experienced players with youth through mentorship programmes

The path forward leverages both traditional strengths and modern innovations. Educational partnerships present opportunities to integrate bridge with curriculum objectives, highlighting the mindsport's cognitive benefits. A structured pathway from school integration to national representation can inspire young players and provide clear goals for advancement.

Community engagement also opens doors for meaningful intergenerational connections. University programmes offer a natural environment for bridge to flourish among young adults but do also suffer from high turnover of key students who lead the university club. By developing standardised teaching materials, implementing supportive transition programmes, developing a base of trained volunteers, and creating youth-focussed digital platforms, strong foundations for sustainable growth can be built. With sustained commitment and collaboration, Scotland can become more successful with youth bridge development.

Introduction

Bridge, a partnership card game that combines elements of strategy, logic, and communication, faces a critical juncture in Scotland. With a renewed focus on youth engagement and development, the bridge community is mobilising to share the game's benefits with future generations. There is growing momentum and enthusiasm across Scotland to develop innovative approaches that will connect young people with the joy and challenge of bridge, ensuring its vibrant future for decades to come.

This study examines the current state of youth bridge development in Scotland, analyses implementation strategies, identifies barriers to success, and explores opportunities for growth. The analysis draws on interviews with bridge teachers and trainers completed in 2024. Their insights reveal a complex landscape where successful programmes demonstrate substantial educational and developmental benefits while facing some challenges with implementation and sustainability.

This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of youth bridge development in Scotland, examining the know-how accumulated through years of bridge teaching in schools. By understanding these elements, stakeholders can work towards building engaging learning experiences that ensure the game's continuity while maximising its educational and developmental benefits for young people.

The findings of this research have considerable implications for bridge organisations, educational institutions, and policy makers interested in developing youth bridge or supporting existing initiatives. The research suggests that while there are some structural, cultural, and practical barriers to implementation, there are also viable pathways for development through structured, well-resourced efforts and committed bridge champions.

Methods

This qualitative research study employed a purposive sampling approach to explore youth bridge development across Scotland. The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants, including bridge teachers, youth trainers, and bridge education stakeholders who either currently teach or have previously taught bridge to young people in Scottish schools as an extracurricular activity.

Participants were recruited through established networks within the Scottish Bridge Union and key informants in the bridge community. Given the geographical dispersion of participants across Scotland, all interviews were conducted remotely via the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing platform, enabling broad regional representation while maintaining research efficiency.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and significant insights. The semi-structured format allowed systematic data collection while providing flexibility to explore emerging themes and the unique perspectives of participants.

A sample of fifteen participants (detailed in Table 1) provided rich insights from multiple viewpoints within the bridge community. This approach enabled the research team to develop an understanding of the current landscape of youth bridge development in Scotland, whilst maintaining an awareness of the historical bridge teaching that took place before the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, allowing sufficient time for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Table 1. Details of the sample of bridge teachers

Interview Duration (minutes)	Participant ID	Gender		Current or historical activity	
		Female	Male	Current	Historical
60:14	BT01		*		*
50:00	BT02		*		*
60:18	BT03	*			*
60:14	BT04		*	*	
60:25	BT05	*		*	
60:12	BT06	*		*	
55:33	BT07		*		*
55:33	BT08	*			*
60:40	BT09		*	*	
51:55	BT10		*	*	
60:06	BT11		*	*	
55:28	BT12	*			*
60:05	BT13	*			*
58:49	BT14	*		*	
60:13	BT15	*		*	

The interview protocol explored several key themes:

- Participants' background and roles in youth bridge
- Teaching approaches
- Success factors and best practices
- Current challenges and opportunities
- Future visions for youth bridge development
- Support and resource requirements

Primary themes in school bridge implementation

The state of youth bridge education in Scotland: Current provision

The contemporary landscape of youth bridge education in Scotland demonstrates regional variation, with current provision concentrated in central Scotland. Active programmes operate across approximately ten schools, including two recent initiatives, whilst the historical provision in the Highlands has unfortunately ceased. Post-pandemic recovery has enabled the successful reinstatement of numerous school bridge clubs. The delivery model typically relies on independent bridge instructors external to the educational institutions, supported by resources developed through collaboration between local bridge clubs, bridge teachers, and volunteer helpers.

The provision spans both primary and secondary education, encompassing both public and independent schools. Bridge education predominantly takes place in extracurricular contexts, with sessions typically ranging from one to two hours in duration. The participating schools generally maintain cohorts of ten to twenty pupils per institution.

The competitive framework of youth bridge in Scotland comprises several established initiatives involving wider UK bridge unions. The Interschool League, now in its fourth year, sees regular participation from Glasgow-based institutions, though engagement from other Scottish schools remains limited in comparison to English participation. The English Bridge Union's Grand Prix pairs competition, also in its fourth year, sees participation from 88 young players across its six constituent events (including from Scotland). Such competitions offer valued and structured competitive opportunities with dedicated prize categories for junior participants.

A notable recent development is the online Generation Game, initiated in December 2023. This monthly RealBridge-based initiative provides a casual competitive environment that is specifically designed to facilitate family participation across different geographical regions. The programme operates across two distinct modes of play – minibridge and bridge – allowing participants to progress between levels as their skills develop. Recent participation has fluctuated between three and eleven tables, with plans for expansion to include additional monthly sessions.

The Inaugural Festival of Bridge recently marked an important milestone in the promotion of bridge across Scotland and England. This week-long celebration, held from 9–15 September

2024, served multiple purposes: showcasing bridge as an inclusive mindsport, engaging participants of varying skill levels and ages, and generating charitable support for Cancer Research UK, surpassing an ambitious fundraising target of £10,000 for Scottish contributions. The Scottish Bridge Union coordinated comprehensive support for local initiatives throughout Scotland, enabling clubs and players to organise independent events such as demonstration games and community open days. These localised activities, hosted at bridge clubs and community leisure facilities across the country, provided opportunities for public engagement with the mindsport. This approach to celebrating bridge through a coordinated festival promotes the game to diverse audiences while simultaneously supporting charitable causes and fostering community engagement.

Overall, there have been marked efforts to expand the offering for youth bridge in Scotland, both in scale and variety. The competitive framework employed in Scotland appears to serve a valuable function in maintaining engagement between formal training events and camps.

Approaching schools: The importance of internal champions and administrative buy-in

The interview data revealed that the successful implementation of bridge programmes in schools fundamentally depends on having an internal champion and securing administrative support. Respondents consistently emphasised that ‘cold calling’ or unsolicited approaches to schools rarely succeed. Instead, the presence of an internal advocate – typically a teacher or administrator familiar with bridge – dramatically increases the likelihood of programme adoption. As one participant articulated:

Getting into school is really difficult. Really, really difficult. Unless you have a teacher or a head teacher or anybody else that either plays bridge or knows what fun the kids will have learning it. And if you don't have that, you will never get into the school. (BT12)

This finding is reinforced by another respondent who emphasised the importance of internal advocacy:

Well, I think that you need a good rapport relationship with the management team at the school... the ideal is that there would be a teacher in the school already playing bridge because they're in a better position to manoeuvre within the system. (BT8)

The data also highlighted that successful implementation requires understanding and accommodating schools' resource constraints, particularly post-COVID. For example, one participant noted: "*I think after COVID a lot of these teachers don't have any time, do they?*" (BT15). Respondents consistently acknowledged the challenge of teachers' workloads:

Being a primary teacher is a very, very busy job. There is a huge amount of paperwork... The majority of staff in our school would be in by 8:00 o'clock in the morning and still there at 6:00 o'clock. (BT5)

Teachers are easily distracted with other pressures, you've got to send stuff in and then if you don't get anywhere, send it in again. (BT9)

This understanding led to an emphasis on minimising additional burdens to the school staff:

I care about the kids and I want the kids to have a fulfilling and interesting life... but it has to be about what can we do for you... rather than can I give you an extra job to do. (BT9)

We'll do all the work, all we need is food providers and a dozen children who are keen to learn. (BT4)

In relation to this, the data emphasises the need for sustainable volunteer support and clear resource planning. As one participant outlined, the operational resource requirements are fairly modest, although bridge teaching initiatives do require some coordination:

We need some cards, not lots. We need some boards, not lots per school. We need two people per school. Someone that wants to take the lead and run the admin side and be in charge of the club and then someone else who wants to just help out and teach. (BT10)

Despite this, several respondents noted how administrative changes can affect programme sustainability. This often pertained to changes in staffing, particularly of head teachers, as noted by one of the bridge teachers: "*Unfortunately, they lost their school because the school they were in, they got a new head teacher. And that can sometimes have an awful effect*" (BT7). Another similarly mentioned: "*They've had a lot of turnover of head teachers. There must have been four head teachers in the last four or five years*" (BT4). The sustainability of bridge initiatives was frequently contingent upon leadership transitions, with each successive head-teacher appointment necessitating renewed advocacy for the programme's continuation.

With regards to approaching schools for the first time, the interviewees also highlighted the importance of effective communication when approaching schools and parents because "*95% of the parents in any school would never have heard of [bridge]*" (BT9) and mentioned the use of leaflets as effective tools for familiarisation with bridge: "*I would have a version of your literature to go to the parents as well as stuff for the teachers*" (BT9). One bridge teacher explained:

I read a lot of stuff before I approached the school... I just put together a sort of one-to-two pages where I just explained a little bit about me and then a little bit about bridge. (BT6)

Here, bridge can be mapped onto existing educational frameworks – as it has in the past – and its educational benefits can be emphasised:

It will meet their requirements for the Duke of Edinburgh Skills. (BT3)

A long, long time ago, when we discussed getting into our local secondary school, it was mainly under the Social Skills Area. (BT2)

The data revealed differences between private and state schools, with one participant stating "*it's much easier to get into a private school because for some reason the parents know what bridge is... it's seen as a skill that they can market because parents kind of get it*" (BT15). Another participant added: "*the head teachers who are really on top of their game and are looking to get in people from the outside to do things to stimulate the children, it's very easy to sell to them. It's the people who are more, firefighting, that's a harder sell.*" (BT2)

Regardless of the type of school setting, a general principle is thought to apply: start small at first and build momentum. For instance, one bridge teacher said: "*I think if I announced it at a big assembly, nobody would show. I think you need to get a small number to come along. You know, a few pupils who are friends to give it a try.*" (BT1)

Marketing bridge for educational integration

The analysis highlighted opportunities and challenges in promoting bridge to younger generations, particularly focusing on two key areas: image perception and marketing strategies. Firstly, bridge faces challenges in attracting younger players because of its perception as an older person's pursuit. As one participant noted, *"it used to have the image of elderly, conservative ladies in hats... I think things have moved on a little"* (BT14). This image problem can cause bridge to be perceived as *'an uncool thing'*: *"if I go to an assembly and was like, bridge is cool... the initial reaction would just be 'that's lame'"* (BT10). Participants consistently highlighted the perception gap, with one teacher noting that *"Most young people seem to believe it's a game just for retirees... perhaps they've got a grandmother that plays bridge"* (BT8). This sentiment is reinforced by the visual reality of many bridge clubs: *"You know, there it's mostly grey- and white-haired people sitting at a table, so that's just a reflection on what's happened to the bridge world over the years"* (BT10).

Secondly, a barrier to educational integration is the lack of familiarity with card games among both students and teachers:

These kids never heard of bridge. Half of them have never picked up a pack of cards, and if they don't know it exists, they're not going to go looking for it ... These are the difficulties, a lot of them have not picked up a pack of cards before. They don't understand the concept of suits. They don't understand the concept of a trick. (BT4)

Maybe like a quarter of them will have played a game which involves trumps... maybe half of them will have played some sort of cards. (BT3)

Additionally, there's a cultural resistance in some areas, as one bridge teacher noted: *"in Scotland, card games are considered to be a bit, you know, sort of almost illicit"* (BT9). He explained that when contrasted with chess, card games – in general – have been historically associated with gambling. He further emphasised:

Most people don't realise that bridge isn't a gambling game. They think it's like poker, so there has to be a bit of work done to make sure that bridge has a separate identity to poker. (BT9)

Thirdly, the findings suggest a need for a multifaceted approach to modernising bridge's image whilst emphasising its educational and social benefits through contemporary marketing channels (see also McCutcheon and Punch, 2024). Celebrity endorsement emerged as a potentially powerful tool, with participants identifying relatable public figures that could promote the game:

Claudia Winkleman plays bridge... She's sort of the face of the people. (BT4).

Victoria Coren Mitchell plays bridge... somebody I think that they would recognise. (BT1)

Could we get young boys interested if their football stars and their cricket stars play? (BT4)

If Selena Gomez started playing bridge, that would go a long way. (BT1)

The aspirational potential of bridge was also highlighted, with participants suggesting that competitive opportunities could be emphasised:

Your children at your school could end up playing for their country... children like to aspire (BT15).

Talk a lot about like the tournament circuits, like congresses, hanging out for a weekend, going to a hotel, playing bridge tournaments. (BT10)

However, this competitive focus must be balanced with inclusivity, as noted by one bridge teacher:

Not all the bright kids are committed. Not all the committed kids are the best. ... But there must be something for the others as well. (BT9)

Several innovative marketing approaches such as digital marketing and student testimonials were also suggested, all in relation to video and visual content:

You probably want to produce short videos about bridge that are really short... because kids are all about TikTok, their attention spans are very short. You want something quite punchy and easy to watch that they won't switch off too quickly on. (BT1)

Getting children to speak, perhaps in a video about what they got out of learning bridge is perhaps a good way of promoting it. (BT2)

Have a basic presentation that you could send to schools, maybe as a video, literally five minutes. Show them a room full of kids having fun playing bridge. (BT4)

These themes suggest a need for a comprehensive, multichannel approach to marketing bridge, with particular emphasis on modernising its image while maintaining its intellectual and social integrity. The strategy must address multiple stakeholders – students, parents, and educators – and use contemporary marketing methods to reach younger audiences effectively.

The multifaceted benefits of bridge: Developing cognitive, social, and life skills in young people

This analysis shows that bridge offers comprehensive developmental benefits for young people, encompassing cognitive enhancement, social skill development, and educational advantages. The findings indicate three primary areas of impact: social and interpersonal development; cognitive development and academic benefits; bridge as an inclusive educational tool.

1. Social and interpersonal development

Bridge fosters essential social skills through its partnership-based structure. As one bridge educator observed: *"It's really good that they have to get together. They have to cooperate with each other and they have to interact... it's a sort of microcosm of life" (BT14).*

The game provides valuable opportunities for developing social etiquette and self-control, and the social benefits are particularly notable compared to those of some other mindsports:

They have to sit nicely, have to be polite to one another... that sort of kind of self-control is a very good skill to learn. (BT7)

What was often lacking in chess was any kind of communicative skills... bridge adds an extra dimension because it has that element of negotiation and communication (BT9).

2. Cognitive development and academic benefits

Bridge develops various cognitive abilities, particularly mathematical thinking and analytical skills. The bridge teachers noted specific improvements whilst commenting on the deficiencies in mental arithmetic that they had observed elsewhere:

The game teaches you good arithmetic skills. (BT12)

They couldn't add up the points, they didn't know their number bonds... mental maths, it's not taught as it used to be. (BT2)

I mean it's great for just the basic things of getting them counting as well. So they're still at the stage particularly the primary sixes where there may be still learning to count or not as quick at counting as the other ones and bridge makes them much quicker at counting. (BT6)

The game cultivates advanced thinking skills and develops strategic thinking earlier than typical educational experiences:

Bridge teaches you how to think rationally, how to solve problems, how to work in a kind of abstract space using logic. (BT10)

You tend not to develop that kind of thinking until you're a little older. It's not something you get taught at school. It starts that bit of the brain working that is looking for bits of information, piecing them together. (BT6)

It's exciting because you have to make a plan... you've got to think about 'how we can do that.' (BT1)

3. Inclusive educational tool

According to the research participants, bridge proves particularly valuable as an inclusive educational tool because it is both accessible and affordable:

It's not expensive... you don't need a whole uniform or special kit or special equipment. It's for everybody. (BT4)

Bridge also supports different approaches to learning, and the bridge teachers reported unexpected successes with various student types, including quieter students and students with special educational needs:

You may maybe have a shy retiring child who's not very dominant. The teachers have never really seen them succeed, which is why mini bridge and bridge is such a wonderful pastime. (BT7)

Children on the autistic scale, I think quite a lot of them probably would be very good at bridge. They always used to say, actually, a lot of players are actually autistic. (BT6)

The game offers enduring value beyond the immediate educational benefits:

It's a lifelong skill... I've spoken to people who played bridge at university, went to clubs. It's something you've always got with you. (BT5)

In summary, the findings suggest that bridge serves as a multifaceted educational tool that develops not only academic abilities but also essential life skills. This impact makes bridge particularly valuable in educational settings, offering benefits that extend beyond traditional academic outcomes to encompass social skills and lifelong learning.

Historical implementation of bridge in Scottish schools: Successes and programme sustainability

This analysis examines the historical implementation of bridge programmes in Scottish schools, revealing key patterns in successful delivery and identifying sustainability challenges.

Successful implementation models

A critical finding emerged around the importance of formal institutional integration. Some schools successfully embedded bridge within their core curriculum, recognising its broader educational value. As one educator noted: "*We did it in curriculum time because we recognised the benefits the children were getting from it*" (BT5). This formal integration appears to provide greater programme stability compared to purely extracurricular approaches.

The analysis revealed that enrichment programmes offered another effective pathway for implementation, as exemplified by one participant's experience: "*It was part of the Academy's enrichment programme, and the school wanted to enrich them by doing stuff that's not part of the curriculum*" (BT12). This approach positioned bridge as complementary to traditional academic subjects while maintaining institutional support.

The research consistently highlighted the crucial role of leadership commitment in programme success. As one participant emphasised: "*If the leadership is committed then you could have kids who are committed... her [the leader's] commitment translated into commitment for the kids*" (BT13). This leadership support often manifested in tangible resource allocation, with some schools developing comprehensive approaches: "*We had a whole ethos through the school of using cards for our mental agility. When children were coming into primary one, we could give them a set of cards*" (BT5).

Successful programmes consistently emphasised practical, hands-on learning approaches. Teachers adapted their methods to maximise limited time: "*We show [the practical bridge card play] because you have such a limited time. You want to get the cards in their hands very quickly so that they can solve the puzzles*" (BT12). This practical focus appears to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

Particularly noteworthy were initiatives that extended learning beyond traditional school hours. Some educators developed community-based approaches: "*We phoned all their parents and we would have them into our house every Sunday evening. They just played, practised, chatted, and bonded*" (BT12). These informal learning environments seem to strengthen both skill development and social connections.

Sustainability challenges

The research revealed some challenges in maintaining programme continuity that could not be attributed to the disruption caused by the global pandemic. A recurring theme was the disruption caused by educational transitions. This challenge was compounded by the constant need to rebuild participant bases:

The frustrating thing is that you take them through P5, P6, P7 and then of course they disappear and you're constantly backfilling. (BT4).

Resource constraints emerged as another critical factor affecting sustainability, with time limitations posing a particular challenge:

We had them for a couple of hours a week... which is not really enough. It's not enough time. (BT12)

Additionally, the importance of teacher support was consistently highlighted: "You can't do something like that, that's different, with the class if you don't have the support of the class teacher" (BT5).

Impact

Overall, successful programmes demonstrated substantial positive outcomes. High engagement and retention rates were reported in ones that were particularly well-structured: "We had very little drop out, because what the students chose, it was their choosing" (BT12). Student feedback was positive: "Some of the quotes we've had from pupils are: 'mind-blowing' is one that I remember and 'workout for the brain' was another one" (BT2).

Perhaps most notably, some school clubs fostered lasting connections that extended well beyond the school years, with students coming back to visit the bridge teacher well into adulthood: "We've been to their weddings and they come back to the town to visit their mothers and they never fail to come and see us" (BT12).

This suggests that successful bridge programmes in schools require a carefully balanced combination of institutional support, dedicated leadership, and flexible learning approaches. Although sustainability challenges persist, particularly around educational transitions and resource allocation, the evidence indicates that bridge clubs can create lasting positive impacts on pupil development and community connections.

Best practices in teaching bridge to young people

This analysis provides insights into the most effective bridge teaching methodologies for young people, highlighting key success factors and pedagogical approaches. The findings demonstrate the importance of age-appropriate teaching methods, engagement strategies, and structural considerations. These teaching approaches have proven effective through the experience of bridge teachers and their helpers, and are highly recommended for new educators who are considering teaching bridge.

The research consistently emphasises prioritising hands-on engagement over theoretical instruction. As one educator noted emphatically: "You've got to get them card playing very

quickly because if they're not playing cards, they lose interest" (BT6). This practical approach appears to serve multiple pedagogical purposes, such as maintaining student interest and building confidence through direct experience. The importance of card play practise is reinforced by another participant's observation about maintaining flexibility in play: "Get them playing and don't force them to just play hands on certain themes. Always have a segment of the class where they just get a deck of cards" (BT10). This approach appears to create organic learning opportunities while decreasing initial reservations to participation.

The analysis also indicates that there are distinct pedagogical requirements across different age groups. For primary school students, physical engagement proves crucial: *"They need to have something physical that they're doing. If you're just sitting, teaching it by a lesson, that's not going to work" (BT6). In contrast, secondary school teaching allows for different approaches: "High school I think is different. They don't have to be so hands-on so fast, they don't have to be occupied every single second" (BT6).*

Successful programmes demonstrate careful attention to practical delivery considerations. Group size emerges as a critical factor, with participants noting optimal ratios:

The groups haven't been very big, you know, ten maximum, so about three volunteers would be sufficient. (BT8)

One participant noted that as a single bridge teacher *"you can't really do more than one or two tables at the same time"* (BT3). Here it is important to note that in practice, volunteer-to-table ratios can vary according to a range of factors (e.g. player experience). The rule of thumb is that numerous tables can be accommodated as long as there is an ample availability of volunteers, such that one volunteer is assigned to one table each.

The importance of consistency in scheduling is also highlighted: *"The main thing is to have consistency of when we meet. The drop-off will happen when the kids change year groups and then their after-school activities change days" (BT3).*

In addition, carefully paced learning progression is identified as crucial to success. Experienced teachers emphasise the need to start with fundamentals: *"I think you have to start at a much more basic level than any bridge player would think. Spend weeks and weeks on mechanics of card play" (BT10). This approach often incorporates simplified versions of the game: "I've become more of a fan of mini bridge... try and kind of keep them playing the cards for as long as possible" (BT3).*

To increase engagement, bridge teachers employ interactive learning techniques that encourage strategic thinking and proactivity:

If a child is declarer, I'll try and stop them and make everyone pause for a couple of minutes, try and get everybody in the table to think rather than people just switching off. (BT3)

What you want to do is sort of like a process of induction where they start to play and then they want to learn more themselves, and then they'll ask. You're not forcing them to learn, they are asking. (BT7)

In this context, the analysis highlights the crucial role of social factors. Although teaching approaches are important, peer relationships are background factors that affect learner engagement:

Friendship groups are pretty important ... it's all or nothing, like they tend to come with their friends. (BT3)

This suggests the need for teaching strategies that target and engage groups of friends and existing social networks rather than individual children to foster social interaction and peer learning. Competition between friends also serves as a powerful motivator for learning:

They like the competitive thing. They really, really like that. (BT6)

They need some kind of competition to sort of make them feel that it's worthwhile. (BT3)

Avoiding common pitfalls

When referring to best practice, the bridge teachers cautioned against common pitfalls such as introducing too much theory too quickly, overwhelming students with bidding systems, or having insufficient focus on basic card play. They warned against over-reliance on written materials, with one even saying "*Don't give youngsters notes. They don't like them*" (BT7). It was suggested that the most successful bridge clubs in schools emphasise interactive learning through practical play.

In summary, the findings indicate that effective youth bridge teaching requires considerable adaptation from traditional adult-focussed methods. Success appears to depend on creating an environment where learning emerges naturally from engagement rather than through explicit instruction. This approach, combined with attention to social dynamics and competitive elements, provides a framework for sustainable youth bridge development.

Barriers and challenges in youth bridge development

In addition to analysing the opportunities and benefits of youth bridge development, this research also examined the challenges faced in integrating and sustaining youth bridge programmes in schools. The findings showed that the development and sustainability of youth bridge face challenges that span structural, social, and practical dimensions. For instance, within educational institutions, systemic constraints can pose some barriers to implementation. Academic pressures particularly affect secondary education, as one educator pointedly observes: "*Secondary is your big challenge. They're absolutely still focused on exams from day one... if the activity doesn't necessarily fit into that factory process, then you've got a challenge*" (BT13). These pressures are compounded by practical time constraints, with one bridge teacher noting:

Another reason for stopping doing the secondary schools was our local schools cut down the lunch hour. They had a Friday afternoon that was a sort of games afternoon that stopped. It's just impossible when they've only got 40 minutes for lunch. (BT2)

Administrative requirements, particularly regarding safeguarding, present additional hurdles. Bureaucratic demands can discourage potential volunteers, as evidenced by one respondent's observation: "*Safeguarding is an issue [for the volunteers]... they don't want to go through that process. They just want to help and don't want to go through all that rigmarole*" (BT7). This administrative burden exists alongside resource limitations, particularly in terms of volunteer

availability. The respondent continued, "*There aren't enough of us to go around ... They were travelling miles and miles to try and teach, so they couldn't do the after-school clubs*" (BT7).

Modern youth culture presents a unique backdrop to bridge engagement as the proliferation of digital entertainment options has fundamentally altered the landscape of youth activities. As one observer reflects:

I played cards when I was little because we didn't have a television until I was nine. There were no mobile phones there. There was no option. We played cards, we played Scrabble, we played Monopoly. And we did jigsaws and that was about it. And we ran around outside. But there wasn't all this other stuff around. (BT4)

Programme continuity presents particular challenges, especially during educational transitions. As one bridge teacher emphasises:

Once they engage with it, they absolutely love it. But the big hurdle, and this is what I would say with anything in terms of transitioning from primary to secondary is if it stops in the end of primary and nothing happens thereafter. You've lost that cohort of kids, and that's what I've seen that it's not backed up in secondary. So what you need to do is to get the groups of schools coordinated up. Here we call them clusters of schools, and so there's a secondary and then feeder primaries. And if you don't get the feeder primary and the secondary linked up, it's a lost opportunity. (BT13)

This challenge is exacerbated by competition from other activities, with one observer noting:

One of the problems I had last time, one little boy was very good, but he was good at everything, so he was obviously into theatre and he was in a show at the Theatre. So there were a couple of weeks, he said, 'oh, I can't, I'm going to rehearsals for the show.' There were some who were very good at music and they couldn't as they were practising for the orchestra. I've had one guy who missed a couple of [bridge lessons] because he's going swimming. (BT4)

Gender disparities emerged as a concern, with some challenges noted in engaging and retaining female participants, albeit more so in the past than in the present. As one respondent observes, "*I think girls feel peer pressure more than boys. So if you know one really wants to do it but nobody else is doing it, then they're not gonna learn with a bunch of boys.*" (BT12). Cultural and religious considerations also affect participation, with one teacher reporting, "*I did get feedback from a young girl who I assume was a Muslim and her parents thought that playing cards was somehow sinful. They came back and said it's Haram*" (BT11).

The learning process itself can be time-consuming, particularly regarding the time required for skill acquisition. As one participant notes, "*I think it takes a lot of time to get people to understand what bridge is all about. It's a year to learn how to play it unless you've got a few spare months*" (BT8). Current teaching methodologies may not adequately serve young learners, with one practitioner observing, "*I think the adult lesson guide is great for adults but totally inappropriate for children*" (BT3).

Long-term sustainability in schools remains a persistent challenge. Programmes often struggle to maintain continuity, as evidenced by one participant's observation: "*Each school that was committed to the bridge lessons, the kids absolutely loved it. But then it stops dead. I don't know if this is this is across the country, but it was P5s and P6s that were targeted. So then nothing happened in P7*" (BT13). Family support and the continuity of being able to play at home

is sometimes lacking as well as "*They [the pupils] actually genuinely enjoy it but... there's no follow on. They know that they will be unable to play it at home*" (BT11).

Educational transitions and bridge participation

The relationship between life transitions and bridge participation presents complex patterns of engagement, disengagement, and potential re-engagement across various life stages. The transition from school to university emerges as particularly critical, with bridge teachers recognising both challenges and opportunities. Participants noted that sustainable university programmes would be beneficial, but would require dedicated leadership:

Ideally if we had kids who learn bridge in secondary schools, we could then report on to where they go on to university and there would be a university club there. So we keep that flow through and that would be the best way to do it. (BT2)

You need to have somebody on site to take charge of it, best if it's a lecturer, somebody who's there for longer than just three or four years. (BT14)

Universities present particularly significant strategic opportunities for intervention as the university environment offers unique advantages. As one bridge teacher suggests: "*Do something in universities because this is a time when people are a bit more curious, a bit less bound by peer pressure*" (BT10). The potential long-term impact is significant, with the same teacher saying, "*for 10–20 years, that would revive the bridge world ... Instead people are being taught bridge when they've retired from work*" (BT10).

Compared to the school-to-university transition, the transition from primary to secondary education presents more immediate challenges, with another observer noting:

I think primary school to secondary school is a bigger problem because when they leave secondary school, like if they're into it, they can play online, they can go to a club, like they're old enough and independent enough. But if someone's starting secondary school it isn't going to be like that. So they really need somewhere to go at the start of secondary school. A local bridge club could step in and they can do something there. (BT3)

Early engagement emerges as a critical strategic priority, where the importance of youth participation is emphasised. One bridge teacher proposed that "*you do need to get them young and if they haven't started playing by the time they've become adults, that's probably them gone until they're looking to retire*" (BT11).

Having witnessed the life trajectories of young bridge players, the bridge teachers identify that major life transitions, particularly career development and family formation, strongly affect bridge participation. Interestingly, one participant found that gender equality has led to fewer men playing bridge:

Blokes are far more involved in the family now and I think that's a good thing. But I think it leaves very little time for bridge. And if girls are having kids, they haven't got time to play bridge. (BT4)

The analysis further reveals distinct patterns in retention and re-engagement. Bridge teachers acknowledge inevitable attrition, with one noting, "*We have to accept that there's going to be a*

high loss rate. People will either lose interest or not have time. But if we can get them hooked on the game to some extent, they'll come back to it" (BT14). Indeed, the evidence suggests considerable potential for later life re-engagement, as illustrated by one observation: "There are quite a few bridge players now coming back to the club ... they've come back because they're married, they've had a career, the families have grown up" (BT7).

This pattern of findings provides several critical insights regarding life transitions and bridge participation. Key transition points include the progression from school to university, the transition to adulthood dominated by career and family responsibilities, and the return to leisure activities once family responsibilities decrease. These transitions suggest specific strategic implications, including the need for structured support during transitions, the importance of early engagement, the value of university-level intervention, and recognition of lifecourse participation cycles. This understanding should inform programme development and resource allocation to support lifelong bridge engagement.

Future opportunities for bridge development: Growth initiatives and educational integration

Potential opportunities and strategic initiatives for developing bridge among younger generations were analysed, highlighting key areas for growth and implementation. The findings point to multiple pathways for development, with particular emphasis on educational integration, technological adoption, and social engagement strategies.

The research revealed multiple strategic pathways for integration into schools. Within formal education settings, numerous experts advocate for curriculum integration, with particular emphasis on mathematics instruction. As one expert emphasises, *"If you were able to create an opportunity within the curriculum for young people to be exposed to bridge and learn what it is all about, that would be great, that would obviously tick a lot of boxes" (BT8). Another adds:*

I think it should be on the school curriculum in some form, even if it's only a little part of the maths curriculum. I think it's fundamental that we focus on getting children to play bridge. (BT4)

This integration, however, requires substantial support for educators, with evidence suggesting that teacher training programmes should incorporate bridge instruction. Two participants noted:

I think the way to do it is to teach bridge in the school, in the teacher training colleges... It doesn't need to be a good player and you just need to teach mini bridge in the schools' training college, which would be, you know, a half-day session. (BT2)

What I would say is get some primary teachers involved who don't play bridge themselves and say OK, we want to make this accessible ... All you all you need to do is equip a primary teacher with the very basics at the beginning. (BT13)

In addition, temporal considerations play a crucial role in programme implementation. This research indicates that optimal teaching periods typically align with academic calendars: *"In the school year it would be best; in January, February, in the winter months, when the kids potentially are not outside all the time" (BT13). This timing strategy must be flexible: "...you don't*

have to do every week all year, just a block of time that you recognise at some point in the year" (BT5).

The technological landscape presents significant opportunities for modernisation of bridge instruction. Digital learning platforms offer promising avenues for engagement:

I was very, very impressed by the people who were saying, well, we get the youngsters to download an app and this app generates hands ... If you look at some of the training applications in things like language and instruments, they concentrate on speed and simplicity, and I think that's something which really appeals to the youngsters. (BT9)

Mobile technology integration appears especially crucial, with one participant stating emphatically, "I'm absolutely convinced that the young people and the apps and stuff, that's the way forward" (BT9). He further elaborated:

We've just had a family stay with us that's got a 12-year-old and I took the young lad off to the National Museum of Flight, and he was so different to what people stereotypically describe 12-year-olds as, he was incredibly interested in the detail and the argument on both sides and so on. ... He was interested in everything on his smartphone. He has a laptop, but he only uses the laptop for serious things like homework and stuff. And that's why I've been taken with the idea that whatever we do to introduce kids, it's got to be smartphone. (BT9)

Online learning integration has demonstrated particular efficacy, with one instructor noting, "Online practise is half the battle... I started doing the [online] sessions in between my face-to-face sessions each week because the pupils weren't getting enough practise" (BT6). However, the importance of face-to-face interaction remains, with another stating, "It's much more fun playing bridge with real people than it is playing some game on your own online" (BT14).

Competition is identified as a fundamental motivator in bridge education, particularly among younger participants. As one instructor notes, "I think the competitive side winning stuff is the biggest motivator for kids that I've found. They definitely get way more enthused about it when there's someone to beat" (BT10). This is echoed by another bridge teacher who states:

Our children love the opportunity to take part in competitions... it is something for them to work towards and practise towards. We just encourage the children to do the best they could do, but a lot of children are naturally competitive anyway. You know, when they play on these XBoxes, they're constantly trying to beat their scores and they're constantly trying to be better themselves at them. So they like winning. (BT5)

This competitive framework is most effective when coupled with structured mentorship programmes to improve junior players' skills, as evidenced by the observations that "We need to be getting our top experienced players mentoring and playing with the juniors regularly" (BT4) and that "You can have a mentoring system in the club, you can have experienced, best players mentor kids and play as their partner and give them feedback in a nice, constructive way" (BT10).

Several innovative ideas for the future of youth bridge were also suggested by the participants. These pertained to community integration, new spaces in which to play bridge, and governmental support:

- Cultural and community integration presents specific opportunities for programme development. As one respondent observes, "*In the South Asian communities, bridge is very over-represented. I think that's incredible potential there*" (BT9). He added: "*In bridge at the moment, the opportunities for women bridge players are incredibly good. Many organisations are prepared to put resources into women's bridge*" (BT9).
- Intergenerational initiatives show promise: "*Our local primary school set up an intergenerational bridge group. The kids seem to like the grandparent surrogates being there, and the grandparents seem to like their grandchildren surrogates*" (BT2).
- Alternative delivery models present innovative opportunities for bridge instruction. The concept of gaming centres and social hubs shows particular promise, with one participant sharing, "*One idea I had, at some point in my life, I would like to set up a sort of Games-Chess-Bridge cafe, 'have a drink' sort of place for younger people*" (BT10), and another saying, "*A young guy has opened a gaming club. And he's got all sorts of games. And it was packed with people. We need to get in there!*" (BT7)
- University settings offer another promising avenue, with one bridge teacher noting, "*You probably want to get university to have bridge clubs as well. If you can keep that going and you can encourage people to maintain that that will help because that will keep the momentum*" (BT1).
- Institutional support, particularly at governmental levels, is thought to be crucial for sustainable programme development, as some of the innovative ideas referred to here might require advocacy and funding. As one participant points out, "*A number of countries have managed to persuade the government to recognise bridge and mindsports, so they get financial support*" (BT9). This is particularly relevant in specific regions in Scotland, where funding has decreased: "*In Scotland, unfortunately, where I live, we've cut funding right back. So the people who were running after school clubs are not getting any local government support.*" (BT7)

The research points to the need for a multifaceted approach to developing bridge among younger generations, requiring:

1. Integration of modern technology and traditional face-to-face teaching
2. Development of structured competitive frameworks
3. Creation of social and intergenerational learning opportunities
4. Establishment of formal educational partnerships
5. Implementation of progressive teaching methodologies

It is anticipated that future success can be assured by combining these evidence-based elements whilst maintaining flexibility to adapt to local contexts and individual needs. By extension, successful implementation will require sustained effort and coordination between educational institutions, bridge organisations, and community stakeholders.

A strategic vision for youth bridge development: Growth opportunities and implementation pathways

The future development of youth bridge programmes requires comprehensive strategic planning across multiple dimensions, with bridge teachers emphasising the importance of evidence-based approaches. As one practitioner advocates, *"I think I'd want a control group really, of a group of kids playing bridge for an hour a week for six months, see how they do on kind of standardised tests compared to a group who do Xbox"* (BT3). This empirical focus extends to documenting outcomes, with another saying that it is important to *"build the evidence about how beneficial it is for the children, not just talking about it, but pictures and videos and everything like that nowadays, and the children's voice"* (BT5).

The implementation of progressive development models is a crucial strategic priority. Bridge teachers envision a structured pathway beginning in primary education, with one participant suggesting: *"If you hook them in primary, then you can run a secondary club for those that don't want to play rugby and hockey, that just want to do something a bit sort of, you know, focussed"* (BT15). This early intervention approach is supported by another observation: *"In a perfect world, children would be learning it at school from first year or primary seven, right through."* (BT12).

Views on educational integration strategies are varied. While some participants advocate for curricular integration, which represents a new model of engagement, others believe that bridge fits well as an extracurricular activity, as evidenced by the existing initiatives that have mostly followed the extracurricular model:

It'll take place, I presume, on Friday afternoons, unless that changes. But there's not much else to it than that. It's just kids going along to a local club. It's no different to a football club. (BT13)

Teaching innovation also emerges as a related and critical factor in future success. The importance of appropriate instructor selection is emphasised:

It has to be delivered by the right people... people who are going to have fun with the kids, underline that bridge is going to help their numeracy and they're going to learn lots of new skills. (BT13)

In light of the finding that *"half of them [children] have never picked up a pack of cards"* (BT4), instructors must also be able to teach at a basic level and not presume that children have any existing knowledge of bridge or card play.

Programme sustainability and growth represent key strategic priorities. As one bridge teacher notes, *"It's not a good idea to be relying on one person in one school to be creating your Scottish youth team; we're right to be looking at how we can reduce risk"* (BT15). Youth development pathways require particular attention, especially regarding age-group categories. As one participant emphasises, *"The European authorities have made under-16 an important category... if we don't do something at under-16 level, we are going to miss out seriously"* (BT9). This focus extends to development targets: *"We're never going to get a proper under-16 programme until we can get 40 or 50 youngsters turning up to a summer school"* (BT9). This vision appears to represent a considerable evolution from current practice, necessitating substantial investment in infrastructure and training.

Discussion and recommendations for future research

This research illuminates the landscape of youth bridge development in Scotland, which is characterised by significant opportunities for further development. The findings demonstrate that bridge offers valuable educational and developmental benefits for young people. Yet the growth of youth bridge requires careful consideration of multiple interacting factors.

Programme success factors

The research clearly identified several critical elements that contribute to successful youth bridge programmes. The presence of internal champions within schools is fundamental, with multiple respondents emphasising that ‘cold calling’ approaches to schools rarely succeed. This suggests that relationship building and internal advocacy represent key strategic priorities for development. The data also highlight the importance of age-appropriate teaching methodologies because traditional adult-focussed teaching approaches may prove ineffective for young people, requiring some adaptation to maintain engagement. The emphasis on immediate practical engagement over theoretical instruction is an additional crucial insight.

Systemic challenges

The findings elucidate some systemic barriers to youth bridge development. Educational system pressures, particularly in secondary schools, can make it difficult to integrate activities perceived as non-academic. This suggests a need for better articulation and evidence of the educational benefits of bridge. Resource constraints, particularly regarding volunteer capacity and teaching expertise, emerge as a consistent challenge. Indeed, the data indicate that while many individuals are willing to help, fewer are prepared to take leadership roles, creating sustainability challenges for programmes. This suggests that other avenues for development, such as schoolteacher training, might prove fruitful. The presence of internal champions within schools, combined with teacher training – for example, as part of in-service days – could be a particularly effective model of implementation.

Strategic implications

1. Educational integration

The findings suggest that successful educational integration requires a nuanced approach that recognises different constraints and opportunities across educational stages. Primary schools appear more receptive to bridge programmes than secondary schools, which present greater challenges because of academic pressures and timetabling constraints. There is potential for curriculum alignment, particularly in areas such as mathematics.

2. Digital integration

The research revealed both opportunities and challenges regarding technology integration. While digital platforms offer potential for increased engagement and practise opportunities, concerns exist about maintaining the social benefits of face-to-face play. This suggests a need for balanced approaches that combine digital and traditional delivery methods.

3. Transition management

The management of educational transitions presents distinct opportunities and challenges that warrant systematic examination. Programme discontinuity, particularly between primary and secondary school, necessitates more structured transition support systems. Although university bridge clubs offer opportunities for post-school youth bridge development, more effort should be directed towards continuity and re-engagement in adulthood.

Recommendations for practice

1. Programme development

- Create structured support systems for transitions between educational stages (primary to secondary education; post-secondary education)
- Establish clear pathways from school programmes to competitive play, including links to youth training and youth national teams
- Implement mentorship programmes linking experienced players with youth
- Create sustainable volunteer recruitment and training programmes to support these strategic objectives

2. Resource development

- Develop standardised, age-appropriate teaching materials that emphasise practical engagement
- Develop digital resources that complement face-to-face teaching
- Establish resource-sharing networks between programmes
- Create evidence-based promotional materials for schools and parents

3. Strategic partnerships

- Build partnerships with educational institutions
- Develop relationships with youth organisations and community groups
- Create connections between schools and local bridge clubs
- Establish university partnerships

4. Institutional support

- Develop an evidence base for the impact of bridge on educational outcomes
- Work towards a formal recognition of bridge's educational benefits
- Seek integration with educational policy frameworks
- Build relationships with educational authorities and policymakers

Future research directions

1. Educational impact studies

Future studies could utilise controlled experimental designs to assess the effects of bridge participation on academic performance and investigate the cognitive benefits of bridge. Longitudinal investigations examining the educational trajectories and outcomes of youth bridge players would be beneficial as these would advance the understanding of long-term impact.

2. Implementation research

There is scope for further exploration of the factors affecting programme sustainability. For instance, the teaching methodologies and volunteer recruitment approaches deployed within new and existing initiatives could be the subject of research, as could be the transition management strategies across primary and secondary education.

3. Technology integration studies

The effectiveness of different digital learning platforms could be evaluated, so that the optimal balance between digital and face-to-face delivery could be determined. Here, it would be important to investigate youth preferences for technology integration and to examine the effect of technology on learning outcomes.

4. Social impact research

As a partnership mindsport, bridge benefits from a vibrant community, and presents opportunities for further community building. The role of bridge in facilitating intergenerational relationship building can be explored, as can be the potential of bridge for contributing to community building for youth. In relation to this, the perspectives of young people on how to make bridge more youth-friendly should be sought.

Conclusion

This research shows that there are viable pathways for the development of youth bridge in schools through structured initiatives that combine traditional teaching with modern engagement methods. Success requires sustained commitment and coordination between multiple stakeholders alongside continued research to build evidence of the benefits of bridge and identify effective implementation strategies.

The recommendations provided in this report offer practical directions for programme development. In addition, the suggested research agenda would strengthen the evidence base for the multiple benefits and potential applications of bridge. Moving forward, focus should be maintained on creating sustainable programmes in schools and supplementing them with additional learning and socialisation opportunities for young bridge players (such as mentorship programmes, competitions, and events).