



Bridge: A MindSport For All

Connects People, Challenges Minds

Insights and Outcomes from the inaugural Scottish
Youth Bridge Summer Camp: A Scottish Bridge Union
and BAMSA Collaboration

BAMSA Report (2025)

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Executive Summary

The inaugural Scottish Youth Bridge Summer Camp, delivered through collaboration between the Scottish Bridge Union (SBU) and Bridge: A MindSport for All (BAMSA) at the University of Stirling (11-13 July 2025), successfully engaged 40 young people and 12 parents. Demonstrating the potential of bridge camps to mobilise and upskill players, the three-day residential programme welcomed 15 beginners and 25 existing young bridge players.

Key Achievements

- The camp achieved high participant satisfaction, with young people rating the experience 8/10 and adults 9/10.
- 86% of the young participants expressed an interest in returning to the Summer Camp next year.
- The camp itinerary effectively balanced bridge instruction with social activities, and socialisation emerged as a primary driver of engagement.

Key Findings and Lessons

- The planning of Summer Camps is time-intensive and begins up to a year in advance.
- International Summer Camp case studies (in this case, from Norway and the United States) are useful sources of know-how regarding the duration and timing of sessions and breaks, as well as the balance between bridge and other activities.
- The research identified word-of-mouth recruitment through existing networks as significantly more effective than broader marketing campaigns.
- Pre-camp skill assessments play an important role in the identification of appropriate groupings.
- Whilst 93% of participants thought that bridge is fun, only 34% considered the rules easily comprehensible, and 55% felt confident playing. This enjoyment-comprehension gap shows that children derive enjoyment from bridge despite, or even due to, its complexity.
- There is a disconnect between individual enjoyment and perceived peer interest that requires targeted strategies to position bridge as culturally relevant to youth audiences.
- Parents' satisfaction derived primarily from observing their children's engagement rather than personal participation.

Implications

The Scottish Youth Bridge Summer Camp's success in attracting engaged participants and generating positive outcomes validates the residential camp model for youth bridge development. However, future efforts should be aimed towards enhancing the social transmissibility of bridge amongst young people. There is also potential for enhanced participation of parents in future Summer Camps (as adult learners or helpers). The provision of follow-up activities and tuition to young people – especially those who are not already a part of a school bridge club – will be key to sustaining engagement beyond the summer camp.

Introduction

The inaugural Youth Bridge Summer Camp, held at the University of Stirling from 11-13 July 2025, resulted from the highly productive and on-going collaboration between the Scottish Bridge Union (SBU) and BAMSA (Bridge: A MindSport for All). The Youth Bridge Summer Camp marked an important milestone in Scotland's youth bridge development. Having previously organised squad training weekends, the Scottish Bridge Union was both keen and well-equipped to enhance their offerings and deliver Scotland's first summer camp of this scale. Equally, the organisation of the camp was a welcome learning experience for all involved.

The three-day residential camp welcomed 40 children aged 11-18, alongside 6 adult learners and 6 participating parents, and was deemed a huge success by both the attendees and organisers. The camp's inclusive approach proved particularly successful, with 15 young people learning bridge for the very first time alongside 25 youngsters who were already learning bridge at school. This mixed-ability format aligned closely with the SBU and BAMSA's joint mission to increase youth participation in bridge and position it as an accessible mindsport that is fun, sociable, and mentally stimulating for all. The SBU's subsidisation of each camp place helped maintain affordability for families, a factor that undoubtedly contributed to the high registration numbers and varied backgrounds of the participants.

Having drawn participation from across the United Kingdom and Ireland, the summer camp demonstrated the wide appeal of youth bridge. Young people, together with their bridge teachers and families, travelled from various regions of Scotland, with many taking ferries from Ireland and others driving over from England. For many young participants, travelling to the summer camp and staying at the university campus were new and exciting experiences that contributed to their sense of independence and adventure.

The purpose of the Summer Camp was to provide a structured yet informal environment for the young participants to learn to play bridge (or improve their existing bridge knowledge) and socialise. The participants were encouraged to develop their logical reasoning and teamwork skills through guided and collaborative instruction, and the timetabled activities included a blend of learning, competition, and social activities. This approach embodied a strong commitment to experiential learning, where the focus was not only on conveying the basic rules and technical aspects of bridge, but also on socialisation and interactive card play.

The summer camp served as a practical extension of the university's "Bridge, Youth and MindSport Education" research project, which seeks to generate evidence and strategic directions for youth bridge development and identify opportunities for community-building through bridge. The participants in the summer camp completed feedback forms and surveys, which provided useful information regarding young people's perceptions of bridge and their motivations for attending the camp. Also reflected in the data were valuable insights into how bridge can be introduced and promoted to young audiences and their families, and which activities resonated most with them.

This report outlines the lessons learnt from the practical delivery of the summer camp and presents a synthesis of data collected from other camps during planning and preparation, as well as data from the event itself.

Planning and preparation

The organisation and successful delivery of a youth bridge summer camp requires extensive planning, coordination, and strategic oversight. The core team at the SBU, including several senior members and the Youth Coordinator, formed a working group that met regularly to agree milestones and record progress. The meetings focused on coordinating logistics and financial arrangements, including venue bookings and volunteer staffing. The group discussed operational details such as meal arrangements, accommodation and room allocations, and equipment needs, whilst also ensuring safeguarding and risk assessment compliance. Potential constraints such as resource limitations and volunteer availability were also reviewed on an on-going basis.

The timeline of the planning process progressed through several stages that spanned the course of a year. It is indeed noteworthy that preparations for a three-day event commenced a full year in advance, underscoring the complexities involved in running a fully residential camp. The key logistical tasks involved in running a residential weekend camp appear to resemble those of a one- or two-week camp. Appropriate venues still need to be secured, large numbers of volunteers and participants still need to be coordinated, and an engaging itinerary of age-appropriate and useful learning activities still needs to be devised.

In addition, thorough safeguarding protocols still apply. Given the comprehensive preparatory work, the prospect of extending the camp's duration may not have introduced significant organisational challenges (provided that the volunteers and participants had additional capacity to attend). The duration of a summer camp alone may not be a reliable indicator of the complexity involved in organising it, since shorter timeframes necessitate more concentrated and tightly choreographed schedules. It is also worth noting that the planning and preparation process will inevitably be more time-consuming the first time a camp is organised.

A year before the Summer Camp

- The initial work in August focused on defining the camp's objectives and developing a timeline of tasks to be completed in the lead-up to the event.
- In September, suitable venues were identified and secured. The University of Stirling was selected for its combination of accommodation, teaching spaces, and outdoor facilities.
- By October, the planning committee had been assembled and began drafting operational plans, drawing upon information provided by the English Bridge Union and adapting this to the Scottish context.
- The venue bookings were finalised in November, with distinct event venues and teaching rooms allocated to different groups.
- Volunteer recruitment was initialised in December, with particular attention paid to the volunteers' availability to cover different days of the summer camp, and their skills and expertise (e.g. teaching/operational support/tournament directing).

- In January and February, the promotional campaign was launched, including the development of promotional and marketing materials, and the setup of a registration system.

Three months before the Summer Camp

In the immediate lead-up to the event between March and the event itself in July, the main emphasis was on participant recruitment through word-of-mouth and targeted recruitment efforts. These efforts included community recruitment and marketing through the University of Stirling, BAMSA and SBU's channels (social media; bridge and school contacts).

Additional logistical planning was undertaken to ensure the smooth running of the summer camp. Responsibilities were allocated for sourcing, transporting, and storing essential materials including cards, boards, bidding boxes, score cards, card holders, hand sheets, refreshments, lanyards, trophies, certificates, stationery, and signage. In addition, a photographer and videographer were hired to document the event and support its wider promotion.

Provisions were made for a dedicated 'Welcome and ice-breaker session' to set the tone for the weekend. This included a warm welcome from the camp organisers and peer-led storytelling where young bridge players from the Scottish Juniors squad shared what excites them about bridge. There were even recorded testimonials and videos from players who were competing at the European Youth Pairs Championships in Italy at the time.

Later, the children engaged in group discussions about their motivations for attending the summer camp and their expectations from the camp experience (e.g. what they hoped to learn or which aspects of their bridge play they wanted to improve). They also reflected on how bridge might appeal to newcomers who have never played before. The welcome session also included fun activities like 'Design a Bridge Flyer' and 'Bridge Bingo'.

In addition to the organisation of volunteer training, several documents were developed:

- Arrival and registration procedure for the volunteers, with compiled lists of and times of arrivals
- Information for parents and carers, including directions for navigating the university campus
- Welcome packs for the participants, including the BAMSA "What is bridge?" flyer and research findings on the benefits of bridge
- Event itinerary, which was carefully curated to provide a good balance between playing bridge and socialising (see overleaf)

Summer Camp 2025 Itinerary, University of Stirling

Friday 11th July

1500	Room setup
1600	Registration and Access to Rooms available
1700-1830	Welcome and icebreaker meetings
1830-1900	Introductory briefing (C2A93)
1900-1930	Dinner: Oscar's Dining Room (Pathfoot Building)
2000-2130	Bridge Tuition (C2A87/C2A93/2A54)
2130-2230	Speed Bridge

Saturday 12th July

0800-0900	Breakfast in Oscar's
0900-1030	Bridge Tuition (C2A87/C2A93)
1030-1100	Break
1100-1200	Bridge Tuition (C2A87/C2A93/2A54)
1200-1300	Lunch: Oscar's Dining Room (Pathfoot Building)
1300-1500	Board games/Additional Tuition (C2A93)
1500-1530	Break
1530-1800	Bridge Competition (C2A93): Play with an Expert
1800-1900	Dinner: Oscar's Dining Room (Pathfoot Building)
1900-2000	Feedback with an expert (C2A93)
2000-2130	Social evening
2130-2230	Speed Bridge

Sunday 13th July

0800-0900	Breakfast: Oscar's Dining Room (Pathfoot Building)
0900-1000	Clear bedrooms
1000-1100	Bridge Tuition (C2A87/C2A93)
1100-1200	Final competition (C2A93)
1200-1300	Lunch: Oscar's Dining Room (Pathfoot Building)
1300-1500	Final competition (C2A93)
1500-1600	Prizegiving and End
1600	Collection from campus

Learning from international experience

As part of the preparation for the youth bridge summer camp, the planning team conducted research into successful models of camp delivery from Norway and the United States. This enabled the identification of best practices and the anticipation of potential challenges. It proved useful to draw insights from established programmes whilst also tailoring our approach to the Scottish context.

Three case studies, in particular, informed the approach taken: The Norwegian Bridge Federation's summer camp model, Bridge for Youth (B4Y)'s summer camp model in the Greater Seattle Area, and the MO-Kan Bridge Academy model in the State of Missouri.

These delivery models played a pivotal role in shaping the structure and implementation of our summer camp and informed our approach by emphasising the importance of securing an adequate number of volunteers and creating specialised groups of learners according to skill level.

Especially useful and important was the guidance on designing the camp to be both enjoyable and socially engaging, and fostering a positive and informal learning environment. While summer camps offer ample opportunities for intensive learning, it is equally important to acknowledge their inherently more relaxed atmosphere as compared to squad training events.

These real-world examples of best practice also provided realistic expectations regarding typical camp durations and itineraries, participant and volunteer numbers, and the balance between bridge-focussed and recreational activities.

They showcased a range of delivery formats: from fully residential camps, to hybrid (online and in-person) camps, to programmes that offer weekly sessions throughout the summer. These inspired the development of a format that best suited our local context and circumstances.

The organisers' guidance on session structure was particularly useful, with recommendations for one- to two-hour lessons and breaks of at least 15 minutes between sessions. In practice, 30-minute breaks were scheduled at our own camp to allow for more flexibility and accommodate potential overruns of sessions (both due to the relatively high number of participants and the size of the campus).

The Norwegian Bridge Federation's summer camp model

- Last year, the summer camp welcomed 72 children and 20 volunteers at a woodland sportel (sports hotel).
- The summer camp was publicised widely, to complete beginners and schools, to foster diverse participation.
- The event organisers gathered information beforehand (through questionnaires) about the children's bridge experience, playing history, and skill level. This decision was made because having an objective assessment was found to be more reliable than parental assessments of children's abilities.
- This greatly facilitated the camp planning process: as a result, activities were organised according to both bridge ability and age groups. There were four groups (clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades) and each group was assigned its own volunteer/leader.
- The static group system with designated leaders presented certain benefits and considerations. On the one hand, the grouping system was very efficient for teaching. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that it may create an 'elite' group dynamic. Encouraging intergroup mixing beyond the bridge tuition was therefore seen as vital.
- The camp programme was split roughly 50/50 between bridge and other activities. There were bridge activities (learning sessions and tournaments with prizes) and social activities which made use of the woodland setting (e.g. outdoor sports like football and BBQs). Free time was built into the schedule so that the children could explore in their own time.
- The scheduling incorporated frequent breaks; for example, hour-long bridge sessions were followed by outdoor activities or downtime. This is especially important for supporting engagement and focus throughout the day in younger participants.
- The emphasis throughout the camp was on casual play and learning rather than intensive instruction. Volunteers were reminded to avoid 'overteaching', meaning that the focus was on crafting a fun and seamless experience rather than correcting mistakes.
- After the summer camp, the organisers circulated evaluation forms to the children and the parents, and the feedback was positive. Some children asked for more bridge activities to be incorporated into the programme next time around, while others asked for fewer. The key 'hook' and appeal of the summer camp for the participants was that they were there to have fun and to socialise.
- Contact details were circulated afterwards so that the children could continue to play together online after returning home.

Bridge for Youth (B4Y)'s summer camp model

- In 2024, Bridge for Youth held a two-week Bridge camp. Week 1 was an online intermediate camp. Week 2 was an in-person camp, with both beginner and intermediate programmes held in the Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Lee's Summit, Missouri.
- The online camp was marketed to the BridgeWhiz and Bridge for Youth graduates, and delivered using the Shark Bridge teacher platform.
- The in-person camp was marketed using school flyers, parent map advertising, and various email lists. Most of the students had heard about the camp through referrals.
- Participant recruitment was thought to be the most difficult part of running the camp, since marketing is expensive and often only produces modest results. It was noted that some of the intermediate students had aged out of the programme since activities other than bridge compete with it in the high school setting.
- The staff comprised paid teachers, adult volunteers, and children volunteers, all of whom were bridge players.
- The online camp curriculum was designed to serve the needs of the graduates of the BridgeWhiz programme, who had been taking BridgeWhiz classes for 2-3 years and ranged in age from 10-16 years. 11 children attended.
- The in-person beginner bridge programme welcomed 12 students aged 9-12, and the in-person intermediate programme welcomed 5 students aged 8-16.
- The online curriculum consisted of two 2-hour sessions with a 1-hour break for lunch: a morning session covering intermediate topics in bidding, play, and defense, and an afternoon 12-board tournament session.
- The theme of the online curriculum was "Thinking Bridge". Deals were organised into core topic deal types, and the goal was for the students to recognise the deal types and apply the appropriate technique when they encounter them at the bridge table.
- The in-person beginner camp consisted of a 20-hour instruction block. Breaks were provided for snacks and lunch, and the church playground was utilised during the breaks.
- The intermediate camp was taught in a 'learning lab' model, where students were given the opportunity to play and discuss deals. The afternoon session on the last day was a tournament open to all campers and parents.
- On reflection, the organisers stated that summer camps and youth programmes are "*hard work accomplished by a few dedicated individuals*". It was their impression that one's ability to run such camps and programmes is highly dependent on the recruitment of new volunteers.

MO-KAN Bridge Academy

- The MO-KAN Bridge Academy in Missouri, sponsored in conjunction with the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) and the ACBL Educational Foundation, was open to ages 8 and above at a cost of just \$5 per morning session.
- The summer bridge programme was delivered over eight weekly sessions, each held on a Friday morning.
- Based on prior experience, organisers found that children aged nine and above were best suited to the programme.
- Earlier attempts to include seven-year-olds resulted in diminished engagement after approximately 30 minutes. While some students who began at age seven have continued to participate, they remained within the beginner/novice cohort. There is no clear evidence that starting at age seven accelerates learning outcomes compared to starting at age nine.
- Most of the children in attendance were homeschooled, with some attending public schools.
- The structure of each session included a 45-minute lesson followed by a 15-minute break.
- After the break, the children stayed in the lesson for an additional hour and a half or joined a sanctioned duplicate game (comprising 18 to 21 boards and lasting 2.5 hours). The continuing lesson also included supervised play.
- The bridge supplies, snacks, and drinks were provided by Mo-Kan Bridge Academy and Rolfe Bridge Services.
- The venue space, including tables and chairs, was donated by a local church. However, that meant that sometimes the sessions needed to be moved to a different location or paused for two weeks in June when the church space was unavailable.
- The biggest challenge, similar to that reported by the Bridge for Youth organisers, was advertising the event.
- In general, the organisers shared that they do not tend to experience any major difficulties in finding volunteers as long as there is student interest. This suggests that a high student interest (indicated by high sign-up numbers) can be a prerequisite and motivator for volunteer participation. High volunteer numbers are not likely to be present in the absence of a high number of interested young learners.

Lessons learnt from the Summer Camp: Considerations for successful Youth Bridge Summer Camps

From the initial brainstorming to the final preparations, the process of planning the summer camp proved to be a valuable, hands-on learning experience for us as organisers. Drawing upon the lessons learnt, we combined a list of considerations to guide the successful development and delivery of youth bridge summer camps (both our own, and other ones that the bridge community may wish to organise in the future).

By articulating the lessons learnt throughout the planning process, we aim to contribute to broader dialogues and practices, and facilitate the creation of more youth bridge events and summer camps. Our lessons coalesce around a common theme – structure and due process – which reflects the strategic and logistical demands of an event of this scope.

Commitment to a shared vision

In our view, one of the most affirming aspects of the planning process was the team's shared vision for the summer camp: what it would look like; where it would be held; who might attend; who might teach; what the resulting impact would be. From the initial discussions onwards, there was a clear sense of alignment between all team members about the purpose of the event.

This alignment was evident in the smooth collaboration between the team members, and indeed between BAMSA and the SBU, which allowed each team member and organisation to contribute from their strengths. The team comprised members with diverse expertise in bridge, research, strategic oversight, networking, and event management. In one team member's words, the team contained "*a healthy balance of visionaries, pragmatists, and thoughtful challengers*".

This blend of perspectives gave the project momentum. Although the core planning team was small, and found that the amount of work needed to organise the camp was more extensive than expected, their commitment to a shared vision gave the work a clear sense of direction and sustained their efforts over time.

Volunteer recruitment

A persistent challenge associated with the organisation of youth events is to secure appropriate staffing. The planning team discovered that whilst many bridge community members expressed support for youth development in principle, translating this into volunteering commitments proved less straightforward. As one organiser noted in their debrief, volunteer recruitment required sustained and proactive communication because single outreach attempts sometimes remained unanswered. Another organiser reflected on this, saying that the bridge community needs to embrace a more collective responsibility for youth bridge development.

The challenges in volunteer recruitment are somewhat surprising, given the community's desire for more younger players and that volunteers' participation in the camp (including accommodation and other associated costs) were fully subsidised. Future initiatives might benefit from a more structured approach to identifying potential volunteers, cultivating

relationships with them, outlining expectations (e.g. time/skills) and clearly articulating the benefits of bridge summer camps for young people and the volunteers themselves.

Collaborative working

Once volunteers are identified, it is essential that their skill sets, availabilities, and teaching preferences are explored, and training and support needs addressed via a combination of meetings and workshops. It was indeed found that some volunteers are best equipped or most comfortable with different roles and responsibilities: operational support; helping out with the bridge tuition; leading the bridge tuition; tournament directing. This meant that each volunteer needed different kinds and levels of support – such as appropriate training, teaching materials, or structured guidance – in order to deliver a seamless and standardised bridge curriculum.

In practice, after the summer camp it was found that some of the volunteer teachers had been given too little structured guidance, which led to some improvisation during the event itself. The team ultimately reflected that the volunteer training, although highly beneficial, may have strongly favoured topics related to safeguarding, child protection, and risk assessment, hence affording less attention to more operational matters (i.e. more teaching guidelines and more detailed assessments of player ability). A more balanced and multifaceted approach to volunteer training is recommended.

Assessing children's skill levels

It was found that the structured guidance provided to the bridge teachers and helpers was directly dependent on the accurate assessment of children's skill levels. In other words, to properly prepare or tailor materials and teaching approaches to the groups' needs, both the organisers and the teachers would have needed to have a clear and up-to-date understanding of the learners' theoretical and practical knowledge, learning goals, and individual strengths.

In practice, this assessment of skills proved tricky, with a few children being placed in groups that are too advanced for their level, and a few others placed in groups beneath their actual level, who were in need of more challenging and advanced instruction.

As a general observation, the complexity of skill assessment is perhaps underpinned by the fact that children's skill levels are sometimes not directly proportional to the time they have spent learning and playing bridge. Additional variables such as the duration and frequency of play sessions, as well as the children's commitment and interest in self-directed learning also play a role in shaping skill levels. Documenting that two young people have learnt bridge over a three-month period does not, in itself, provide sufficient grounds to infer that their skill levels are similar.

A potential solution could be to adopt a more structured approach, for example, by designing more detailed quizzes or holding a sort of 'qualifying' match at the start of the summer camp. To account for possible misalignment, tutors were informed upon receiving their student assignments that, because of the self-declaration of skill levels, some students might be better suited to different pairings. Tutors were encouraged to make skill readjustments gently and sensitively, using their judgment to determine when the changes would be well received and beneficial.

Feedback and outcomes

Feedback on the summer camp was provided by **39 participants (30 children and 9 adults)**. The adults (parents, bridge teachers, and volunteers) also reached out over email after the event to provide more detailed feedback.

The children rated the summer camp **8 out of 10** on average, and the adults rated it **9 out of 10** on average.

Out of 30 responses from the children, 25 (**86%**) said that they'd like to come again next year. 4 replied "no" or "maybe", with two indicating that they would like to continue to play bridge, just not in a camp setting, one saying that they will have a busy summer next year, and another saying that they have already achieved what they wanted, which was to *"learn basic bridge and look at the campus"*.

9 out of 9 parents confirmed that they would definitely come again next year, saying that *"it's been good to have lots of time to play, replay & figure things out"* and that they would be even more likely to attend if more adult learners join the next time around.

Children's feedback

A frequency analysis of the children's responses revealed a clear hierarchy of preferences for the summer camp activities, with social interaction emerging as the most frequently cited positive aspect of the experience.

1. **Socialisation and interpersonal connection** garnered the highest number of explicit mentions (13 instances), manifesting in various forms throughout the responses.

Young people made reference to valued experiences such as *"being with friends"*, *"chatting with other pairs"*, *"bonding with roommates"*, *"making new friends"*, *"getting to meet and play with new people"*, and *"playing with the experts"*. This suggests that the summer camp had a dual purpose: (1) strengthening existing friendships and bridge partnerships; and (2) creating new friendships and playing bridge against new opponents or partnerships.

This profile of engagement suggests that the summer camp offered multifaceted social benefits. Of note, the children found not only new friends, but also friends with whom they share a common interest – playing bridge – which is likely to sustain their new friendships. One can also reasonably anticipate that the exposure to new players and varied styles of play enhanced the children's bridge skills.

2. **Bridge tournaments** received 9 direct mentions. Here, the participants particularly valued the authentic competitive experience.

As one respondent articulated:

"I enjoyed the 20-board tournament we did as it gave me the feeling of playing a proper bridge game."

The tournament format appears to have provided much excitement, with other participants noting satisfaction from *"winning bridge games"* and feeling *"really proud when beating the experts."*

3. **General bridge activities** (excluding tournaments) accumulated 8 mentions.

The educational components of the summer camp were particularly appreciated. One participant specifically highlighted "*the bridge tuition...specifically the one that taught us Stayman*", while another mentioned that they felt "*really happy when handed an amazing hand*".

4. **Board games** (8 mentions) and **Speed Bridge** (7 mentions) were thought to be just as exciting as bridge.

Enthusiasm was conveyed for board games such as Monopoly and card games other than bridge. One participant stated:

"I liked when we had free time and that we got to do more card games instead of just bridge"

This implies that allowing children to engage in games and activities beyond bridge during a bridge-focussed summer camp is not only compatible with the camp's core objectives, but it actively enhances them as well.

With regards to what the children learnt at the summer camp, several learning outcomes were reported:

- Bidding, especially how to respond when partner bids 1 No Trump (N = 8)
- Stayman and transfer techniques (N = 8)
- Trumps and how to draw trumps (N = 3)
- Scoring and points needed for a game (N = 3)
- Other: defending; evaluating a hand; the value of two-suited hands; how to finesse

The children also provided the following suggestions for improving the summer camp:

- More bridge, including more tuition but also more focus on playing bridge rather than pure theory in lessons (N = 5)
- Longer breaks (N = 3), more time outdoors (N = 2), and shorter bridge sessions (N = 1)
- The beginners' group would have liked to learn more about bidding and there could have been a larger advanced group (N = 3)
- The icebreakers could be shorter or were not necessary (N = 2), more socialising on the first day (N = 1), more moving around to play other people (N = 1)

The research team collected metrics (via surveys) of the children's views on the game of bridge and the summer camp before and after attending. Before the camp, the children who were new to bridge thought that they might enjoy playing bridge because "*it helps to make new friends*" and "*develop strategic thinking*". At the same time, they thought that bridge might be "*too technical*" or "*challenging at the start of learning*", in part due to having to memorise all the cards.

The children who had played bridge before the camp conveyed slightly different motivations and expectations. Many were inspired to attend because they wanted to learn more bridge and meet new people, and the camp had been recommended by their bridge teachers. They chiefly expected distinct improvements in their bridge skills, often in relation to their bidding or declarer play.

As an additional observation, word of mouth (e.g. through bridge teachers) appeared to be one of the most effective participant recruitment methods for the summer camp. This suggests that costly or time-consuming marketing campaigns may be less effective than recruiting through strong social networks. Indeed, the Youth Coordinator had found that ‘cold call’ approaches had not yielded as much participation as actively leveraging the SBU and BAMSA’s existing professional and community networks. As a further consideration, while existing networks have proven highly effective for outreach and guaranteed participation in our summer camp, additional relationships with educators and community leaders could be cultivated as well. This will ensure that there is on-going outreach to audiences that are completely new to bridge.

After the camp, children’s enjoyment and confidence of bridge was recorded through ten Likert-scale statements rated on a three-point scale: ‘agree’, ‘not sure’, and ‘disagree’. The findings paint an interesting picture of youth bridge participation.

Statement	% of participants who agree (N = 29)
I enjoyed learning and playing bridge at the Summer Camp	100%
Bridge is fun	93%
The rules of bridge are easy to understand	34%
I feel confident playing bridge	55%
I like working with a partner in bridge	93%
I would recommend bridge to a friend	83%
I think other people my age would enjoy playing bridge	55%
I think that bridge helps me think carefully and solve problems	83%
I think that bridge would help me get better grades at school	38%
Bridge is more interesting than other games I’ve played	48%

Firstly, the survey data reveals a pattern of near-universal enjoyment of bridge, with very high ratings given for young people’s enjoyment of the summer camp (100%) and the game of bridge itself (93%). The social aspect of bridge emerges, once again, as a principal driver of participation, with young people saying that they like working with a partner in bridge (93%) and that they would recommend bridge to a friend (83%) – perhaps with a view towards playing together. Alongside socialisation, a key benefit of bridge is that it helps young people think carefully and solve problems (83%).

Secondly, there is an apparent disconnect between enjoyment and comprehension. Out of the sampled young people, only 34% considered the rules of bridge easy to understand, and 55% felt confident playing the game. This translated into low confidence that bridge would help with grades within the school setting (38%). In addition, despite being willing to recommend bridge to their friends, only 55% of young people believe their peers would enjoy playing bridge, and less than half (48%) find it more interesting than other games.

These findings have crucial implications for the development and promotion of youth bridge. The disconnect between enjoyment and comprehension suggests that children can derive pleasure from bridge despite, or perhaps because of, its complexity. The interplay between enjoyment and challenge is such that although children enjoy bridge *whilst* learning and playing it, bridge might maintain its somewhat niche status in youth culture and its low transmissibility within social circles.

The challenge, then, might not be to foster enjoyment of bridge for the duration of young people's participation in youth events, but to attract them to these events in the first place. If young people are willing to recommend bridge to their friends, but do not believe that their peers would enjoy it or that other games are likely to compete for their attention, then this brings into question the potential of bridge to propagate across youth populations. This assertion holds true if it is assumed that young people's on-going engagement with bridge is at least partially dependent on their peers' participation.

An encouraging prospect is that the low comprehension of the game reported in the sample might prove to be a driver for further participation, rather than a barrier to participation, as young people who have tried bridge may feel compelled to learn more and improve their mastery of the game. Bridge stakeholders' efforts may therefore be best directed towards exploring ways to maximise the social transmissibility and appeal of bridge and emphasising its cultural relevance.

Adults' feedback

An analysis of the adults' feedback – and especially the parents' feedback – indicated that the most enjoyable aspect of the summer camp for them was seeing the children have fun with bridge. Rather than make reference to their own experiences or learning outcomes, most of the parents said that their appreciation of the camp stemmed from observing their children's enthusiasm and social connection. For example, parents described their impressions as follows:

"It was wonderful to see so many young players learning bridge."

"I also loved seeing so many kids getting into bridge & playing together"

"(I enjoyed) the sound of children's voices during the relax time"

This pattern of vicarious enjoyment signifies how parents' impressions of the camp are defined through their children's achievements and experiences.

When asked about what they learnt at the camp, parents again made more frequent references to their children's learning outcomes than their own, noting that they attended primarily as chaperones and not learners of bridge. For instance, the parents who learnt bridge themselves said that they *"finally learnt how to count their losers"* and that they became more proficient at *"Stayman and transfers"*. Still, some parents did mention enjoying *"learning a new concept and seeing it played during a game"*. There may be scope for greater parental engagement in learning in future camps.

Those who were primarily chaperoning said:

"My daughter said the lessons were really good. She learned a lot. She thought Saturday was a great day of activities"

"The feedback from my boys is very positive – clear, concise"

"Students enjoyed lessons and having a choice of lessons was great".

Parents' input on potential areas for improvement manifested as unanimous agreement: most were pleased with the camp and had no specific suggestions, with some asking for more breaks to be added to the itinerary next time around. They conveyed that the camp “exceeded expectations” and praised the “good organisation and schedule” of the camp. One parent underscored this by remarking that “this was the best-organised junior bridge event we’ve attended”. It became evident that the smooth execution and effective organisation of the summer camp (e.g. pacing and variety of the sessions; activities running to schedule) were key determinants of parents’ positive perceptions of the camp.

A parent who was involved in learning bridge provided similar feedback on the tuition to that commonly conveyed by the children. Although they appreciated that “the lectures were short and that there was lots of playing time”, they also thought that more practical support could be given in the practice sessions:

“I also really appreciated when we had an expert/teacher hovering around our table talking to and teaching us - I found those moments more useful and empowering than the formal lessons and would have liked more of that.”

Early outcomes

To demonstrate the value of hosting bridge summer camps for young people, we compiled a summary of some of the early outcomes from our recent camp:

- Fifteen complete newcomers to the game were invited to join the intermediate players in follow-up activities (online RealBridge sessions; school-based sessions; the English Bridge Union’s autumn camp) so that they could continue their bridge learning journeys
- The mobilisation of volunteers for the summer camp sparked discussions about next steps – for example, several players offered to start teaching in a school in Dumfries
- The University of Stirling recognised the success of the event, highlighting this in internal newsletters and communications, and featuring it on their [social media](#) and [website](#)
- The summer camp received attention online, with dozens of likes and shares across [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and the [SBU website](#)
- The summer camp received press coverage in one of Scotland’s major news outlets, [The Herald](#), with an article titled “Bridge is a mindsport, and researchers want more players”
- The SBU expressed a strong appreciation for BAMSA’s involvement, noting that this “helped bring together the dynamism and systematic vigour of an academic institution”

These early outcomes show that summer camps have great potential to enhance the visibility of youth bridge, reach new audiences, and create lasting engagement. One might anticipate that similar event formats (e.g. training weekends, demonstrations, talks, workshops or showcases) would also act as catalysts for youth bridge, not only bringing the bridge community together in shared pursuits, but also appealing to newcomers and existing players.

Critical reflections on best practice

Bridge sessions:

- The labels used to distinguish groups based on bridge ability should be clear and relatable for teachers. The suits can be used to represent each group, with spades, as the highest ranked suit, being assigned to the more experienced players.
- Holding camp activities in a single room can help create a less hierarchical group structure for some events. A Swiss pairs format allows players of all skill levels to participate in the same competition. To accommodate varying experience and pace, less experienced (and often slower) players might play three-board rounds, while others continue with four-board rounds.
- Some children liked the opportunity to play with an expert adult player, whereas others felt more comfortable playing with someone their own age ('Play with an Expert or a Pal').
- Most children were not able to remember the boards, even with hand records, for a group post-mortem after the competition. For those children who played with an expert, a small pause after each round of 3-4 boards may allow them to ask the expert some questions and for the expert to offer one key tip rather than having a later discussion session.
- Parents can be invited to arrive slightly ahead of the scheduled pick-up time to attend the prize-giving ceremony and celebrate the presentation of certificates and awards.

General points:

- The camp committee should have an overall organiser, with specific roles for other members: recruitment; sign-ups and registration; teaching programme and volunteers; camp practicalities (accommodation, food, welcome pack); bridge practicalities (equipment, dealing boards, hand sheets).
- To maximise the impact of youth camps, it is important to have follow-up activities planned in advance. This includes securing volunteers to run them and promoting the opportunities to young people and parents both during the camp and afterwards.
- It can be beneficial to include squad training for the national youth teams during the summer camp. This could be just one day for the more advanced youth or integrated into the whole weekend. The more advanced youth squads can be inspirational for the less experienced campers. Some squad players could be asked to share their youth team experiences as a way of motivating the campers to carry on playing beyond the camp.
- A volunteer should be assigned to keep an eye out for children potentially struggling to make friends or feeling overwhelmed. This person should check in with them and offer support as needed.
- Feedback sheets and surveys should be developed and distributed so that each following iteration of the Summer Camp is tailored to the campers' preferences and responsive to changing contexts.