



Bridge: A MindSport For All

Connects People, Challenges Minds

Bridge across the life course: Young people's bridge journeys and transitions

Summary of BAMSA Report (2026)

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This study investigates young people's engagement with bridge across the life course, focussing on youth transitions within the broader context of three major life stages: childhood, adulthood, and retirement. Drawing on interviews with forty young bridge players (aged 13-31) and eight bridge teachers in Scotland and England, the research reveals five types of progression within bridge journeys:

- From casual play to serious leisure
- From supervised to independent play
- From playing non-competitively to competing in local, regional, and national tournaments
- From playing with different partners to strategising with a regular partner
- From conscious thought to intuitive play

The findings show that young people's bridge journeys tend to follow a fluctuating pattern of engagement where players experience an early phase of active participation followed by disengagement in early adulthood and mid-life. This pattern stems from a tension between bridge and other significant commitments that also demand a significant time investment, notably work and family. Disengagement is also compounded, at times, by a lack of easily identifiable opportunities to play bridge that are both local and conveniently timed. Many young people maintain their identities as bridge players over time, evident in their efforts to continue playing despite obstacles and their intention to return to bridge later in life. They commonly re-engage with bridge after retirement, when there is more time for leisure and fewer obligations.

The synthesis of the interview responses suggests that bridge transitions may be best facilitated by strengthening social support networks. This includes the development of welcoming peer and intergenerational communities and ensuring that young players have access to mentors who can guide them through transitions. Providing play spaces and formats that accommodate changing needs is equally important. Concrete actions towards enabling smoother transitions include establishing more clubs in secondary schools and universities, alongside evening or weekend sessions aimed at players in their twenties and thirties. Further recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

Recommendations

1. Provide social support across educational stages and early adulthood

Young people are most at risk of disengaging from bridge during the youth transition from childhood to adulthood. A dedicated role could be created within bridge clubs or bridge organisations, taking responsibility for maintaining contact with young players facing transitions. Its remit could include checking in regularly, circulating information about forthcoming events and opportunities, and helping players identify partners or clubs suited to their changing circumstances.

Some support is also needed during the transition from primary to secondary school. Pupils who no longer have access to a school bridge club should be supported to identify alternatives or even start their own club. Bridge organisations may benefit from retaining contact details (with appropriate permission) and maintaining communication with young players.

2. Expand the range of times and formats of lessons, games, and tournaments

The evidence indicates that scheduling mismatches are a primary driver of disengagement, rather than a loss of interest in bridge per se. For bridge to become more accessible to players in their twenties and thirties who work full-time, evening and weekend sessions are essential.

It is important to acknowledge that not every club will have the volunteer capacity or player numbers to sustain new formats. Regional events at weekends may bring geographically dispersed young players together without placing unsustainable demands on small local clubs. At the local level, hourly drop-in opportunities or shorter or more informal sessions could lower the participation threshold for busy players.

3. Foster welcoming club communities

The social dimension of bridge is consistently identified as a motivator for participation and as a protective factor against disengagement. Club environments could welcome young people by matching them with experienced and supportive partners or mentors and maintaining a positive and encouraging tone during interactions.

The transition from a school or university bridge group to an adult bridge club is frequently experienced as daunting. Clubs and organisations can ease this through buddy systems, by pairing newcomers with welcoming and experienced members, and setting realistic expectations about club play.

4. Accommodate the full spectrum of player orientations

This research confirms that bridge attracts many different kinds of players. Bridge tuition and play should accommodate both more casual and more serious players whilst retaining the designation of bridge as serious leisure and signposting opportunities for progression.

Bridge players should not feel that bridge is too demanding of their time and cognitive investment, unless that is the specific goal of their participation, since it was seen that some players disengage if they perceive bridge to be ‘too serious’. This is particularly important for players in their twenties and thirties, who may be casual players out of necessity. In recognition of the many kinds of transitions experienced by players, bridge organisations can help normalise more irregular play patterns, welcoming players returning after a break.

5. Support different progressions by providing tailored support

Young people commonly experience five kinds of progressions within their bridge journeys, which signify their growing interest and commitment to bridge as a form of serious leisure. Tailored strategies to support players through each progression could prove beneficial:

- (1) From casual play to serious leisure – recognise when players begin taking bridge more seriously and offer more challenging and stimulating forms of learning and play.
- (2) From supervised to independent play – highlight how independent play differs from supervised play, setting expectations around greater player autonomy.
- (3) From playing non-competitively to competing in local, regional, and national tournaments – help players identify tournaments appropriate to their current skill level and provide preparatory training.
- (4) From playing with different partners to strategising with a regular partner – help players find regular partners and teach them partnership etiquette and strategy.
- (5) From conscious thought to intuitive play – support learners with memory aids at initial stages of learning and allow for greater creativity and flexibility as more automatic and intuitive cognition develops.

