

## **Dear Members**

As we start to get back to some form of normality, it is pleasing to see that more members are now back playing live bridge, but equally importantly that online bridge is still meeting the needs of those members who are unable to access live bridge. The challenge for us all is to offer an appropriate balance between live and online bridge so that the wide, and often conflicting, needs of our members can be met, and clubs can remain in good health.

## **Review of SBU's International Activities**

Feedback from members has suggested that they would like Scotland to have a strong international presence. This is now part of SBU's Strategic Plan and is in the context of poor results over many years, particularly in Open competitions. A Group was established by the Board to review all aspects of international activity and make recommendations for change. A summary of their findings and recommendations is attached as an Appendix to this Newsletter. We're indebted to the Working Group, Stirling University and the contributions from players and administrators around the world.

## **Director of Selection**

A key recommendation of the International Review Group is the appointment of a Director of Selection. The role is outlined in the Appendix and further details are available on request. If you may be interested in applying for this role, please get in touch with Neil Archibald ([hr@sbu.org.uk](mailto:hr@sbu.org.uk)) by the end of February.

## **Getting more youngsters playing bridge**

We are very fortunate to have members who already introduce bridge to youngsters in their local community. However, we desperately need more volunteers to get involved. Please get in touch with Marina Evans ([education@sbu.org.uk](mailto:education@sbu.org.uk)) if you think you could help, or you have contact with teachers and schools that may be interested.

## **Mempad Development**

A significant amount of work will be undertaken over the next few months to undertake an essential upgrade to our current Mempad system. Although the system incorporates our membership database, it's primary and more complex function is to administer our Masterpoint system. The Board considered alternative systems but concluded that upgrading the existing software is the most cost-effective solution. Concurrently we will also consider how we can improve our emailing system to members, which is a known weakness of the current system.

## **Masterpoints Scheme**

With the advent of online SBU competitions and a different bridge landscape post Covid, we need to reconsider the purpose of the Master Point Scheme and to what extent it meets the needs of the SBU and its members. Considerations will include the allocation of red and black points, and whether the current rankings and bronze/silver/gold designations are fit for purpose. A Working Group chaired by Anne Coles is addressing the many questions, and will produce a set of recommendations to the Board in due course.

**Alan Goodman** ([chair@sbu.org.uk](mailto:chair@sbu.org.uk))

**February 2023**

## **APPENDIX**

### **Report from SBU International Review Group (IRG)**

#### **Background**

The Group\* was established by the Board to review all aspects of international activity with a view to improving results in the medium to longer term. Feedback from members has suggested that they would like Scotland to have a strong international presence, particularly at junior level. This is now part of SBU's Strategic Plan and is in the context of poor results over many years, particularly in Open competitions.

The IRG's remit was to recommend a new structure be established for the 2023/4 season onwards to achieve our aim which is "to support players, develop players, and select teams so that results in international competitions rank highly relative to comparable national bridge organisations." It is recognised that we start from a very low base, our teams are all amateur, and significant progress may take 5-10 years. However, some tangible improvement should be visible by 2026.

The IRG operated with three workstreams: –

1. Looking at development and support for aspiring and current international players which included

- A survey on junior and international training programmes via the World Bridge Federation
- A survey of aspiring internationals from many countries, including many who came through junior bridge.
- Discussions between workstream members and with external individuals with relevant experience. This includes reflecting on a range of issues and risks.

2. Considering the most appropriate way to select teams/pairs to represent Scotland, and the support required for the teams. The conclusions draw upon the analysis of the questionnaire that was sent to Scottish internationalists and trialists.

3. Identifying the financial implications of taking part in various international events.

The proposals made by IRG attempt to recognise current financial pressures whilst establishing a strategy to develop and support players who represent Scotland in the international arena.

#### **Key conclusions**

- That the current structure is very unlikely to deliver a significant improvement in the playing standards.
- The key to players' development is to improve the quality of the opposition players are playing against, support them to put together an effective training routine, and for players and partnerships to work hard on their own development.
- Currently there is no structure in place to support players' development once they go past junior ranks. High potential juniors need to be integrated into the top-level set-up through support from established players, either as partners, teammates, or formal mentors. Starting young and having high quality development from an early stage is often of vital importance.
- We must recruit, train and support committed volunteers who can act as coaches and mentors. This would be for players across the spectrum from junior through to top level.

- Any substantial improvement will require sustained commitment. It is widely recognised that improvements will come at a cost. To balance this, the players will need to demonstrate that the monies contributed by the SBU are matched by players' commitment to work to improve results.

### **Key Recommendations agreed by SBU Board**

1. A Director of Selection (DOS) be appointed responsible for the development of international players and selection of teams.
2. That a squad system be established which will form the basis of selection of teams for events from 1st September 2023. It is expected that squad selection and on-going development will start once a DOS is appointed.
3. Investment of time/money in the junior set-up to improve attraction (schools and universities) and development (coaching, mentoring, events support).
4. A budget would be made available over a 3/4-year period, to support the development of both junior and adult players. It is recognised that players selected for international competition may be asked to make a financial contribution (subject to an appropriate 'safety net') and that all international players should be asked to support other fund-raising activities.
5. SBU will develop opportunities to raise awareness and promote interest in international bridge. This will include online pro-am fundraisers, social media, celebrating success better, improved website promotion etc. This should be combined with working closely with BAMSA and an initiative to lobby government to secure recognition of the benefits of bridge, and possibly funding.
6. Building collaboration with other national bridge organisations (e.g., EBU junior squad leader) could lead to some shared training or practice events.
7. The Board agreed in principle, to support the approaches and specific policies recommended by IRG for an initial three years. The DOS will be required to report directly to the Board on a regular basis.

### **Research and Survey Results**

Research conducted for the International Review Group is on the BAMSA website <https://bridgemindsport.org/home/research/bridging-organisations>. It includes four separate pieces of research:

- NBO perspectives: Survey answered by 28 NBOs (out of 101 countries after distribution by the World Bridge Federation). Includes 42 responses from trainers within the 28 NBOs.
- Player perspectives: Questionnaire with 95 international and aspiring players.
- Top player interviews: Data on NPCs, coaching and advice for development from interviews with 52 top players from UK, USA and Europe
- Scottish players: 33 (out of 80 contacted) Scottish Internationalists Survey

Background information will also be available on SBU website in due course.

**\* The members of the IRG were Mike Ash (Chair), Alex Adamson, Malcolm Cuthbertson, Philip Morrison, and Sam Punch. Abi Wilson was originally on the IRG but stood down in December 2022.**