

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.**