



Scottish Bridge Union

Systems Policy

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Other Scottish Bridge Union Policy Documents:

- **“SBU Alerting Procedures (2013)”**
- **“SBU Bidding Box regulations (2013)”**
- **“SBU Screen regulations (2015)”**

can be found on the SBU website at sbu.org.uk/index.php/council/laws-ethics. Hard copies may be obtained on request.

Internet links updated in April 2015

1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This document supersedes the “Handbook of SBU Directives and Permitted Conventions” published in September 1999.
- 1.1.2 This document defines permitted partnership agreements in bidding and play, and general regulations concerning convention cards and disclosure of systems.
- Information about rules governing specific competitions will be published separately in the annual “Competition Handbook” (hereafter referred to as the “Handbook”), on the website sbu.org.uk and at competition venues.
- 1.1.3 The Scottish Bridge Union (SBU) is guided in its procedures by World Bridge Federation (WBF) practices for alerting and the use of bidding boxes and screens.
- 1.1.4 The SBU has also adopted the WBF division of events into Categories rather than the previous ‘Levels’. There are 5 Categories, ranging from Category 1, for international level competitions, to Category 5, for ‘No Fear’ type events. Each Category has its own definition of permitted agreements in bidding and play. Each SBU competition will be allocated to a Category.
- Districts, Areas and Clubs may allocate their events to an appropriate Category if they so wish.
- 1.1.5 It is not possible to discuss every existing or conceivable conventional agreement within the confines of an accessible booklet. Players are expected to try to conform with the spirit of the policy, making themselves responsible for ensuring that their systems comply with the conditions of contest for each event in which they play.
- In case of doubt, please approach the Laws and Ethics Committee for advice: contact details will be published in the Handbook, and can be found on the website: sbu.org.uk/index.php/council/laws-ethics.
- 1.1.6 Tournament Directors are not responsible for monitoring systems, though they may offer advice on request. A Tournament Director has absolute discretion in ruling whether or not a particular convention or treatment is allowed in the event for which he is responsible.

2 Directives

2.1 Definitions

- Natural:** a call or play that is not artificial or conventional
- Artificial:** a call that carries information concerning a denomination other than the one named or a bid concerned with values or controls which does not necessarily indicate preparedness to play in the named denomination
- Length:** three cards or more
- Shortage:** two cards or fewer
- Balanced:** For the purpose of classifying NT openings, balanced shall mean a hand with no more than one shortage; that shortage shall be not fewer than two cards in length
- High Card Points:** HCP are calculated using the Milton Work evaluation: ace=4; king=3; queen=2; jack = 1
- Distributional values:** A hand with distributional values contains one or more shortages. Distributional values may also be added for extra length.
- Average Hand:** A hand containing 10HCP with no distributional values
- Published:** A conventional agreement will be considered as published if it has been recorded in an accessible form and made available in that form to officials of the SBU and all registered players in an SBU event

2.2 Convention Cards and Disclosure of System

2.2.1 Both members of a pair must play the same system.

(See Law 40B2. The SBU has chosen not to vary the general requirement that the meaning of a call or play shall not alter by reference to the member of the partnership by whom it is made. This requirement refers solely to method, not to style and judgement.)

2.2.2 At the start of each round, you should exchange convention cards with your opponents and inform them of:

- Your basic method
E.g. Natural with four-/five-card majors (specify the minimum length for one of a minor if fewer than four); Strong Club (specify minimum HCP for 1♣)
- The range of your opening 1NT, including any variations according to position and vulnerability
- The meaning of your two-level opening bids
E.g. Strong Twos; Strong 2♣, Game-forcing 2♦, Weak Twos in the majors; Weak Twos in three suits; Multi 2♦; Two-suited Weak Twos in the Majors
- Any unusual aspects of your system

List these items in a clearly identifiable area of your convention card.

E.g. Canapé (opening or responding in a shorter suit before a longer one); game-forcing two-over-one responses; weak jump shifts; unusual doubles (such as low-level penalty doubles; or a double of 1NT which is not penalty).

We strongly recommend the use of the SBU Convention Card which can be downloaded from the SBU website: sbu.org.uk/index.php/council/laws-ethics.

The WBF Convention Card is also acceptable and can also be downloaded from the SBU website.

2.2.3 If you fail to provide two fully completed convention cards, then

- If the opponents have been damaged by lack of knowledge of your methods the Director will award an adjusted score and may impose a procedural penalty.
- The Director will instruct you to play the SBU Simple System.

You must continue to play this system until you have fully completed two convention cards. You will not be allowed any additional time to do so; you will only be able to use the time available between rounds.

2.2.4 When an opponent asks for an explanation of the auction he is entitled to a full explanation of all bids, including any special understandings and negative inferences, whether the bids are natural or conventional.

2.2.5 Similarly, opponents are entitled to a full explanation of defensive card play. In particular, it is unacceptable for a regular partnership to claim that they play random cards. All partnerships develop implicit understandings of which cards are played in different circumstances; such understandings must be formalised and disclosed to opponents.

2.2.6 Directors and Appeals Committees will give the benefit of any doubt to your opponents if your card contains inaccuracies or discrepancies, if it lacks relevant information, or if you have failed to disclose explicit or implicit agreements. Such shortcomings will prejudice any claim that it was the call or play rather than the explanation that was mistaken. (See Laws 40 and 75)

2.2.7 Further information on alerting can be found in the **"SBU Alerting Procedures"** published in September 2013: this is available for downloading from the SBU website; hard copies can be obtained on application to your District Secretary.

2.3 Opening Bids

So that players may know what to expect from certain opening calls, the SBU has produced the following guidelines. Any agreed deviations from these guidelines must be clearly documented on the Convention Card, and may alter the Colour Classification of a system from Green/Blue to Red.

2.3.1 An opening bid of one of a suit is expected to conform to the **Rule of 18**:

“HCP plus the lengths of the longest two suits is at least 18”.

Thus ♠6 ♥AJ1075 ♦K9872 ♣84 is an acceptable opening bid: $8+5+5 = 18$

But ♠7 ♥KQJ652 ♦Q83 ♣985 is substandard: $8+6+3 = 17$

(**Note:** any agreed variations, e.g. light opening bids in 3rd seat, must be clearly documented on the Convention Card.)

2.3.2 A Strong (Acol) Two opener in a suit is expected to conform to the **Rule of 25**:

“HCP plus the lengths of the longest two suits is at least 25”

Thus ♠6 ♥AKJ1075 ♦AK72 ♣42 is an acceptable Strong Two opener: $15+6+4 = 25$

But ♠7 ♥AKQJ6542 ♦Q32 ♣8 is substandard: $12+8+3 = 23$

(**Note:** A partnership may agree different criteria for its Two-level opening bids; these must be clearly documented on the Convention card.)

2.3.3 An opening bid of 1NT indicates a balanced hand with a specified point range that does not commence below 10 points.

(**Note:** this does not preclude opening 1NT with semi-balanced 5-4-2-2 or 6-3-2-2 distribution, or even with a singleton honour and a weak long suit. Subsequent bidding agreements, however, should not identify such hand types)

2.3.4 A pre-emptive opening bid is expected to have at least six cards in the suit opened, and less than average HCP.

(**Note:** this does not preclude pre-empting with fewer than six cards, or a different point range, but such partnership agreements must be clearly documented on the Convention Card.)

2.4 Partnership Agreements and Psychic Bids

2.4.1 Both members of a partnership must play the same system, including bidding and card play agreements. Where, as a matter of style, members frequently adopt different approaches from each other, that difference (or those differences) must be disclosed on the system card.

2.4.2 The Systems Policy outlines meanings for calls and plays that a partnership may **agree** to use. For example, partners may agree that an opening 1♠ shows 11+HCP with 5+spades, or an opening 1NT shows 12-14 HCP with a balanced hand.

Such agreements in no way remove the right of any player to make a “psychic bid” such as opening 1♠ with 5 HCP and a doubleton spade, or 1NT with a void, provided that the bid is as much a surprise to partner as it is to the opponents.

See “**The Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge 2007**”, Law 40c

“1. A player may deviate from his side’s announced understandings always provided that his partner has no more reason to be aware of the deviation than have the opponents. Repeated deviation leads to implicit understandings which then form part of the partnership’s methods and must be disclosed in accordance with the regulations governing disclosure of system. If

the Director judges there is undisclosed knowledge that has damaged the opponents he shall adjust the score and may award a procedural penalty.

"2. Other than the above, no player has any obligation to disclose to opponents that he has deviated from his announced methods."

If a call is based upon a partnership understanding it ceases to be psychic.

A partnership understanding exists when the frequency of occurrence is sufficient for the partner of the player who makes the call to take his awareness of psychic possibilities into account, whether he does so or not; or, of course, it may be a matter explicitly agreed. Such an understanding must be disclosed beforehand.

Explicit agreements that psychic calls are expected, or providing systemic protection for psychic calls, are classified as Brown Sticker. An example of such a Brown Sticker agreement would be when, third in hand at favourable vulnerability, a player is expected to open the bidding on anything at all.

Understandings whereby from time to time there may be gross violations of the normal meanings of calls, and where the nature or type of violation can be anticipated, must be disclosed on the convention cards. The understandings may be explicitly agreed or they may have developed from partnership experience or mutually shared knowledge not available to opponents. They must be listed on the card amongst the conventions that may call for special defence and give full detail of situations in which these violations may occur and of the relevant partnership practices and expectations. Subject to satisfactory disclosure methods of this kind are permissible in Category 1, 2 and 3 events.

Similar principles apply in the case of psychic actions in defenders' play of the cards.

2.4.3 Where a suspicion arises that a psychic bid has been 'fielded' (partner has taken an unusual action that might suggest the psyche was not unexpected) the incident should be reported immediately. If the Tournament Director considers the case proven he will assign an adjusted score and may impose a procedural penalty.

2.4.4 Strong artificial opening bids

The SBU has taken up its option under Law 40B(d) to restrict the use of psychic artificial calls. It is forbidden to psyche strong artificial opening bids that are forcing:

e.g. an Acol strong 2♣ opener, or 1♣ in a Strong Club system.

If a player psyches a strong artificial opening bid that is forcing this must be reported. Such a psyche is subject to a procedural penalty.

2.4.5 Random Actions

It is forbidden to open or to overcall hands which, by agreement, may contain fewer than 8 high card points and for which no further definition is provided.

2.4.6 Encrypted Signals

Players may not use signalling methods by which the message or messages conveyed by the signals are hidden from the declarer because of some key available only to the defenders (i.e. encrypted signals are not allowed)

3 Systems Policy

3.1 Aims

The aims of the regulations are:

- to ensure that our competitions can be properly operated and administered, with a fair and equal chance for all competitors
- to ensure that players are in no doubt as to what is permitted in the various categories, and what is required with regard to disclosure of systems material.
- to allow the development of constructive bidding methods
- to restrict the use of methods that are purely destructive or designed with the primary intention of preventing simple counter-measures
- to provide a natural, simple system for “No Fear” events.
- to keep the licensing rules as simple as possible

The SBU reserves the right to prohibit any methods that, in its opinion, violate these general principles, even if such methods comply with the letter of the regulations.

3.2 Classification of Systems

In order to facilitate recognition, systems will be classified by Colour. The Colour should be clearly identified on the Convention Card by one of the following:

- a coloured sticker or printed circle;
- or the appropriate name.

The following sections identify the typical features of each colour of system.

3.2.1 Green (Natural) Systems

- a) An opening bid of one of a suit guarantees length in the named denomination.
Exception: in a five-card major system a non-forcing 1♣ may be opened with a doubleton
- b) An opening bid of 1NT indicates a balanced hand with a specified point range that does not commence below 10 HCP (See [2.3.3](#))
- c) The first response to an opening bid of one of a suit is either natural, or promises length in a known suit.
Exceptions:
 - i) a 1♦ response to 1♣ may have any meaning
 - ii) a first response may be artificial if it is always strong and forcing.
 - iii) transfer responses to opening bids of one of a suit are not permitted in Green Systems.
- d) Opening bids of 2♣ through 3♣ are either:
 - i) natural; if weak they promise at least four cards in the bid suit; or
 - ii) artificial, with any combination of meanings provided that all are strong and forcing

Exception: an artificial 2♦ opener where the only weak meaning is a weak two opener in either major, whether with or without additional strong meanings.

e) Constructive bidding is largely natural; conventional bids are widely familiar and/or easy to explain and understand.

f) Overcalls are natural, or indicate one known suit

Exceptions:

i) a cue overcall that shows a two-suited hand where at least one of the suits is known, e.g. Michaels

ii) a cue overcall that shows a very strong, but otherwise undefined hand

iii) a jump cue overcall that asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper

iv) an overcall in NT that shows a two-suited hand where at least one of the suits is known

g) Artificial defences to 1NT promise at least four cards in one known suit.

Exception: an artificial overcall of 2♣/2♦ that indicates a single-suited hand in either major.

Note: The essential feature of a Green System is that it lacks “special partnership understandings” as defined in Law 40B1(a): ‘A special partnership understanding is one whose meaning, in the opinion of the Regulating Authority, may not be readily understood and anticipated by a significant number of players in the tournament.’

3.2.2 Blue (Strong Club/Strong Diamond) Systems

a) An opening bid of 1♣/1♦ is artificial, forcing and always strong (strong in this context is defined as 15+HCP)

b) The one-level opening in the other minor may be artificial with various possibilities not covered by other opening bids

c) An opening bid of one of a major is natural

d) 1NT is as in 3.2.1 b) above

e) Opening bids at the two-level and higher are as in 3.2.1 d) above

f) Constructive bidding and overcalls are as in 3.2.1 e), f) and g) above

Note: where a basically Blue System contains “special partnership understandings” (see 3.2.1 Note), or any of the features listed below under Red Systems the Convention Card should indicate that it is also Red.

3.2.3 Red (Artificial) Systems

This category includes most systems that do not conform to the criteria for Green and Blue systems. A system becomes Red if it exhibits one or more of the following features:

a) The basic structure (other than the length of natural suit bids or the point range of openings) varies according to position and/or vulnerability

b) The system contains ‘either/or’ bids at the one-level – e.g. Two-way club systems where 1♣ has two or more meanings that may be either weak or strong

c) Opening bids of one of a major are not natural

d) 1NT openers are not balanced – e.g. Vienna No-trump where 1NT shows 16+HCP and an unspecified distribution– or have a range that commences below 10HCP.

e) The first response to a natural opening bid of One of a suit is not natural – e.g. the next suit is an artificial enquiry – or has either weak or strong meanings.

- f) Artificial two-level opening bids may have both weak and strong meanings – e.g. a 2♣ opener that is either an artificial game-force or a Weak Two in diamonds.
- g) For agreements that are permitted only in Categories 1 and 2 see Brown Sticker Conventions and Treatments (3.2.5)

3.2.4 Yellow (HUM) Systems

These are defined by the WBF as follows:

A Highly Unusual Method (HUM) means any System that exhibits one or more of the following features, as a matter of partnership agreement:

1. A Pass in the opening position shows at least the values generally accepted for an opening bid of one, even if there are alternative weak possibilities
2. By partnership agreement an opening bid at the one level may be weaker than pass
3. By partnership agreement an opening bid at the one level may be made with values a king or more below average strength.
4. By partnership agreement an opening bid at the one level shows either length or shortage in a specified suit.
5. By partnership agreement an opening bid at the one level shows either length in one specified suit or length in another.

EXCEPTION: one of a minor in a strong club or strong diamond system

3.2.5 Brown Sticker Conventions and Treatments

Certain types of conventional calls or treatments are considered to place demands upon the opponents' defensive preparations. The conventions/ treatments in question are categorized as 'Brown Sticker'.

Any one of the following characteristics qualifies a convention/ treatment as Brown Sticker if it is a matter of partnership agreement:

- a) Any opening bid of two clubs through three spades that: could be weak and does not promise at least four cards in a known suit.

Exceptions:

- i) Where all the weak meanings guarantee at least four cards in one known suit and only the strong options do not.
- ii) A two level opening bid in a minor may show a weak hand with 5+ cards in either major only, or as an option among any number of strong hand types.

- b) An overcall of a natural opening bid of one of a suit that does not promise at least four cards in a known suit.

Exceptions:

- i) A natural overcall in no trumps.
- ii) Any cue bid that shows a strong hand.
- iii) A cue bid in an opponent's known suit that asks partner to bid 3NT with a stopper in that suit.

3.2.6 Unrestricted Conventions

None of the foregoing restrictions pertain to conventional defences against strong, forcing artificial opening bids or defences against 'Brown Sticker' or HUM conventions.

Conventional defences to 1NT are also unrestricted in Categories 1, 2 and 3.

4 System Categories

4.1 Category 1

This category is confined to international level events and Trials.

Conditions of Contest will normally require pairs to submit convention cards in advance. Any Published system (See [2.1 Definitions](#)), including Yellow (HUM) Systems and Brown Sticker Conventions and Treatments, is allowed, subject to adequate disclosure.

See “**Yellow Systems and Brown Sticker Conventions**” for regulations concerning this category.

4.2 Category 2

This category applies to events involving matches of 16 boards or more: Scottish Cup; Double Elimination teams (Winter Foursomes).

Yellow (HUM) systems are prohibited. All other systems are allowed.

Brown Sticker Conventions and Treatments are allowed, but only if Published ([2.1 Definitions](#)). The conditions of contest may require that details be made available to opponents in advance.

Pairs employing Brown Sticker Conventions are required to produce a viable suggested defence. Any defence to a Brown Sticker Convention is deemed to be part of the BS Convention card and may be referred to by the opponents at the table.

4.3 Category 3

This category applies to all events run by the SBU unless specified otherwise.

Yellow (HUM) systems and Brown Sticker Conventions and Treatments are prohibited.

All other systems are allowed.

Pairs playing a Red System are required to list the features that make their system Red in the appropriate part of their Convention Card so that they are easily accessible to their opponents.

4.4 Category 4

This category applies to a few specified Pairs events run by the SBU.

Yellow (HUM) and Red systems, and Brown Sticker Conventions and Treatments are prohibited.

Green and Blue systems are allowed.

4.5 Category 5

This category applies to ‘No Fear’ and Simple System events.

Only Green systems are allowed. Tournament organisers may further restrict competitors, or publish a specific simple system for all players.

Districts, Areas and Clubs are encouraged to allocate their events to a Category.