

# ***Developing Junior Bridge in Wales***

Junior bridge in Wales is at a very low ebb. Over the last few years Wales has generally not fielded a team at u20 level in the junior Camrose events and is in danger of not having sufficient players to make up an u26 team either. There has been no junior representation at European or World level in recent times. There are very few active junior bridge players. There is no systematic approach to attracting and developing junior players. There are no quick fixes for developing a self-sustaining junior bridge system in Wales - taking a beginner all the way through local, region and national bridge to experienced international junior will take over ten years.

This paper sets out a plan to develop and grow junior bridge in Wales over the short, medium and long term to support Wales in becoming a leading bridge nation.

Each of the initiatives proposed here could boost junior bridge in Wales - taken forward separately they will not have an ongoing systemic impact. If the WBU leads a coordinated approach, drawing on the skills and enthusiasm within Welsh bridge and building partnerships across Wales and beyond then a real step change can be achieved.

## ***Why should we care about junior bridge?***

Promoting bridge to children and young people will increase the numbers of players. Some will continue to play bridge - either immediately or return to the game years later, supporting the sustainability of club bridge; some will have the motivation and ability to become strong players; a few will have the potential to become international players; and the best of these will be able to progress to the senior international ranks.

Actively promoting junior bridge will enhance the game as a whole in Wales and generate a pool of potential international players. If done in a way that brings together clubs, schools, universities, districts, the WBU and the Welsh Government, we will have a sustainable system that will strengthen Welsh Bridge.

- Children of a wide range of academic ability can be enthused by bridge
- Children can develop card skills and learn the basic rules of bridge extremely quickly
- Bridge can be a strong tool to support numeracy, concentration and team work
- Introduced in the right format, Bridge can attract large numbers
- Children's bridge camps work extremely well as motivators and to enhance skills
- Exposure to competitive bridge, if appropriately staged, can be a major motivator
- There need to be effective methods for following through on any junior bridge initiative to support retention and progression

- Finding methods to broker bridge club- school partnerships are vital. Our aim should be foster links where large numbers of children are introduced to bridge, a clear and easy route for progression for those with an interest, gradual introduction into club level bridge, continued development and support

## ***Who should we be working with in Wales?***

### ***Individuals***

- Children and young people, and their parents/carers, should have a easy access to information on taking up bridge- this could be part of any refresh of the WBU website
- Parents and grandparents who are bridge players can be encouraged and supported to get children and young people into bridge

### ***Schools***

- Bridge can be used to develop numeracy and mathematical skills ranging from basic counting through to complex bayesian analysis
- Bridge is also an ideal game to facilitate team working and communication skills. More experienced junior players could become facilitators or coaches themselves at junior bridge events and gain volunteering experience

### ***Universities***

- Universities used to be a strong training ground for bridge players. Many current players first came across bridge at university. Undergraduate years are particularly good time target new potential players - as they have both the time and space to explore new interests can rapidly progress to become competitive players. Some will keep playing after college, some may give it up due to pressures after graduation, but will be more likely to return to the game later in life than if they had never encountered bridge. There has not been a Welsh team competing in the Portland cup for over a decade.
- Some universities in the USA offer bridge scholarships. An offer of, say, six £1500 pa scholarships at Welsh universities in partnership with the WBU could be used to attract experienced players to locate to Wales in the short term. Such a scholarship could include requirements to both seek selection in Wales and support wider efforts to develop junior bridge across the country

### ***Welsh Government***

- We should seek to develop bridge modules that can be incorporated within the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification (at GCSE and A level) drawing on EBED bridge skills qualification
- This can be used to introduce bridge to a very wide range of young people and, with Welsh Government endorsement provide strong encouragement to schools to participate
- Bridge can be used to fulfill baccalaureate requirements for both skills and volunteering

## ***What should we aim for?***

### ***Overall***

- Increase numbers of bridge players
- Increase number of potential international players
- Improve competitiveness of junior teams at Home International, European and World levels

### ***How many juniors do we want?***

The reason the leading bridge nations continue to produce strong junior teams, with many players progressing to the open ranks is that they have a large number of young people introduced and engaged with bridge. Many will drop out - a combination of aptitude and attitude. Of those who progress to become competent players only a few will have real potential.

In order to have the strongest u26 teams possible for open and women's events we should aim for a squad of 20 players who would be actively supported with events, mentors and coaching. This group would ideally have progressed from a u20 squad of 30 players, who in turn have progressed from an u15 squad of 40 players. We should aim to progress to the point where membership of a Welsh junior bridge squad would be highly competitive and subject to regular review. This will not be achieved quickly. The first few years will have far fewer players and the standards will be lower - our initial focus will need to be recruitment and nurturing talent.

Wales needs to recruit as many young people to bridge as it possibly can, but this must be part of a joined up plan to provide resilience and ensure progression. Our principle constraint will be the number of volunteers available to support local/area groups.

### ***What junior competitions should be promote?***

Welsh Bridge needs a junior bridge infrastructure that introduces young players gradually to competition of increasingly higher standards. This will need to develop over time in line with the number and standards of players. From our low starting point, we need to firstly attract a wide pool of young juniors and ensure practice and competitive opportunities are structured to motivate and develop them.

Local bridge clubs and our membership are our biggest assets. A small group of clubs from across Wales should be sought out and supported by the WBU. A structured approach to developing junior bridge in these clubs should be coordinated at area and national level.

Junior Bridge Centres, based in volunteer clubs can work with a common curriculum

- starting with separate rapid learning sessions
- introducing duplicate play
- progressing to stratified sessions alongside regular club sessions; and
- more experienced juniors competing regularly in club level bridge

At all stages of junior development a mixture of area and national events should be used to motivate and stretch players.

- Welsh mini-bridge challenge
- Junior sims events
- Regional schools challenge
- Area team selection events at u15, u21, u26 levels
- Junior Perry Cup inter-area competitions at u15, u21, u26
- Welsh schools cup
- Welsh universities cup
- Welsh junior championship pairs and teams
- Welsh entries into UK wide junior competitions

Many such events could be arranged within the margins of standing competitions, eg an additional 10 tables squeezed into Porthcawl Congress run in parallel with the open event.

### ***International representation***

If there are sufficient junior players coming through a system from taster sessions through to regular playing and participation in Welsh junior events, it will be straightforward to use performance and track record to target young players to join junior squads which can be brought together face to face and online for training and development. Selection for competitions should be based on performance, potential, attitude and conduct.

We should aim to introduce Welsh junior squads into increasingly stretching Welsh and UK-wide domestic open competition

Joint competitive/training events with Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland could be developed

1st objective is to progress to the point of having a competitive team in all home international junior competitions

2nd objective is to have strong junior representation that will be competitive at European and World level