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NZ Bridge International Selection Method – Review 2018

1 Introduction

The current selection method for International teams has been in place since 2011. As part of an ongoing cycle of review applicable to all aspects of its operations, NZ Bridge will be undertaking a review of the selection method during the early part of 2018.

NZ Bridge intends to seek feedback and submissions from current and prospective international team members as vital stakeholder input to the review. Following receipt of the feedback/submissions, NZ Bridge will undertake the review and will publish a summary of the inputs to and outcomes of the review.

This paper has been prepared in order to provide background to and information on the current selection method.

2 Background

The international bridge calendar can be considered as a 4-year cycle, comprising:

2.1 World Bridge events

Year 1 (2017)	World Bridge Teams Championship	(Bermuda Bowl, Venice Cup, d’Orsi Trophy)
Year 2 (2018)	World Bridge Series	(Rosenblum Cup, McConnell Cup, World Open Pairs, World Women’s Pairs)
Year 3 (2019)	World Bridge Teams Championship	(Bermuda Bowl, Venice Cup, d’Orsi Trophy)
Year 4 (2020)	World Bridge Games	(formerly known as Bridge Olympiad)

New Zealand participates in the World Bridge Teams every 2 years providing that it can win one of the 2 slots available for the Zone 7 (South Pacific) region, comprising NZ, Australia, French Polynesia & New Caledonia.

New Zealand participates in the World Bridge Games by right – every member country of the WBF is entitled to participate with one representative (national) team in each of the three sections.

The World Bridge Series is open to any bridge player to attend and allows transnational Pairs and Teams to play; New Zealand Bridge does not currently fund players or teams to attend these events.

2.2 Asia Pacific Bridge events

The Asia Pacific Bridge Federation (APBF) (formerly PABF and prior to that FEBF) is the WBF’s Zone 6, and comprises: China, China Hong Kong, China Macau, Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Timor Leste. APBF invites countries from Zone 4 (Asia & Middle East) and Zone 7 to send national teams to its championship events.

In odd-numbered (World Bridge Teams) years, the APBF Championship is used to select their representative teams, and it also runs the Asian Cup, which is of equivalent format and status as the APBF Championship in the same year as the

World Bridge Series. Every fourth year, APBF runs an event known as the APBF Open Congress which is open to all players.

New Zealand normally participates in the APBF events other than the APBF Open Congress.

2.3 Self Funded teams

From time-to-time, NZ Bridge will choose to call for interest from players in forming a national team to attend an international event, but where no Player Subsidy is to be paid – aka a self-funded team. For such events, NZ Bridge will typically:

- a) Pay the tournament entry fee; and
- b) Provide uniforms where appropriate; and
- c) Provide travel insurance for the team members

2.4 Senior teams

In recent years, a number of the Senior events have been less restrictive than the Open/Women events insofar as they allow a country to send multiple teams. In recent years, participation in Senior events has been on a self-funded basis.

2.5 Mixed teams

In 2016, the World Bridge Games included a new event the World Mixed Teams Championship. New Zealand has decided in principle to send a team to this championship – the next event will be in 2020.

2.6 Youth programme

The World Bridge Federation holds youth events on much the same cycle as indicated in 2.1, although these are typically held at different times/places than the open/women's/senior/mixed events. Often, the youth events are categorised by age/sex (Kids, Youngsters, Girls, and Junior) and in many cases allow transnational teams. Similarly, most APBF events have one or more youth sections. In all these events, participation, friendship and development of a lifelong love for the game is encouraged

NZ Bridge encourages beginner youth players through the work of Richard Solomon, the Bridge Development Officer. The role of transitioning youth players new to bridge through to being of a suitable level to participate in international events is held by the Youth Co-coordinator, Tracey Lewis. This role has many challenges, including establishment of regular partnerships, availability of youth players to practice/attend tournaments; and financial constraints faced by most young people. With limited resources, and the financial help of the NZ Bridge Foundation, NZ Bridge has encouraged youth players by holding youth weekends, played bridge at schools, staged Youth IP's, held youth fund raising tournaments and sent youth teams overseas (most often to the Australian Youth Week in Canberra).

NZ Bridge has had to take a fairly hard-nosed approach to sending teams to WBF and APBF youth events due to funding constraints. In practice, the most promising youth players have been able to quickly establish themselves as serious contenders for selection in Open and Women's teams.

3 Funding

3.1 Bulk-Funding

For the last few 4-year cycles, NZ Bridge has provided a bulk-funding arrangement comprising \$400K delegated to the International Subcommittee to be spent over the course of a 4-year cycle. This funding is required to cover:

Direct Tournament Expenses

- NPC Air Fares & Accommodation
- Uniforms
- Tournament Entry Fees
- Travel Insurance
- Player Subsidies

Indirect Expenses

- Trials
- International Subcommittee Meetings
- Chef de Mission Honorarium

It is noted that the \$400K/4-year budget is tight and does not provide sufficient funding to reimburse players for reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses. For example, in 2017, the player reimbursements for Seoul and Lyon were \$1,300 and \$2,000 respectively.

Looking at the current 4-year cycle, the current and planned events/teams are:

2017	APBF Seoul	Open + Women
	World Bridge Championships Lyon	Open + Women (+ Self-Funded Senior)
2018	Asia Cup *Bangladesh	Open + Women
2019	APBF (unknown venue)	Open + Women (+ Self Funded Senior)
	World Bridge Championships **Netherlands	Open + Women (+ Self-Funded Senior)
2020	World Bridge Games ***Adelaide	Open + Women + Mixed (+ Self-Funded Senior)

* Due to a current MFAT Travel Advisory, NZ Bridge is not proposing to send teams to this event

** It is believed that the event will not be held in Netherlands; no details of alternative venue are yet known

*** This has been mooted but is not yet confirmed

3.2 Summary

New Zealand is typically required to select between 12 and 16 international teams during the 4 year cycle.

3.3 Rank-and-file view of funding

There has always been a degree of discomfort within the wider bridge population as to whether the level of expenditure on international programme is justified. This needs to be recognised by NZ Bridge and international team participants, and this makes it necessary to engage with the rank-and-file wherever possible, through providing reports and articles during prior to and during major events, to participating in tournaments and club events to socialise the benefits of the international programme.

4 Current Selection Method

4.1 Method

The current selection method has been in place since 2011, and operates as set out below.

4.1.1 Events

NZ Bridge decides 'in principle' which events it is planning to send teams to in the following year. NZ Bridge reserves the right not to send teams in any category if there have been insufficient applicants of suitable quality.

4.1.2 Selectors

NZ Bridge appoints a panel of selectors; typically comprising the Chef-de-Mission and one or more of the team captains for the proposed events. On occasion, the selectors have augmented the panel with an experienced player not vying for selection in that year.

4.1.3 Pairs -Based

Entries are called for from pairs interested and available to play in one or more of the proposed events.

4.1.4 Eligibility

Pairs must meet the relevant eligibility criteria for the proposed events, which include NZ citizenship/residency; membership of an affiliated club; stand-down period for players who have represented another Country; and may also include Age and Gender. There is also a requirement that each player has played in events totaling at least 100A points in the preceding year.

Pairs are required to submit with their entry

- a) Declaration of Availability
- b) Representation Agreement
- c) Declaration of Partnership Participation in “A” Point Tournaments

4.1.5 Squad

Pairs from whom entry is accepted are formed into a squad from which the eventual teams are chosen.

4.1.6 Selection Events

Pairs from the squad are required to play two or three selection events, which are Teams tournaments at 15A level or above. For these events, the Selectors form teams from the pairs comprising each squad.

4.1.7 Non-Selection Events

Pairs from the squad are strongly encouraged to play in major NZ and Australian tournaments.

4.1.8 Assessment of Performance

Performance in the Selection Events is measured:

- a) Via calculation of each pair’s performance based on Datums (specifically Modified Datums as calculated by the NZB scoring package); and
- b) Via observation by the Selectors at those events;

In addition to performance in selection events, Selectors assess many other factors.

4.1.9 Selection Criteria

For Years 1 and 3 of the international cycle, the Selectors have sole discretion to choose the makeup of each team as they see fit. For Year 4 (World Bridge Games/Olympiad), the pair which has the highest total Datum from the Selection Events is automatically selected; and the other two pairs are subject to Selectors discretion.

4.2 Rationale

The rationale behind the current selection method is set out below.

4.2.1 Pairs-Based

The rationale for the pairs-based approach has a number of aspects as follows:

- a) At the time the current selection method was instituted, there was a struggle to attract entries for teams trials; and in any case, the size of the available player pool makes it difficult to get a suitable number of teams (eg 2,4,8).
- b) There was a desire by NZ Bridge to provide a trialing method which would give an up-and-coming pair a chance to become part of the NZ team, something which could be very difficult if they had to find team-mates of sufficient quality to be able to unseat an incumbent team.
- c) It is arguable that NZ has insufficient depth of strong players to support teams trials. A teams trial risks that the 3 best pairs in any category may not play together in a team. There is some evidence in favour of this rationale based on NZ's relative performance against Australia in international competition (where Australia have used a Teams Trial approach), whereby Australia would have been expected to perform better than NZ based on player numbers (Australia has 37,000 registered players whereas NZ has 14,000).

Event	Open Team Round-Robin Results	
2011 BB/VC Netherlands	NZ 10 th	Australia 11 th
2012 WBG France	NZ 10 th in grp	Australia 10 th in grp
2013 ApBF Hong Kong	NZ 9 th	Australia 7 th
2013 BB/VC Indonesia	NZ 14 th	Australia 17 th
2014 Asia Cup China	NZ 9 th	Australia 4 th
2015 APBF Thailand	NZ 7 th	Australia 6 th
2015 BB/VC India	NZ 17 th	Australia 13 th
2016 WBG Poland	NZ 5 th in grp	Australia 8 th in grp
2017 PABF Korea	NZ 4 th	Australia 7 th
2017 BB/VC Lyon	NZ 8 th	Australia 15 th

- d) In the years where NZ Bridge sends teams to 2 events, it is relatively common for one or more pairs to be available for only one of the events (eg due to time or cost involved in attending both events). Having a pairs-based approach makes it straight-forward for the selectors to form 2 teams from the available players in this circumstance.
- e) In the years where NZ Bridge sends teams to 2 events, a pairs-based approach also gives the selectors the opportunity to send a pair near the cusp of selection and having future potential together with two more experienced pairs to one of the events in order to gain experience.
- f) A pairs-based approach will tend to make it harder for a sponsor (of lesser ability) to gain selection in comparison with a teams-based approach, where the sponsor's impact can be counteracted by the strength of the remainder of the team. This is an ongoing issue in other countries, even though it has not been significant in NZ in recent times.

4.2.2 Selection Events vs Trial

One of the more contentious aspects of the current selection method is the use of Selection Events as opposed to a Trial.

- a) The use of the Selection Events mandates attendance of all NZ team contenders at major NZ team events. This has led to a resurgence of the popularity and strength of these tournaments, and ensures that rank-and-file members of NZ Bridge gain visibility of and the opportunity to play against NZ representatives. This is important given that a substantial proportion of the NZ Bridge levy that goes toward International events.

b) Selectors form teams for the Selection Events from the pairs comprising each squad. This gives the Selectors the ability to balance teams; and also to give NZ team contenders opportunities to play and socialise with other contenders that wouldn't occur otherwise.

c) It is arguable that the Selection Events have a number of aspects which render them unsuitable as an objective way of determining the best pairs. The use of Selectors to choose either 2 or all 3 of the pairs making up a team provides a means to allow for these factors, and to take other factors such as past performance; future potential; and results from non-selection events.

4.3 Trial Considerations

If NZ Bridge was to run a Trial, the following aspects should be considered and factored in.

4.3.1 Role of Selectors

NZ Bridge would need to determine if it was going to continue make the trial the sole means by which selection for the target event(s) was determined, or if not, what role Selectors would play in the selection process.

4.3.2 Selection Events

Even if the trial was at least part of the selection method, NZ Bridge would need to determine if it was still going to mandate attendance at Selection Events.

4.3.3 Pairs Trial

A Pairs trial has the advantage of ensuring that only results against squad members are counted, as opposed to the Selection Events which include results against non-contenders. While this is undoubtedly the case, there are limitations to a pairs trial, particularly when the number of pairs will be very small. Factors which need to be considered include:

- a) Duration/Format of trial
- b) Scoring method – Datum/Modified Datum/Cross-Imps
- c) How to handle an unsuitable number of entries (eg 5 pairs)
- d) Impact of non-contending pairs
- e) Impact of swinging pairs late in the event
- f) Potential for dumping

It is generally accepted that a teams-based trial would be preferable to a pairs-based trial if the trial is to be sole basis for selection.

4.3.4 Teams Trial

- a) Team Size/Augmentation

NZ Bridge would need to determine whether to accept entries from 4 or (5) or 6 person teams and determine the process and rights for augmentation of 4 (or 5) person teams during the Trial as well as augmentation rights for the target events.

- b) Format – Knockout vs Round robin

Knockout matches are widely considered the best determiners of skill. Most world championship and international tournaments finish with knockout matches. Round-robins have issues including the importance of scores against weaker teams; the impact of non-contenders on the outcome, particularly late in the event; and the possibility of dumping.

However, a round-robin offers certainty that a team will be playing over the entire duration of the trial, and means that all teams gain experience from playing that duration against relatively strong opposition.

c) Trial/Match Duration

NZ Bridge would need to consider how long a trial would last; and for a knockout format, how long the matches are. The US Bridge Federation trials in 2016/2017 were both conducted over a 10 day period; of which the first 2 days reduced the entries to manageable numbers, and then proceeded as a series of 2-day 120 board knockout matches. Australia limits trial entries to a maximum of eight teams based on Playoff Qualifying Points earned in events over the preceding year, and then operates over 6 days as a series of 2-day 128 board knockout matches.

d) How to handle an unsuitable number of entries (eg 3 teams)

4.3.5 Cost

a) Cost to NZ Bridge

All costs associated with a Trial (hire of venue; cost of director(s) and staff; director's travel and accommodation expenses) reduce the amount of money able to be provided for player re-imbursement.

b) Cost to Players

Attendance at a Trial will cost players in terms of entry fees; travel and accommodation, and typically the costs to be borne by players will vary considerably depending on the trial venue. NZ Bridge will need to consider whether travel equalisation should be provided, and this also has challenges; for example for players who are not resident in NZ at the time of the Trial.

4.3.6 Leave/Timing

a) Leave

It is likely that attendance at a Trial will require time off from work commitments; timing of the Trial may be challenging for some trialists; and overall amount of time-off from work including Trial and Event may limit potential entrants.

b) Timing

There are various challenges with timing of a trial, including finding a slot within a crowded tournament schedule; and the tension between an early trial giving the winning trialists a chance to practice and prepare for an event against the risk that the players will no longer be in form at the time of the target event.

5 Feedback Sought

NZ Bridge would like to receive feedback from current and prospective international representatives on:

- a) Aspects of the current selection method seen as strengths;
- b) Aspects of the current selection method seen as weaknesses;
- c) Changes that could be made to the selection method in order to enhance its strengths or minimise weaknesses.

NZ Bridge does not wish to proscribe feedback in any particular form; or on any particular aspects of the current selection method. We encourage submissions that raise issues with the current method and propose alternative(s) that address those issues and provide a rationale for the proposed alternative, together with an impact assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative.

A framework for considering alternative selection methods is presented below:

<p>If Selection then</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> what selection events degree of selection vs automatic qualification how to minimise impact of non-contenders size/makeup of selection panel what selectors should do to assess performance how selectors should factor performance outside selection events (eg other events, historic performance) how selectors should assess individual vs partnership vs team performance <p>If Trial then</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> duration timing of trial(s) how to handle inconvenient number of entrants how to minimise impact of non-contenders if teams trial, then format – knockout vs round-robin
<p>if Team Based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> team size augmentation rules for teams of less than 6 players rules in 2-event years if only part of winning team is available for both events
<p>Cost</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to NZ Bridge to run selection event(s) or trial to players to participate in selection event(s) or trial should there be travel/accommodation cost equalisation for selection event(s)/trial to players in terms of leave to participate in selection event(s) or trial
<p>Eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> degree to which criteria is based on participation vs results period over which eligibility is measured
<p>Multi-Category issues (eg a player available for youth/open/women/senior/mixed in different partnerships)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how to manage eligibility how to manage availability degree to which individual vs partnership performance is considered
<p>Visibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> what requirement to play events other than trial/selection events
<p>Selection Method by Category/Event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are different selection methods applicable to different teams (open/women/senior/mixed) or events