

# CONTRACT BRIDGE ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND

## Minutes of International Committee Meeting for Trialists, held over Zoom on 17 April 2025

A meeting of trialists and potential trialists was held by the CBAI's International Committee (IC), over Zoom, on Thursday 17 April 2025.

Attendees were: Martin Brady, Ann Burns, Anna Carr, John Carroll, Rachel Connellan, Ciarán Coyne, Margaret Farren, Peter Goodman, Tom Hanlon, Mairead Haugh, Suzanne Hill, Sheila Horkan, Bríd Kemple, Aoife MacHale, Adam Mesbur, Louise Mitchell, Mark Moran, Fearghal O'Boyle, Máire O'Connor, Matthew O'Farrell, Fiona O'Gorman, Peter Pigot, Adrienne Purdy, Martin Purdy, Diarmuid Reddan, Teresa Rigney, Fran Ronan, Marcin Rudzinski, Terry Walsh, and CBAI CEO Dermot O'Brien. Apologies were received from: Jeannie Fitzgerald, Ranald Milne, and Derek O'Gorman.

Dermot O'Brien introduced the meeting by thanking the attendees for coming to the meeting, and the International Committee for their work on our behalf, including their recent survey, which had attracted 60 responses.

He handed over to Ciarán Coyne, who presented a set of slides on the survey responses. Ciarán credited Jeannie Fitzgerald, who had done most of the work on the survey. The data would be shared with the attendees, and feedback sought. It was not proposed to make any decisions today; the IC would reflect on the discussion before doing so.

The headline items from the survey were:

**Venues:** 43% of respondents preferred Dublin, with a further 13% opting for Dublin or a central location. 42% opted for Bridge Centres (not clear whether this was specifically Templeogue or any bridge centre) while 13% favoured hotels. The IC's recommendation was to hold roughly 50% of trials in Dublin, and 50% elsewhere, focussing on venues that had good playing space, and ideally were within walking distance of decent accommodation and food, had good public transport links, and plenty of parking. A preliminary conversation with Dermot had revealed that, within reason, cost should not be a barrier to using venues other than bridge centres if desired. A small number of respondents had recommended online trials; the IC felt that the resulting security issues were extremely complex, and resolving those probably outweighed the benefits of playing online. It was not proposing online trials unless that was made necessary by external events.

**Teams v Pairs:** 53% of respondents preferred Teams trials, 40% Pairs trials. Ciarán outlined briefly the pros and cons of each format, noting that across the bridge world, both models were used. The IC was minded towards maintaining the recent practice of Teams trials, except for the Preliminary trials, which had always been pairs. The cases in which the CBAI provided two teams for a home international event might be used to offer some combination of Pairs AND Teams, to test the results and the player feedback. Ciarán also noted that, even where Pairs trials are used, some selectorial discretion is often allowed for.

**Format:** 40% of respondents preferred a full round-robin, 32% a round-robin followed by a knockout. A reasonable case can be made for both formats. The IC is inclining towards the full round-robin for the next cycle of trials, on the grounds that all participants play more bridge, it provides greater certainty in terms of travel and accommodation, and all boards count, which is desirable in itself and is in line with the events for which the trials qualify teams.

**Adding to Teams:** The IC noted that the recent practice of allowing teams of four to add an eliminated pair created the potential for conflicts of interest, and could result in a pair being added that was inferior to what might be available if the team were forced to wait until the end of the

trials to nominate their third pair. As a result, the IC feels this option should be avoided in future. Full round-robin formats would eliminate this issue anyway, but if knockouts were being run again, the IC recommends this issue be revisited.

**Carryover:** 57% of respondents were opposed to any carryover from initial round-robin to knockout phase. The IC had not spent much time on this issue, given that it favoured full round-robins for the moment anyway, but if knockouts were reinstated at any stage, the suggestion would be that the issue should be considered afresh at that point.

**Timings:** There was no clear preference on start times for Friday play. There was a very clear preference for a finish no later than 5 p.m. on the final day. The October bank holiday weekend was a very popular choice (50 of 60 respondents approved). Ciarán noted that some players with school-going children might find that weekend unsatisfactory; he encouraged them to voice their views in this session, or by contacting Dermot or the IC afterwards. While observing the majority preference was important, it was also felt desirable not to disenfranchise any potential trials participants if it could be avoided. Midweek was felt to be convenient for the Teltscher trials by the vast majority; it will not be necessary this year, but if the calendar became too crowded for whatever reason, it is an option. Again, any likely participants fundamentally opposed to this were invited to make their reasons known.

**Visibility & Consistency:** The IC would like to ensure that at least some matches from trials are broadcast to the public, and feels that a consistent set of expectations as to the availability and detail of results should be formulated. Preliminary conversations with Dermot indicate that the Association is supportive on both issues; it is also planned to have discussions with the TD cohort before drawing up relevant guidelines. Any other views on improving the visibility of, and publicity around, trials would be welcomed.

Ciarán then invited the attendees to ask questions or make comments.

Tom Hanlon referred to the Teams v Pairs issue. In his experience, most federations used Teams trials, and, even where Pairs were used, a high degree of selectorial discretion was usually involved. He noted that the EBU experience with Pairs trials would not give great encouragement to other federations to follow suit. His view is that Teams trials are a much better option; there is simply too much randomness in Pairs trials. Adam Mesbur concurred; he had played a lot of Pairs trials years ago, and there was no question in his mind that it was rarely the case that the teams selected were even close to being the best three pairs.

On carryovers, Adam noted that there is a big difference between carrying over the scores against all opponents versus those from the matches against the qualifying opponents. His view would be that the latter should be reflected to some degree, on the “all boards should count” basis.

Peter Goodman noted that another randomising, and irritating, factor is the sit-out currently caused by an odd number of teams. It also results in a reduced number of boards played. This could be avoided by either (a) a preliminary knockout between the two lowest-ranked teams, or (b) the use of three-way matches. The security issue around three-ways is easily managed, in his view. Adam and Terry agreed.

Tom Hanlon noted that the predictability around a date for trials (e.g. the October bank holiday weekend in recent years) is a big plus as far as he is concerned.

Mark Moran stated that the goal of the Association, and hence of the IC, should be to have at least two or three teams in each category that are truly competitive abroad. This would entail a lot of hard work, and those players needed to be playing regularly overseas to test themselves at the highest level. Ciarán commented that the IC had expressed exactly the same view, and added that we should also be looking to attract top overseas talent to play in our events. He said he had had a discussion with Dermot about this, and that all were agreed that exposing more Irish players to longer-form matches against top players, both from Ireland and overseas, was desirable on a

number of counts. The creation of an Irish Premier League, and possibly a Gold Cup, was under active consideration, and would be very welcome in the view of the IC.

Bríd Kemple raised the issue of coaching. It was good to see that the women's teams had the benefit of some coaching in recent years. It was important that a feedback loop be created so that the Association would know what had worked well, and might be repeated. Dermot O'Brien mentioned that the coaching bursary for the Preliminary Trials winners, which had been Hilary Dowling-Long's suggestion, was working very well, and that the feedback loop had been created there. Terry Walsh suggested that, with the growing popularity of mixed events, perhaps consideration should be given to coaching for the mixed teams too. Dermot referenced the recent Online British Isles Trophy (effectively a Mixed Camrose); it had been very successful, and he felt it was likely to become a regular event, but that it would remain online for the moment. There had been consideration of adding a live Mixed Camrose to the series, but both the crowded calendar and some federations' financial situation had ruled that out currently.

There were no further questions. Ciarán said that the IC would reflect on the survey and the contributions at this meeting, and would publish dates and preliminary formats for this year's trials events shortly.

Dermot closed the meeting by thanking the IC for all their work on our behalf – Ciarán Coyne, Martin Brady, Jeannie Fitzgerald, Peter Pigot, and both Hilary Dowling-Long who began the year on the committee but had had to step down due to pressure of work, and John Carroll who very kindly volunteered to replace her.

## **International Committee**

**May 2025**