

THE OXFORD JUNIOR BRIDGE CLUB

I started the above club (OJBC), which has been running since October 2014, initially in Summertown church hall and since 2019, in the OBC when the club re-opened following refurbishment.

In 2014 I was teaching Bridge at the Dragon School and, in those early days, some of my pupils attended as well as juniors from 3 other state schools and 3 other independent schools. At one time, we had four tables, regularly with each pupil being taught at their own level and I'm sure that the right people could get the numbers up again.

Having done some research, we discovered that Sunday afternoon was the period over the weekend when juniors did the least amount of extra curricular activities so I've been running the club from 2:30 – 4:30 on Sunday afternoons for x 3 ten week terms.

Unlike the adult programme, we haven't followed a rigid EBU programme but we always start with mini bridge and work towards bidding according to the ability of the group. Some children attend very regularly and others don't and some pick up the game amazingly quickly regardless of how often they attend!

Over the years we have enjoyed quite a lot of success with our pupils, many of whom have made it to the England Under 16 squad and on to the Under 21's. Our first pupil was put in the Under 16 team at the age of 11 and represented England on many occasions but my goal has always been to make bridge enjoyable and fun and some of our pupils contact us long after they have left to tell us that they've taken up the game at university or post grad.

Recruitment wise, I used to cycle to all the local schools with flyers and posters and try to speak to the right member of staff. We also put flyers through local doors but this was of course, extremely time consuming so latterly we have done all advertising and recruitment via What'sApp. Taster sessions and first visits are free of charge and thereafter we charge £5 per child with a maximum of £10 per family; adults learning with their children are not charged.

We pay the Oxford Bridge Club £15 per session, which includes milk and, in addition to that, we provide refreshments, usually cakes or biscuits. All the volunteers are DBS checked.

Three of the current volunteers are happy to stay on: Kelvin Ward, who was a junior international, is happy to run the advanced group of which there are currently four pupils, including his own son; Peter Sherry, a member of the Oxford Bridge Club, who has been a volunteer since the inception of the club and Zahir Soonawalla, whose son also attends regularly.

We are looking for at least two more people to run and promote this little club and they do not have to run it in the same way. For example, they may wish to have shorter terms and start a bit later?

Job Description

Obtaining hands for the different groups but I have lots already made up.

Organising taster sessions and promoting the club via What'sApp groups and word of mouth.

Making sure that the juniors take part in the many online junior sessions, which are now available, and the weekend camps and keeping in touch with the parents.

Liaising with the OBC about term dates/holidays etc.

They DO NOT need to be experienced or brilliant bridge players! However, they do need to like working with children and to be very flexible and quite patient and I can't pretend that it isn't a commitment. Therefore, if two or even three people took it on, it would be far less onerous.

I had never cancelled a session before until last term when flu struck down pupils and volunteers alike but generally, I don't think sessions should be cancelled as the pupils and parents lose confidence.

I would like to finish at the end of June 2026 and I'm very happy to meet with anyone who might be interested.

Holly Kilpatrick

April 2026