

A Development Strategy for the National Youth Brass Band of Scotland (NYBBS)

At the heart of a development strategy for the National Youth Brass Band of Scotland must be the consideration of what is best for its players, for NYBBS itself, and for the wider brass band movement in Scotland.

1. The current situation

NYBBS was founded in 1958 and since then has operated as an end-of-course band, with no permanent identity or continuing existence outwith the summer course other than an occasional tour or a one-off concert. Under the current arrangements it is difficult to bring players together for performances throughout the year, something that is not seen as being within the current remit of NYBBS by either players or management.

It should be noted that the other national youth brass bands in the UK have similar arrangements (although the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain has an Easter and summer course and has carried out more frequent 'out-of-course' performances in recent years). Other national youth music ensembles have a more permanent identity.

2. Proposed aims of NYBBS

We will aim for NYBBS to be the best youth ensemble in Scotland and one of the best youth brass ensembles in the world.

Among its main goals will be to provide a platform of excellence for young brass and percussion musicians both in terms of their learning and development as musicians, and to perform a wide range of music at a higher level than they can normally achieve in their own community bands.

At the heart of this ethos will be providing the finest available musical support and the introduction of an extended and rolling artistic plan for a number of years ahead.

3. The development of NYBBS

It is difficult to see how NYBBS can achieve these aims, or even to expand its horizons, within the current limited arrangements of a one-week band.

However, development is possible by building on the band's existing strengths and increasing its reach, making it more accessible, improving its musical standards and giving it a higher public profile.

A series of measures will be necessary if NYBBS is to become recognised as an authentic national body, taking its rightful place beside the other national youth companies in Scotland. These measures include, but are not limited to, the following:

3.1 The organisational structure of NYBBS

The NYBBS (defined as the national band, currently the senior band) will be a band with a defined membership of the best players that can be recruited. (That is, not a membership of players who happen to attend, or are able to attend, the summer course).

This will change the emphasis of NYBBS - it will become a truly all year round national youth music organisation, providing the young players in Scotland's brass bands with the same opportunities that young musicians who take part in NYCoS and NYOS currently

have, and this will be recognised as such by the arts establishment.

The band will have a complement of 40-50 brass and percussion players. This will provide a greater aspirational challenge to prospective members and will be easier to manage practically and financially, especially with an increased level of activity. It will also facilitate the organisation of a standard band for performances, with the full band available for special occasions.

Entry to NYBBS will be by audition and/or appointment (that is, to the band itself, not to the summer course as at present), to suit the instrumentation complement of the band.

Repertoire will be for performances, not dependant on the variable make up of the players who attend the summer course. Training (and performances) will take place during the year, improving the standard all the time. As now, it will have a regular Musical Director, augmented by the engagement of world-class conductors for special events.

The summer course will become an opportunity for players to improve their playing standard and musicality in an intensive environment. Although there will be an end of course concert, that will not be the main purpose of the course, which will be about improving the standard of NYBBS. For example, every player attending the summer course will have a one to one lesson with an expert tutor as well as take part in masterclasses. The summer course will be one element in the annual training calendar.

NYBBS will have several training and repertoire preparation sessions during the year – as well as the traditional week-long summer course, possibilities could include a course between Christmas and New Year of 2-3 days, a course at Easter of 4-5 days, and the occasional Sunday as circumstances require. This programme will, of course, have to be commensurate with the players' commitments to their own parent bands.

NYBBS will be the pinnacle of the SBBA youth development programme, which has to be expected to produce a plethora of talented young players in the years ahead. The age limits for NYBBS will be reviewed, bearing in mind the definition of youth used by Creative Scotland and other UK and European arts bodies, and the adoption of age limits up to 25 years by NYOS and NYCOS, as well as the European Youth Brass Band.

3.2 The role of NYBBS Reserve Band

The current NYBBS Reserve (NYRBBS) will have its own identity and will be auditioned either during the year or just prior to the summer course. It will have its own performance opportunities, but on a more limited scale than those of NYBBS.

NYRBBS will provide the main route into NYBBS, thus increasing its popularity for aspiring players. This route will not preclude the direct entry to NYBBS of especially talented players.

3.3 The role of the Children's Band

Likewise, the Children's Band (NCBBS) will have its own identity, albeit on a smaller scale, and will be a feeder for NYRBBS (but, as above, not the sole route). It will not have auditions for entry.

As a unique national company (that is, for 13 year old and younger players) NCBBS could have a very prominent role, demonstrating the talent of our younger players.

In addition, a fourth training band could be established for new and inexperienced young

players which will in turn feed into the Children's Band. This group could be almost an offshoot of the NCBBS for the very young and inexperienced players attending the same course.

3.4 Regional organisation

NYBBS currently only meets once a year, at its summer school held in St. Andrews University. In order to bring players more easily together for rehearsals and events throughout the year, Regional NYBBS ensembles will be formed (eg perhaps based on the existing Area Association regions), comprised of players from NYBBS and NYRBBS in that area. This will enable players to meet more frequently (albeit in smaller ensembles) and facilitate more rehearsal time and performance opportunities.

Regional conductors and regional band organisers (mainly from within NYBBS) will be recruited to support the regional bands. Entry to these bands will be by virtue of membership of NYBBS and NYRBBS, or exceptionally on the recommendation of the various local teachers and conductors.

3.5 The Summer Courses

With the overall NYBBS family growing in size, it is getting more difficult to hold a course for all 3 bands in one location. The likelihood is that, with more publicity and the further developments in SBBA's Youth Development Programme, the demand for places (especially in the Children's band) will increase considerably.

Two of the bands could co-share a course (possibly NYBBS and NYRBBS), with an enlarged Children's band (or even two bands) having room for expansion.

The summer course currently has a 5 day duration (Monday mid-day to Saturday mid-day); when auditioning time is taken off, as well as time for players to sight read and learn the new music, the effective course time is less than 4 days. The course time will be extended by 2 days (starting on the Saturday); with pre-auditions, and pre-rehearsals in the proposed Regional NYBBS, the effective time will be almost doubled.

Of course, with 2 extra days to be paid for, it will not be realistic to increase the course fees any further. Initial developmental funding could be obtained through grants, but eventually savings will have to be made, either by negotiation with the current accommodation provider, St Andrews University, or by identifying a less expensive venue with suitable facilities.

3.6 Collaboration with other groups

The collaboration of NYBBS with other groups will be extended. As well as enlarging the musical boundaries of NYBBS, such cooperation with well established and high profile groups such as NYCOS or one of the NYOS ensembles (eg in joint concerts), will expose new audiences to NYBBS and greatly increase NYBBS' own profile.

3.7 Creating a bursary scheme

It is recognised that a number of players cannot afford (or take time off a summer job) to attend the summer course. As members of NYBBS, they will still remain a member of the band.

To make it easier for members to attend the summer course and any others that may be established, a bursary scheme will be introduced. A defined band membership will make the bursary scheme easier to organise and fund.

4. Funding for NYBBS development

It is clear that external funding for NYBBS in its current format will be limited or non-existent. Application will be made to Creative Scotland (the main source of such funding) to fund developmental costs and to support the running costs of a recognised national youth band.

These costs are likely to include:

- Administration of 3 bands.
- Additional training events during the year.
- Performance events during the year until NYBBS is established and the concerts are self-funding.
- Engagement of high profile conductors.
- Accommodation, music equipment and office equipment.
- Establishment and initial funding of a bursary scheme.
- Publicity and promotion.
- Support for regional NYBBS ensembles.