

# Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season



The British Columbia Pipers' Association (BCPA) would like to provide pipers and instructors with information on the issues and rationale that informed the planned changes in the Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping grades and how this is intended to benefit players' development.

## Guiding Principles

The first purpose in the BCPA Constitution is:

*"To foster and preserve bagpipe music"*

Relating to competitions, the BCPA's prime grading principle is

*"To ensure that competitors (individuals and bands) of similar caliber in a discipline are assigned the same grade for that discipline".*

## Youth Player Development and Support for Adult Player Development

For many decades, the BCPA region has been fortunate to have an abundance of young people taking up the pipes and drums, with dedicated teachers guiding and mentoring their musical development.

The whole grading structure, from Beginner through to Grade 1 and finally into Open, has been centered around the advancement of those young players.

However, interest by adults taking up piping as "mature beginners" is increasing and will likely increase further with new efforts by the BCPA and the Scottish Cultural Centre Society (a Metro Vancouver based registered charity) to increase their funding and promotion of piping and drumming educational initiatives for all ages.

BCPA's long term goal is moving in a direction to have efforts and funding for piping and drumming educational initiatives be commensurate with efforts and funding for piping and drumming competition activities.

## Adult Players Separated

Many decades ago, the Adult grade was created to respond to older players who just wanted to play a tune and gain some comments on their playing as well as "mature beginners", who took up the pipes later in life and desired some goals to work toward and feedback on their development.

# Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season



## Adult Grade Grows Beyond Original Scope

Over the past number of years, interest in competitions by adult age players has significantly increased, from low single digits to the high teens in the Adult grade and several adult age players competing in Grade 5 and Grade 4. However, the corresponding development path specific for adult age players has not changed (i.e. just one grade, spanning adult player calibres equivalent from Grade 5 to Grade 4).

Furthermore, the music requirements for the Adult grade do not match those of Grade 4 so any player hoping to be promoted from Adult to Grade 3 is at a significant disadvantage in that they will never have competed in a Strathspey & Reel event yet be expected to play that music in Grade 3 against younger players who have had at least one full year of playing Strathspey & Reel events in Grade 4 before being promoted to Grade 3.

## Inconsistencies in Players Maintaining a Grade Throughout the Season

In addition, several players who would enter the Adult grade events at a highland games were also entering the Grade 4 Piobaireachd event (ground and next variation) at the same games, which is not intended (no "grade hopping") and was not fair to all players.

## Adult age Players Competing in Higher Grades to Play Full Piobaireachd

Many years ago, the BCPA Solo Grading subcommittee re-interpreted clause 4.2.1 of the Solo Piping Competition Rules ("*Competitors shall compete in the grade appropriate for their ability, as determined by the Association.*") to be able to assign a player a different grade of piobaireachd than their light music grade, to recognize situations where a player's demonstrated piobaireachd calibre was significantly higher compared to their demonstrated light music calibre.

These situations are player-requested, are mainly players competing in Grade 4, and who were demonstrating full piobaireachd playing calibre at a Grade 3 calibre level. Such requests require a letter of confirmation and support from their teacher. If approved, a letter is issued by the Solo Grading subcommittee approving the dual grading, that can be submitted to highland games with the player's entry. There have been very few players at the Grade 3 and Grade 2 grade levels who have requested this dual grading.

Because this interpretation has not been widely communicated, its awareness among players is not common. In addition, believing that the Adult grade was excluded from this option, some adult age players have been competing in Grade 4 and Grade 3 light music events rather than the Adult grade just so they were able to compete in the Grade 3 full piobaireachd event that they were authorized by the Solo Grading subcommittee to do.

# Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season



## Comprehensive Changes to Address the Issues

As these issues were being brought to the BCPA Board by adult age players, the Board is determined to address them in a comprehensive manner and to bring alignment with established performance expectations and consistency with some other North American piping/pipeband associations.

## Splitting the Adult Grade

1. The current **Adult Grade** would be split into **Grade 5 Senior** and **Grade 4 Senior**, reflecting player calibres and requiring players to be 18 years of age or older as of October 1 of each season.
2. The current **Grade 5** and **Grade 4** would be renamed **Grade 5 Junior** and **Grade 4 Junior** and would be confined to players of those grade calibres and requiring players to be under 18 years of age as of October 1 of each season.

## Development Paths

This re-alignment ensures that for adult age players there is a clear and dedicated development path for them. Adult age players of a Grade 5 calibre will experience the benefits of competing against players of similar calibre, gain the rewards of placings they earn and performance ratings levels appropriate to their grade, and be recognized for their work with promotion to **Grade 4 Senior** and Grand Aggregate winner status.

### Intended Development Path for Junior Players

Beginner → Grade 5 Junior → Grade 4 Junior → Grade 3 → Grade 2 → Grade 1 → Open

### Intended Development Path for Senior Players

Beginner → Grade 5 Senior → Grade 4 Senior → Grade 3 → Grade 2 → Grade 1 → Open

## Lateral Movement of Junior Players

In the unlikelyhood that a **Grade 5 Junior** player is not promoted but becomes 18 years of age as of October 1 of the next season they would move laterally to **Grade 5 Senior** and continue their player development path in that manner.

## Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season



Development path for Grade 5 Junior players turning 18 years of age as of October 1 of the next season

Beginner → Grade 5 Junior → Grade 5 Senior → Grade 4 Senior → Grade 3 → Grade 2 → Grade 1 → Open

In the unlikelyhood that a **Grade 4 Junior** player is not promoted but becomes 18 years of age as of October 1 of the next season they would move laterally to **Grade 4 Senior** and continue their player development path in that manner.

Development path for Grade 4 Junior players turning 18 years of age as of October 1 of the next season

Beginner → Grade 5 Junior → Grade 4 Junior → Grade 4 Senior → Grade 3 → Grade 2 → Grade 1 → Open

### Music Requirements

1. The music requirements for **Grade 5 Junior** and **Grade 5 Senior** will be the same, and the same events will be offered at a highland games.
2. The music requirements for **Grade 4 Junior** and **Grade 4 Senior** will be the same, and the same events offered at a highland games.

Grade 5 Junior and Grade 5 Senior	Grade 4 Junior and Grade 4 Senior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2/4 March (minimum four parts)</li> <li>• Slow Air (minimum two parts, repeats to be observed)</li> <li>• 6/8 March (minimum four parts)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2/4 March (minimum four parts)</li> <li>• Piobaireachd (ground and next variation (singling))</li> <li>• Strathspey &amp; Reel (two parts each played twice or four parts each)</li> <li>• 6/8 March (minimum four parts)</li> </ul>

This ensures equity in the offerings for **Grade 5** players, whether they are in **Grade 5 Junior** or **Grade 5 Senior**.

It also ensures equity in the offerings:

- For a **Grade 4** player, whether they are in **Grade 4 Junior** or **Grade 4 Senior**; and
- Provides fairness in music requirements for a **Grade 4 Senior** player hoping to be promoted to **Grade 3**, as that of a **Grade 4 Junior** player would hope to be promoted to **Grade 3**.

### Improved Alignment with ANAPBA Recommended Grade Level Expectations

Players in **Grade 5 Senior** and **Grade 4 Senior** gain the new benefits of newly established ANAPBA Recommended Graded Level Expectations (which BCPA was significantly involved in developing), the same as **Grade 5 Junior** and **Grade 4 Junior**.

# Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season



[https://www.anapba.org/images/PDF/2020/ANAPBA\\_Recommended\\_Grade\\_Level\\_Expectations\\_-\\_v10-021220.pdf](https://www.anapba.org/images/PDF/2020/ANAPBA_Recommended_Grade_Level_Expectations_-_v10-021220.pdf)

With this, adult age players in **Grade 5 Senior** and **Grade 4 Senior** will know the expectations of performances in those grades and can work to meet those expectations, whether they are competing within the BCPA region or within the regions of other North American pipe band associations.

## Ability to Request a Piobaireachd Grade different to Light Music Grade

Players in **Grade 4 Senior** would gain the opportunity for eligibility to compete in a higher grade of piobaireachd than their current grade of their light music if they met the criteria for dual grading.

## Historical Grade Changes

The last time such a significant change was made in the BCPA grading structure was in the fall of 1999, when the Grade 5 Piping grade was created, for the very similar purpose of having players of similar calibre in the same grade.

The 1999 season was announced as the mechanism for compiling placings data for this transition. Players who were not mandatorily promoted from Grade 4 that fall then stayed as Grade 4 players for that season and Beginners graduating out of that grade then automatically went into Grade 5. By the start of the 2000/2001 season, the two years of promotions had effectively achieved the planned calibres in Grade 5 and Grade 4.

That transition was very successful and has been appreciated by teachers over the past two decades as providing attainable steps for the development of their students.

## Transition of Players to the New Grading Structure

It is recognized that there is not the same amount of upward movement of players out of the current Adult grade, with few mandatory promotions and requested promotions from the Adult grade to Grade 3, so this transition would not exactly parallel that of the creation of Grade 5 two decades ago.

It was anticipated that a full competition season of players' placings and performance ratings would inform discussions of the Solo Grading subcommittee with each Adult grade player and their instructor at the end of the season on what might be an appropriate grade for the player in the transition. It was also anticipated that new adult age players would automatically enter **Grade 5 Senior**.

## Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season



### Ability to Remain Within a Senior Grade

As has always been the case with BCPA grade promotions, it should be recognized that **Grade 5 Senior** or **Grade 4 Senior** players who do not have ambitions to travel up the grading ladder to **Grade 3** and higher may be able to stay in their grade, even if promoted by a mandatory promotion in future years, by submitting a regrading appeal application to the Solo Grading subcommittee providing information why they should not be promoted. The Solo Grading subcommittee comprehensively examines appeals, with particular emphasis given to instructor's insights and recommendations.

### Ability to Request Assignment to Grade 5 Senior

As has always been the case with BCPA grade promotions, it should be recognized that **Grade 4 Senior** players who believe their playing calibre is more appropriately aligned with **Grade 5 Senior** are able to request a reassignment to **Grade 5 Senior** by submitting a regrading appeal application to the Solo Grading subcommittee providing information why they should be competing in **Grade 5 Senior**. The Solo Grading subcommittee comprehensively examines appeals, with particular emphasis given to instructor's insights and recommendations.

### Ability to Promptly Resolve Mis-graded Players

The Solo Grading subcommittee has a mandate to ensure players are in grades appropriate to their calibre and if there is an obvious misalignment the Solo Grading subcommittee can regrade a player anytime in the season.

Solo Piping Rules clause 4.2.3 "*The Association shall have the authority to re-grade a competitor at any time.*"

Some informal surveys by pipe band associations and juvenile band program have found that up to 90% of players who graduate from high school generally do not initially carry on with their piping and drumming but sometimes return to it in later life.

For the "10%" who do initially carry on with their piping and drumming after high school, there is a possibility of the following scenario:

A player who turns 18 on October 1 and was playing in Grade 5 and doing well but not of a calibre to achieve a mandatory promotion to **Grade 4**. There is the possibility that the player might win all the top prizes in **Grade 5 Senior**, get mandatorily promoted, and win all the top prizes in **Grade 4 Senior**, before being mandatorily promoted to **Grade 3**.

## **Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season**



If a player is playing well beyond their current grade's calibre range, the Solo Grading subcommittee can take action at any time to re-assign that player to a grade that is more appropriate to their playing calibre, as per above noted clause 4.2.3.

### **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Planned Changes**

The planned changes were approved by BCPA in February, after consultations with the BCPA sanctioned highland games to gain their agreement, and when it was planned that the placings and performance ratings of players in the 2020 competitions from the Annual Gathering over Easter through to the Campbell River Highland Gathering in early August would be used as part of the data to inform discussions between the Solo Grading subcommittee and Adult grade players and their instructors on the grades transition.

The BCPA Board in consultation with, and agreement by the highland games had agreed to implement a balanced schedule for 2020 season which would have seen an altered schedule for event offerings at each highland games. This would have allowed for a balanced offering of events in each grade across the entire season. A part of this initiative would have been the inclusion of a limited number of offerings of a special Adult Strathspey & Reel event for adjudication sheets only. This would have enabled the Adult grade players to perform the Strathspey & Reel idioms to gain assessment in a competition like setting, enabling them to be prepared for the Grade 4 Senior Strathspey & Reel event in the following season.

However, since then the COVID-19 pandemic has caused cancellation of the complete 2020 season and, as a result, there will be no objective data on which to make informed decisions.

On June 3, the BCPA Board met and approved a postponement of the transition by one year (i.e. the 2021 season placings and performance ratings data and other information would be used as part of the data to inform discussions between the Solo Grading subcommittee and Adult grade players and their instructors on the grades transition).

In addition, the BCPA Board is opening up a further discussion on all these changes with Adult grade players and their instructors to gain further feedback and insights to influence any further changes before the next competition season begins.

## **Issues and rationale informing planned BCPA Grade 5, Grade 4 and Adult Piping Grade changes originally planned for the 2021 season**



### Closing

Overall, BCPA is looking to the successful 1999 transition of the introduction of the Grade 5 Piping grade, which has informed the current Adult grade transition, as a sign that the above changes for adult age players will yield increased numbers and calibres of adult age players.

Finally, BCPA is increasing its efforts and funding of educational and player development initiatives, and as a result there will be continued advancement of its offerings in all grades to ensure that the BCPA is assisting all its members with continued success in their piping and drumming careers, whether it be as a casual, amateur or open player.