



Guide to Running a Solo Piping Contest

Background

The CPA has been considering various matters to assist solo pipers, stewards, and judges at Highland Games solo piping contests. It occurred to us that there is much very good practice already, all over the country which could be shared from one Games Organiser to another, and perhaps we should start to document that.

This document is an attempt to put together a list of actions, which in our opinion would help the Games run smoothly. The following comments are intended in the spirit of constructive criticism – i.e. if you are doing these already, then carry on doing so – but if not, have a think about how feasible the changes would be for you.

The document has been written by Competing Pipers and checked by Piping Conveners. There are of course many ways to run these events – no two are the same, so some of this document may not apply to your particular situation.

Planning the Judges Bench

Ideally, judges should be selected from the Joint Committee for Judging's Register of Judges which is available on the CPA website: www.competingpipers.com/judging/approved_judges.html. These judges are recognised as having the status and ability to judge solo piping competitions at various levels, which are clearly detailed on the website. You can contact the Secretary for a copy of the Register with judges' contact details. You will find that there is no shortage of judges to choose from, though travelling arrangements for some individuals might be a factor.

Where competitions are restricted to B or C graded competitors, judges may additionally be selected from the Supplementary List: www.competingpipers.com/judging/senior_pipers.html. Members of the Supplementary List are graded Premier in both Piobaireachd and Light Music and are active competitors at the highest level. They are another useful resource for Games organisers, and again, contact details can be obtained from the Secretary.

On the day the judges will need a good seat and a sturdy table, ideally with some form of shelter. They may need some sheets to write on – some Games provide a Weather Write clipboard too, though many judges will bring their own of both of these. They will certainly need a final proforma for writing the prize-winners on, plus judges' expenses forms. They may also need some water to drink through the day – and some Games give the judges lunch vouchers or a hot meal – depends what your system has been in the past. Tea and coffee are much appreciated to help them through what can be a very long and demanding day.

Performance Evaluation or 'Crit' Sheets

The CPA supports the provision of feedback to competitors through assessment sheets at all competitive levels and respects the willingness of judges to provide feedback and the opinions provided. We can provide crit sheet proformas for use at any competition (just contact us by email), however we ask that **all** B and C graded contests provide crit sheets.

Competitors themselves are responsible for collecting their own crit sheets at the end of the competition, and some may ask you to send these on to them. This would be done at your discretion. It might be useful to lay them out on an empty judges' table at the end of the competition.

Taking Entries in Advance

The CPA can ensure that competitors are aware of your Games, by publishing details in the annual “Guide to the Games” and on the CPA website. If you wish to have more certainty over the numbers on the day, you can set a date by which entries must be lodged with the Piping Convener. This can most easily be done by email (all competing pipers use email), though some organisers use the phone or post as well. If you wish, draws (together with start times) can be published in advance on the CPA website – we would recommend this is done a week before the competition. If you did a draw in advance, all you need to do is get in touch with us, and we would be very happy to upload the information onto our website.

Dealing With Large Numbers of Entries

Solo piping seems to be more popular than ever. You will know approximately how many competitors to expect at your competition from previous years. If your competition consistently receives over 30 competitors particularly in Light Music competitions, you may need to plan for running two or three leets with a final which is played later on. We recommend that leets are kept to a number of about twenty, with four from each leet progressing to the final. This makes the whole day more manageable. It would be acceptable for a sole adjudicator to judge each leet, with them collaborating in larger bench of judges for the final. Taking entries in advance will help you to plan for this situation.

If you take entries “on the field” – which is the commonest scenario and works well in many situations – you could end up with an unexpectedly high number of contestants. In such a situation, it may be feasible to split the competition into leets on the day, however, this is not an ideal situation, and we would recommend that this only be done in close consultation with the judges concerned and communicated very thoroughly to competitors.

Registering on the Day

Pipers should be asked to report to the Piping Convener on arrival at the Games, to confirm their attendance and to settle any unpaid entry fees, if appropriate, before they compete.

Getting started on time is important so the first few competitors need to be reminded of the timescale and shown where to tune up and perform. Some Games issue numbers to be worn on the kilt for easier identification of competitors.

Stewards, and the Running of the Contest Once it has Begun...

Piping Stewards are vital to the smooth running of the day, and they really don't get enough thanks for the hard work they do. To make life easier for everyone, they should be clearly identifiable to pipers in some way. A brightly coloured badge is helpful – and one Games uses a coloured hackle in their hats, which is a great idea. This certainly helps on rainy days, when the cape can cover any badges – which again are often colour-coded to good effect. Some Games use brollies rather than capes – depends on how bad the weather is!

Pipers can be in more than one competition on the same day – such as piobaireachd and light music, and stewards might have to make changes to the running order if there is a clash of contests. The obvious difficulty then arises, that other pipers have to swiftly move up (or down) the running order and be ready to play sooner (or later) than they had planned. The bagpipe is a very unforgiving instrument, and doesn't like being heated up and cooled down! Ideally, sufficient recovery and preparation time should be allocated to affected pipers, when their position in the order of play is adjusted.

One way of managing the order of play is to post a copy of the draw near the competition platform, or in a designated area. This could then be updated for any withdrawals or changes to the order of play. Pipers will then be able to access the draw and monitor the playing order as the competition progresses. Pipers like to work in conjunction with stewards, and appreciate as much information as possible so that everyone is able to prepare in good time for their performance.

Any changes to the draw should really only need to accommodate a piper having a clash with another event. If the piper simply does not take enough notice of what is happening, or arrives late for the event, they would only compete at the discretion of the organiser. Consideration should be given to the other competitors who have been timing their preparation carefully during the day.

Breaks will be necessary throughout the day, whether for judges or other games events. Stewards should clearly indicate to pipers when any breaks will be taken and the times that competitions will recommence after the break. Stewards should then ensure that recommencement times are adhered to as closely as possible. Unexpectedly late or early commencement will certainly have a negative impact on the piper who is drawn first after the break.

Keeping in touch with your piping convener, and the other stewards could involve word of mouth, walkie-talkies, mobiles, or a PA system.

What Pipers Will Expect to do on the Day

As mentioned above, it is up to pipers to get to the Games by the advertised time, register with the appropriate stewards, and be ready to play when it is their turn (as per the draw).

Pipers need time to tune their instrument prior to their event and this can be a lengthy process! Pipers become skilled and sometimes desperate to find a wee spot where they can settle their instrument and their nerves before the competition. This can drive pipers to tuck themselves away and make it difficult for a steward to find them, however a responsible competitor should advise the board steward where they will be tuning up and try to keep him/her in sight if possible. Pipers should also keep an eye on the boards and tuning areas, as sudden breakdowns or withdrawals can bring forward their playing time very sharply.

An idea to minimise this 'bomb-burst' effect is to identify an area for the tuning of pipes before each competition event. This is not easy in a busy field, but there will be places that are suitable. At some Games the organisers have gone as far as arranging a small covered gazebo or open-sided tent a short distance from the competition platform which is the "final tuning area" for pipers who are about to go on for a piobaireachd contest. This is an ideal situation and has advantages for both pipers and stewards including:

- Pipers have a dedicated, covered, quiet (-ish) area to tune their pipes one last time. This is very much appreciated by the pipers, especially in rainy conditions, when the number of trees in the area becomes critical!
- Pipers can gauge the progress of the competitor immediately prior to them and adjust their own build-up accordingly
- Pipers further down the draw can see who is in the 'tuning' area, and thus work out when it will be their turn to go on
- Stewards can fill this area with the next piper, after the preceding piper has actually gone onto the boards to play
- There is a clearly defined area for pipers and stewards in which to work.

Pipers should proceed to the platform when called by the steward, or shortly after the preceding piper has left the platform, and judges have completed their notes. Delaying this arrival on the boards will only lengthen the contest, and is not likely to please the judges, especially in bad weather.