



# ROYAL NEW ZEALAND PIPE BANDS' ASSOCIATION

## **Grading Process – How it Works**

Notes used in a presentation by Nigel Foster, Grading Committee Convenor at the time, to the Annual RNZPBA Conference Wellington 1 September 2018.

Nigel begins.

My understanding is that this topic came onto today's agenda because people were interested to understand in greater detail the process by which member bands of the RNZPBA are graded.

So, I'll take you on a brief visit inside 2 tents:

- The tent of the Grading Committee, and the,
- Tent of the Grading Advisory Panel.

**But first a quick reminder on why/how these two tents are erected.**

- Bands compete in Grades.
- The rules provide for movement between Grades.

There are two ways a band can move up or down between Grades:

- Proactively-----by requesting to move and outlining the reasons for that request.
- Reactively -----at the recommendation of the Grading Advisory Panel.

In both cases the final decision rests with the Grading Committee.

**A quick summary of both "routes" to regrading.**

**A band proactively seeks to move up or down.**

- A band can lodge a request at any time.
- The Grading Committee considers the request, possibly with further engagement with the band to ensure the committee fully understands the issues leading to the request.
- The decision is made and advised to the band.
- No grade change can become effective later than 4 months before the next NZ Contest.

**A band is recommended for a grade change by the Grading Advisory Panel.**

- The Grading Advisory Panel meets once a year on the Saturday afternoon immediately following the completion of the Grade 1 Contest.
- The panel consists of the piping, drumming and ensemble judges who have judged throughout the weekend Any recommendation for a grade change for a band is advised to that band and the Grading Committee within 21 days of the contest.
- Bands recommended for regrading can either accept that recommendation or can appeal that recommendation to the Grading Committee by writing to the Association by 30 June outlining the grounds for its appeal.
- The Grading Committee convenes as necessary to consider those recommendations and appeals and advises of the final outcomes.

### What does the Grading Committee base its decisions on?

Rule 5 of Appendix 4 of the Contest Rules prescribes that the Grading Committee shall be entitled to determine the grading of the affected bands having regard to:

- i. Any recommendations of the Grading Advisory Panel.
- ii. Any written or oral submissions received from member bands.
- iii. The optimum number of bands in each grade which the Committee considers will achieve the best possible competition within that grade.
- iv. The desirability of promoting the winner and relegating the lowest band in each grade except in exceptional circumstances.
- v. Performances by any band at other contests of which the Committees are aware.
- vi. The frequency of attendance of any band at National or other contests.
- vii. Any other relevant matter.

So, with that rule framework in mind lets now go inside the two tents.

#### The tent of the Grading Advisory Panel.

- 8 judges who have just spent two full days listening intently to the competing bands. Mostly NZ judges but as many as 3 internationals as was the case at Rotorua in March 2018.
- 8 judges knowing from the outset of the weekend that at the end of the weekend they would meet as the Grading Advisory Panel.
- 8 judges gathered around a table covered in the master sheets from the weekend.
- In my experience an individual and collective sense of responsibility to “get it right for the bands and to get it right for the movement” but acknowledging that grading bands is an art not a science and so there is no measurable right or wrong.
- An obvious focus on the bands at the very top and very bottom of grades- except of course the top of Grade 1 and the bottom of 4b.
- Frequently asked question “how has that band fared at other contests through the season?”
- Frequently asked question “if that band had been in the higher grade how would it have fared this weekend?”
- Frequently asked question “if that band had been in the lower grade how would it have fared this weekend?”
- Frequently asked question “what do we know about what is happening within that band that might also guide our recommendation?”

- A recognition that school bands are a special case because of the annual exodus as pupils leave school.
- To be honest, low adherence to the purported desirability that winners are promoted, and last place getters are relegated.
- Consideration of international alignment—this is where the overseas judges make a real contribution
- The desirability of avoiding the yoyo effect—a band too frequently going up and down between grades
- After all that decision time in the case of each individual band.

#### Four options:

1. Recommend regrading
2. Recommend no regrading and no further action
3. Convenor to have a discussion with the Band leadership about the possibility of regrading
4. No regrading but a letter to the band advising that it seems to have been languishing around the bottom of its grade for some time and needs to be aware of the potential for relegation in the future.

#### The tent of the Grading Committee

- Composition-2 members nominated by the music judges committee plus a convenor nominated by the Management Board.
- Meeting by teleconference typically on a week evening.

#### Agenda to consider:

- Proactive requests for regrading from bands.
- Recommendations from the Grading Advisory Panels.
- Appeals against recommendations made by the Grading Advisory Panel.
- A recognition that “ours is the final decision” and so a real sense of responsibility to “get it right”.
- Each member having both the letters written by the band and access to the master sheets from the Contest.
- In some case the convenor having already had some informal contact with a leader of the band to better understand some aspects of the request/appeal.
- Very similar questioning and thinking processes to those that I summarised a moment ago from inside the tent of the Grading Advisory Panel.
- A willingness to seek views of other well-informed people whose knowledge and experience might add to the decision.

Decision time in the case of each individual band. Two options:

- Final decision now
- Further engagement with the band and its leaders prior to making a decision.

This year the Committee had five decisions to make. Three of those were made at the first meeting which was convened early July. The other two were made mid-August after a detailed, thorough and in my view very beneficial period of further engagement with the Band.

End.