

Amended version.

A previous version of this press release stated the appeal had been made against a ruling by UK Sport – this should have read Sport England.



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English Bridge Union appeals Sport England ruling on whether bridge is a sport

The English Bridge Union (EBU), the governing body for bridge in England, is appealing against Sport England's decision to use a definition of 'sport' which appears contrary to that recognised by the UK Parliament.

Sport England is the organisation which determines which activities are recognised as sports in England, and it **chooses** to use a 1992 definition provided by the European Sports Charter. This definition refers to "sport and physical recreation", which Sport England has chosen to interpret as excluding all Mind Sports.

Furthermore, the last time Parliament assessed the issue of 'what is a sport' was when considering the Charities Act in 2011, and on that occasion it **specifically included** Mind Sports.

There are five Mind Sports recognised worldwide by such organisations as SportAccord (the Federation for all Olympic and non-Olympic sports), the International Olympic Committee, and European Union, with bridge and chess the most well established in the UK. England's Women's bridge team this week won two gold medals and one bronze medal in the World Mind Games event in Beijing¹, which is organised by SportAccord.

The Charity Commission now recognises as 'sports', activities which promote health involving physical or mental skill or exertion², and as such includes bridge as a sport³.

Sport England's accreditation process runs contrary to this intent and as a result of this approach the EBU is not eligible for Sport England or Lottery funding. This leaves the ordinary 'club members' of the EBU having to fund all investment in the development of the sport out of their own pockets. Bridge is one of the UK's most popular pastimes, with an estimated 300,000 people playing regularly⁴, and yet it receives no public funding for the development of playing facilities, or for teaching initiatives, whether for children or adult players. EBU members must also fund England's international bridge activities. It is one of the nation's most successful international squads – the three England teams each won a medal at the 2014 European Championships, including gold in the Senior event – and yet

receives no contribution from public funds.

The EBU is appealing Sport England's accreditation process through Sports Resolutions (UK), the independent body set up for appeal purposes. The EBU has also briefed the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Sajid Javid, on the unfairness and eccentricity of Sport England's approach, and the damage it has caused⁵. The EBU is being supported in this campaign by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Bridge and in particular Baroness Ruth Henig and Bob Blackman MP.

The impact of Sport England's decision is further compounded by the fact that HMRC **chooses** to use the accreditation list to decide which organisations receive the tax relief available to sporting bodies. As a result bridge players must be charged VAT on their entry fees, which is not the case for other sporting activities. The EBU is separately challenging this decision in the Upper Tier Tax Tribunal at an appeal due to be heard in July. The EBU is being represented by David Ewart QC, one of the UK's leading tax lawyers.

Were the EBU to be successful in its appeals it would provide great benefit to its members, and to the many hundreds of thousands of bridge players, and potential bridge players, in the country. With funding from UK Sport/Sport England and/or sports lottery funding, and VAT relief from HMRC, the EBU would be able to invest in many projects around the country. These could include schemes to teach bridge to all ages, from children through to senior citizens, and the giving of grants for clubs to upgrade their facilities - facilities which are often shared with other recreational groups, thus benefiting the wider community.

The EBU is taking further legal advice on challenging Sport England's accreditation process through judicial review.

1 – event website - <http://www.worldmindgames.net/en/>;
information on England's medals - <https://www.ebu.co.uk/node/1868>; <https://www.ebu.co.uk/node/1888>

2 - Bridge is seen as an excellent way of improving mental acuity and delaying the onset of dementia, and the social and partnership aspects of bridge are of great benefit to those who may otherwise become isolated (see Annals of Internal Medicine, American College of Physicians and the Washington Post, 2003 reporting on: Verghese, J. 2003. The effects of mind games on Alzheimer's and dementia. Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, USA.)

3 – The Charity Commission decision on Hitchin Bridge Club. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hitchin-bridge-club>

4 – The current membership of the English Bridge Union is around 55,000. It is estimated that there are around 300,000 people in England who play bridge recreationally, whether competitively or socially.

5 – See <http://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/media/press-release-ebu-meets-with-secretary-of-state.pdf>, 7th November.

What is Bridge?

Bridge is a card-based mind sport, played in pairs against other pairs (the pairs are sometimes combined into teams of four or eight); The partners sit opposite each other at a table. There is an auction (often called bidding) and then the play, after which the hand is scored. The more tricks a partnership correctly predicts they will make the better their score - but if they do not make as many as they predict their opponents score points instead. In competitions the same hands are played at each table so you can compare your scores with the other partnerships and work out who did best with what they were dealt, thus almost eliminating the 'luck' aspect that exists in card games such as poker.

Playing bridge is one of the most enduring and popular pastimes in the world and for over 100 years, and it has fascinated people of all types and from all walks of life. It is one of the most popular leisure activities in Britain, with around 300,000 people playing on a regular basis. Famous players include Bill Gates, Omar Sharif and members of the band Radiohead.

About the English Bridge Union

The English Bridge Union (EBU) was formed on 23 May 1936 and is a non-profit making membership-funded organisation committed to promoting the game of duplicate bridge. It is also a National Bridge Organisation, affiliated to the European Bridge League and the World Bridge Federation.

The national headquarters of the EBU are in Aylesbury where around 20 professional people support and advise the committees, serve the membership, and help implement policy.

For further information please contact the Communications Officer, Peter Stockdale, on 01296 317215 or at press@ebu.co.uk