



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WESTERN COUNTIES WORKING GROUP
AT HARRINGTON LANE, EXETER
ON Thursday 3 April 2014 @ 12pm**

Western Regional County Representatives:

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Cornwall	Bill Thomson	Devon	Dick Andrews	Devon	Howard Kent-Webster
Dorset	Andy Kittridge	Hampshire & IoW	Andy Hughes	Hereford	Roy Milnes
Somerset	Gina Howard				

Invited Members:

County	Name
EBU Board	Darren Evetts

Apologies:

County	Name	County	Name
Avon			

CHAIRMAN: Dick Andrews

- Darren outlined the rationale for the formation of the County Working Group (CWG) structure. It was perceived that its predecessor - the National Club Committee structure – seemed to bypass the County Associations, and although this was not so in some counties, in others it was not as engaging as it could have been.
- One of the principal aims is to build 'Top Down' and 'Bottom Up' communications within the EBU.
- Two representatives from each regional CWG will meet at national level to discuss points raised at regional level, and decide what recommendations to present to the Board.
- It was agreed that an approach to the U3A by the EBU could prove beneficial. A point to take to the National Working Group (NWG).
- It was noted with disappointment that Wiltshire had not responded to communications regarding the meeting(s) of the Western Regional Counties Working Group; the timing was not the best for Avon.
- The question of a meeting venue for this CWG initiated discussion about possible venues for Western League matches. There was general agreement that 'mid-points' should be sought, such as Dorset v Hereford in Woolavington, and Devon agreed to look at hosting Cornwall v Dorset and Cornwall v Hereford matches in Exeter. (Note to meeting: HKW has asked DBA's Western League co-ordinator to investigate). Also, there was a request for clarity on the rules for the selection of the County C team, both at regional level and national level. This is something to be discussed at the NWG and fed back to Counties for a consensus. Darren indicated that this was the ideal forum for Counties to discuss such matters.

Teaching

The role of Teachers in recruiting new members was discussed. It was recognised that some learning groups represent the Teacher's livelihood and their desire to keep students rather than migrate them to affiliated Clubs. Several views confirmed that some groups did not wish to progress beyond their circle, although some had progressed to 'No Fear' events but no further. Approaches to this situation include/could include:-

- Cornwall have had some success in migrating Rubber bridge players to Teams.
- Teams of 8 events have proved successful in Cornwall, but less so elsewhere.
- Some No Fear events are more popular than County Championships.
- Annual Certification of EBU Teachers requiring Teachers to establish affiliated playing groups.
- Annual EBU Teacher licensing - free to EBU Teachers who have established affiliated playing groups (similar to above proposal).
- There was general agreement that every encouragement to learn bridge should be given.
- The need to recognise that two different groups with different needs play bridge; some for purely social reasons and others who wish to progress. Some Clubs have introduced a coffee round during which extra time is allowed to get refreshments.
- Encouraging Club players to participate in County events is an issue. Somerset has introduced a tiered inter-Club event. Club members who would not normally play in a County event participate because they are invited to represent their Club.
- Hereford and Cornwall have no trouble recruiting teachers, but finding students is difficult. Conversely Hampshire & IoW do not have any Teachers for the Portsmouth/Southampton conurbations.

Schools

- Getting Bridge on to the National Curriculum was seen as a top priority and as a route to establishing bridge in Universities.
- Cornwall have tables of primary school children playing mini bridge at their Congress.
- Dorset send people to one school and see opportunities in after schools Clubs.
- There is no sponsorship for a Schools Cup.
- EBU Board to be asked if a national sponsor could be found for a schools cup (aka Daily Mail Schools Cup).
- EBU Board to be asked if publicity could be given promoting the link between mini-bridge and improved mathematical ability.
- Players from Poland seem to be proficient at the game. Is there a reason for this? Further investigation might yield some interesting facts. Darren will investigate.

Unaffiliated Clubs

- Seminars: Hampshire & IoW have found these very successful - 4 or 5 'master classes' for improvers. These are offered to affiliated and unaffiliated Clubs, in an attempt to appeal to a majority of members and to encourage more people to enter County events which are in decline, and which tend to be populated by the same core players.
- There was discussion about the future of the English Bridge Magazine and the fact that it is now available online. It was felt that the magazine should remain in paper format, as well as other mediums. Many new and existing members see it as a benefit of membership, and it can provide excellent advertising when, for example, it is left in staff common rooms/doctors'/dentists' waiting rooms, etc. This is to be raised at the NWG meeting.
- A précis of the benefits of affiliation, to aid discussions with unaffiliated Clubs, will be provided by Darren.
- The affiliation status of a Club can sometimes depend on one or two personalities who are involved in its running. Therefore, a change of leadership may warrant a further approach regarding affiliation.

- Some County Bridge Associations list unaffiliated Clubs on their website in exchange for publicising County and EBU events.
- Devon operates a regular charity simultaneous pairs, to which unaffiliated Clubs are invited to participate. This improves the experience of affiliated Clubs and gives the unaffiliated Clubs an example of the benefits of affiliation. There is a surcharge on top of the Universal Membership Fee (P2P) to the unaffiliated Clubs (currently totalling 50p per player), to the detriment of the charity. Affiliated Clubs have the ability to identify the session as one of its exempted sessions, therefore maximising the donation to charity. The NWG will be asked to discuss this approach to unaffiliated Clubs and County charity events.

General

- Bridge Centres: general agreement that they are a good model. Few affiliated Clubs own their own premises, so that every event attracts a cost.
- Advertising is expensive and probably unproductive. It was suggested that advertising in some of the free 'what's on' publications, and advertising costs shared between County Associations might prove more attractive.
- Hampshire & IoW sends an electronic newsletter by email (also available on their website); it is well received with a 55% open (read) rate, but perceived to have little impact on upping attendance to County events.
- Some players do not understand the significance or rationale of the National Grading System.
- Café Bridge was explained as being played in 4 or 5 venues within walking distance in a town, and players move from one venue to another, taking morning coffee /lunch/afternoon tea whilst they play a pairs competition.
- Typically table money in the South West is low and bridge is seen as an inexpensive activity. The cost of £52 per pair for the Portland Pairs was perceived as a barrier to entry. The question of pricing elasticity was raised. For example, was the same cover charge appropriate for all venues if there is a mix of hotel/affiliated Club venues which have widely differing room hire rates? Darren will investigate.

Administration

- It was suggested that the Western CWG could meet every 6 months.
- Darren outlined the County online forum, which could be used to share best practice and resources, and to raise any topic for debate/ideas. Darren to send details.
- The notes of this and future meetings will be circulated nationally once agreed.
- Dick Andrews (Devon) and Andy Hughes (Hampshire & IoW) will represent the Western Region on the National County Working Group.
- The notes of all the Regional and National Working Group meetings will be available for County Associations to communicate with affiliated Clubs. The National Working Group will receive feedback from the Board on all points raised, and will also receive matters for discussion from the Board, which will be fed down to Regional Groups, Counties, Clubs and Members.
- The Terms of Reference of the National County Working Group to be circulated with these minutes.

Date of Next Meeting:

12.00 Noon Thursday 23 October 2014. Exeter - venue TBA