

Amended version.

A previous version of this press release made reference to decisions made by UK Sport – in places this should have read Sport England.



THE ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION
Broadfields, Bicester Road
Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 8AZ

Telephone 01296 3172000

7th November 2014

Press Release - for immediate distribution

English Bridge Union meets with Secretary of State over unfair treatment of bridge.

The Chairman, Treasurer and General Manager of the English Bridge Union met this week with Sajid Javid MP, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, to outline the belief that bridge, and other mind sports, are not being dealt a fair hand.

At the meeting on Tuesday 4th November, arranged by Bob Blackman MP¹, who is a member of the All Party Parliamentary Bridge Group, the representatives from the EBU outlined their belief that bridge, and other mind sports, are not receiving fair treatment by governmental organisations.

Mr Javid was advised that whilst bridge is recognised as a sport by such bodies as SportAccord (the federation for all Olympic and non-Olympic sports), the International Olympic Committee, and the European Union, it is not recognised as such by Sport England.

This has a direct impact on bridge, and other mind sports, as HMRC use the list of accredited sports to grant VAT and other tax exemptions. The EBU explained to Mr Javid that this meant that mind sports received neither any public funding, nor any tax relief.

The EBU brought to Mr Javid's attention that this failure by Sport England to recognise bridge as a sport is in direct contrast with Parliament's 2011 Charities Act in which bridge was an acceptable sport to the Charities Commission. The Charities Commission recognises as sports activities which promote health involving physical or mental skill or exertion², and as such includes bridge as a sport.

The EBU are therefore appealing against both the decision of Sport England, and the decision of HMRC to charge VAT on the entry fee to bridge competitions. The appeal to HMRC will go before a second tier tribunal in July 2015, however the EBU explained to Mr Javid that Sport England have declined to explain how an appeal against their decision could be lodged.

Were the EBU to be successful in their appeals it would provide great benefit to their members, and to the many hundreds of thousands of bridge players, and potential bridge players, in the country³. 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.

1 – Mr Blackman spoke on the subject on the Daily Politics show on BBC2 on Thursday 6th November. The programme is available on the BBC iplayer at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04nvh5j/daily-politics-06112014> – Mr Blackman's interview begins at 48:18.

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.)

Bridge has been seen to have both cognitive and social benefits in young people when taught in schools - <http://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/media/bridge-and-young-people.pdf>

3 – 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.

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