



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION

1 APRIL 2015- 31 AUGUST 2016

The English Bridge Union is the governing body for duplicate bridge in England, representing communities of bridge players at club, county and national level. It is funded by members for members and provides the infrastructure and development of the game in England. Monies are re-invested into our national game.

This annual report provides an insight in to the work that we do to support our clubs, counties and members and will be of interest to those individuals and organisations that, in turn, provide us with support to develop the game. This year it has been produced for a slightly longer period to ensure that it and future reports will be more up to date and relevant.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers that make up our national team - the Directors of the Board and all the members of its committees and the dedicated team of staff under our General Manager, Barry Capal, at Aylesbury.

A full list of national volunteers and staff can be found on the EBU website at <http://www.ebu.co.uk/biographies/ebu>

The statutory annual report and accounts will be able to be viewed on our website www.ebu.co.uk shortly after the EBU's Annual General Meeting on 23rd November 2016.

The Board

The Board is made up of eight directors elected by the shareholders, who are the representatives of our counties, and up to two appointed by the Board, renewable annually. The directors receive no remuneration for the work they undertake. They have legal and financial responsibilities as set out in the Companies Act 2006. The Board appointed a new director, Graham Smith in August 2016

Each director takes responsibility for one or more aspects of the EBU's business. This responsibility includes budgetary control, delivering strategic objectives and regular reporting on the work of the department and committee associated with it. For the year 2015-16 the responsibilities were as follows:

Chairman: Jeremy Dhondy

Vice-Chairman: Ian Payn

Treasurer: Jerry Cope

Tournament Committee Chairman: Ian Payn
Board Director responsible for facilitating the strategic plan: Jerry Cope
Board Director responsible for staff development: Jerry Cope
Board Director Responsible for Education/Representing the Board on EBED: Rob Lawy
Board Director Responsible for the County Working Group: Darren Evetts
Board Director responsible for legal matters: Anthony Golding
Editorial Board Chairman: Jeremy Dhondy
Tournament Directors Development Group Chairman: Heather Dhondy
Board Director responsible for Bridge Great Britain: Heather Dhondy
Board Director responsible for European and World duplicate bridge affairs: Jeremy Dhondy
Board Director responsible for Awards: Ron Millet
Board Director responsible for the All Party Parliamentary Group: Ron Millet

Progress is very slow with our efforts to reclaim VAT on entry fees. At present the documents we have supplied are being translated into 23 languages. We continue to be grateful to David Ewart, our honorary Counsel, for his great assistance in representing us on a pro bono basis. We are also involved in the process of judicial review concerning Sport England's refusal to recognise us as a sport. An application to appeal is due to be heard shortly after the publication of this report.

We were pleased to have presented the first Tony Priday award last year awarded for an outstanding contribution to bridge and enhancing the game in all its aspects. It went to Bernard Teltscher.

English Bridge Education and Development

Our sister charity English Bridge Education and Development (EBED) receives funds to help it operate from the English Bridge Union. It runs most of the elements of education that the EBU used to run. It runs the English Bridge Teaching Association (EBTA). It has started work on some significant projects which are a new accelerated learning project called Fast Forward for Bridge to help get new recruits to a standard where they can play more quickly than at present, a cognitive research project to provide evidence for bridge's ability to enhance the quality of life for participants and an integrated approach towards bridge for those in full time education built around the recently launched Junior Awards Scheme.

Finance

The EBU is a not-for-profit members' organisation which does not distribute any surplus but retains it to invest in the future of the game. We entered 2015/6 in a healthy financial position, and therefore, notwithstanding inflation increasing some of our costs, decided to freeze our main prices for 1 year from 1 April 2016. In practice a number of areas (Universal Membership, Competitions and our Shop) performed a little less well than we hoped and we ended the year with a small operating deficit of just below £28k. We also invested around £180k in legal costs in pursuing our case against Sports England. It is worth noting that administrative expenses remain below £10 per Member. The Board feels this represents excellent value for money for Members, and will continue to keep a tight control on costs, whilst seeking to enhance service levels.

Our reserves remain satisfactory and although we will also have a planned operating loss in 2016/7 (because it is the most expensive year of the 4-year international calendar) we aim both to return to operating profitability from 2017/8, and to continue to invest in the future of duplicate bridge.

Clubs and Club Services

A number of clubs affiliated during the period April 2015 - August 2016 but the total number of affiliated clubs reduced from 625 to 615. The main reasons for the reduction in numbers were falling numbers at small clubs, teaching clubs not wanting member benefits and club amalgamations. Bev Purvis was appointed as the new Club Liaison Officer in May 2016 replacing Andrew Urbanski. Visits to clubs across the country have taken place including a new initiative to contact and visit non-affiliated clubs. Work on updating the Club Management Handbook has begun and the UMS exemption for Novice sessions has been clarified with all clubs being reminded of the limited nature of such sessions. Several clubs have been assisted with applying for charitable status with the Charity Commission and with HMRC.

Education and development

Most education activities are now run by the charity, English Bridge and Education. Full detail can be seen in their annual report. In the past year EBUTA, the Teacher's Association has been transferred to the charity and re-badged as EBTA.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Bridge (APPG)

The group is chaired by Bob Blackman MP; a member of the House of Commons is required by the rules to fill this position.

Baroness Henig along with the other Lords on the APPG continues to be very supportive of Bridge and the EBU.

Bob Blackman MP has raised the issue of Bridge as a Sport on two occasions at Question Time as well as raising it directly with the Minister for Culture, Media and Sport. He had also challenged the Departmental officials on the matter.

This year the APPG has, again, hosted two visits from schools that play bridge and/or minibridge and in October Heather Dhondy undertook a teaching session at the Lords. In May 2015 Fabian Hamilton MP joined the group so that the 2 major political parties were now represented. Unfortunately for the APPG in January 2016 he was appointed an opposition front bench spokesperson on Foreign Affairs and as Parliamentary rules dictate he resigned from the APPG.

During the year the Group was approached by Briony Brock, daughter of the well-known international Bridge player. She works as a fund raising officer for Stoke Mandeville Spinal Research, a charity that among other things looks at rehabilitation techniques for those who have suffered spinal injury including Afghan war veterans. One of the techniques has been teaching and playing Bridge to those who are wheelchair bound. Further details can be seen here -http://lifeafterparalysis.com/what-we-do/#what_we_do_section_2

The APPG agreed to become an official sponsor to Stoke Mandeville Spinal Research and this is now in place.

At the final meeting for the period held at the end of July Richard Banbury from EBED was present so that both the promotional and educational aspects were represented. Several events at school student and Parliamentary level were announced for the forthcoming Autumn period. There will also be a House of Lords reception in November to promote Stoke Mandeville Spinal Research's work in introducing Bridge to the hospital's patients.

As can be seen the Parliamentary APPG is becoming more lively and active in promoting Bridge.

International Performances

England's representation in international duplicate bridge competitions is an important part of the EBU's activities as a national bridge organisation. Successes at international level help to raise public awareness of English bridge and to attract new players to the game. Our participation in international events provides us with an international profile in the bridge world and it also brings more influence within the European Bridge League (EBL) and the World Bridge Federation (WBF).

The Selection Committee, made up of seven elected and two ex officio members and chaired by Gillian Fawcett, is responsible for selecting the teams to represent us internationally. It has been a good year for England at international level, with a gold medal winning performance at the European Championships, and wins in three of the five Home Internationals:

- **Open**

Following the team's 4th place in the Bermuda Bowl in 2015, their performance in the Europeans was disappointing, as they failed to qualify for next year's world championships however they did qualify for the European Champions Cup. The England Open team won the Camrose Home Internationals

- **Women**

The Women's team continued their run of medal-winning performances with the Gold Medal at the European Championships, qualifying once again for the Venice Cup.

- **Seniors**

The Senior team won the Senior Camrose for the first time since 2010, but unfortunately did not repeat their medal winning performance in the European Championships, finishing in 10th place and failing to qualify for the D'Orsi Bowl.

- **Juniors**

The Junior team won the Junior Camrose for the fourth time in a row. Two junior teams had qualified for the World Youth Teams championships by finishing 4th in the Junior Europeans in 2015, but unfortunately finished out of the medal positions.

Junior squads

The Selection Committee is also responsible for the junior squads which provide training for young players. Through the hard work of squad leaders Alan Shillitoe, Michael Byrne, Sarah O'Connor and Sally Brock, supported by a number of top players who provide coaching and mentoring, the junior squad system continues to bring young players into the game and to prepare successive generations of players for national and international competition.

The U16 squad is developing well, and young players have already progressed from that squad into the U21 team for the Palmer Bayer Trophy. They performed well in both last year's junior Europeans, and this year's Youth Teams Championships. A new U26 women's squad is in development, headed by squad leader Sally Brock, and we hope to enter an U26 women's team into the Junior Europeans next year.

Regulation

The Laws and Ethics Committee (L&E), made up of seven elected plus two ex-officio members under the chairmanship of Tim Rees, is responsible for the regulation of the game in England.

Updated regulations were published in 2013, including a White Book (primarily information and guidance for Tournament Directors) and a Blue Book (primarily information for players). Both publications are available electronically, free, from the website and are updated annually. Only minor amendments were made in August 2015 and August 2016.

The L&E hears cases of both a technical and disciplinary nature. During the last year, there have been three appeals to the National Authority, which is the final step for appealing a Director's ruling. All three cases had sufficient merit to be heard, with one being successful. Disciplinary cases continue with relatively low frequency. One case successfully prosecuted was where a member had been misusing the NGS opt-out facility. Most of the issues considered by the L&E are concerned with complaints of bad behaviour by players and/or committee members. The L&E encourages these issues to be dealt with at a local level, which has successfully happened in most of this year's cases. The L&E provides advice on model disciplinary regulations for clubs, counties and jointly run events. The L&E has also produced a set of model regulations for League Competitions.

Appeals from tournaments are reviewed by the L&E so that they can offer advice and ensure the consistency of decisions. An annual booklet of the major decisions is published and is available electronically from the EBU website. There has been a backlog of these – this has now been cleared, with booklets for 2012, 2013 and 2014 now available. Appeals are reviewed and comments published in the minutes of their meetings.

There is a panel of referees appointed by the L&E who hear appeals at tournaments and act as telephone referees in knock out events, on a voluntary basis. They are also called upon from time to time to give rulings from club and county events.

The L&E believes that it is important that any player can invoke the appeals procedure when unhappy with a ruling. However, there has been a spate of appeals without merit, often from people for whom a financial sanction is of little importance. Therefore, the sanction for an appeal without merit has been increased to include a score reduction.

Tournaments and Competitions

For the first time in two decades the EBU ran a European Bridge League event last year– the annual Champions Cup for national teams from the top ten countries of the previous European Championships, together with the holders and the host nation’s team. Run by our competitions department with a lot of help from volunteer members and financial support from Simon Gillis, it took place at Horwood House near Milton Keynes last November. It was judged to have been very successful and came in well under budget, so the possibility of further co-operation with the EBL in the future is very much alive.

The biggest change to the competitions calendar this year was the move of the Summer Meeting from Brighton to Eastbourne. It had been prompted by steadily declining entries moving us towards a financial situation that would not be sustainable for much longer, together with considerable feedback that many of our members disliked a few important aspects of Brighton – the expense of hotels & restaurants, the difficulty and expense of parking, and the unpleasant atmosphere on the sea-front when leaving the venue late at night. Although not everyone liked Eastbourne and there were some problems with the very hot period mid-week, the feedback overall was very much more positive than negative. There can be no doubt that Eastbourne provides us with the best chance of sustaining a long summer event of this nature in the future.

Other changes that have been introduced to the competitions schedule, as mentioned in the last report, have settled in to varying degrees. The Player of the Year Championship awards place-points to those ranking highly in a range of our toughest pairs and teams events, to provide an extra challenge of interest to our top players, and indeed to the rest of us who like to see how they compare with each other.

The new format Autumn Congress is approaching its third year and provides welcome variety to the standard Championship Pairs schedule. The move to having smaller Championship Pairs finals in all congresses with qualifying sessions seems to have generally been welcomed. This year was the first time we have had a new format for the National Pairs qualifying stage and there is still some adjustment to be done to make it best suit members’ needs, but it certainly makes it simpler to administer and clearer to pairs whether or not they have qualified for the final.

The Really Easy Afternoons that we run four times a year at some of our congresses, with satellite events running alongside at various local clubs, seem to meet a need among our less-experienced members and we anticipate them continuing to expand. Also with the same broad constituency in mind, this year’s Masters Pairs had a bumper entry of 127 pairs, up 50% on the previous year.

Many of our other competitions have continued to decline, in common with those of most other national organisations, but we are constantly looking for ways of making our events more desirable and trying to minimise price increases. Our arrangement with Bridge Overseas helps in that regard by providing us with cheap or free event accommodation. Our overseas congresses, also organised in conjunction with them, always perform well financially and are popular with the members who attend them.

Tournament Directors Development Group

This subcommittee of the Board deals with the appraisal, promotion, development and management of the EBU's active tournament directors. It is chaired by Board Director, Heather Dhondy. During the period Jim Proctor decided to retire from the panel. We were sorry to see him go after so many years of excellent work and wish him well in the future. The TDDG ran a senior TD training weekend for the first time and several of our TDs attended a European Bridge League training weekend. Sarah Amos and Eddie Williams head the list of promotions, becoming National TDs, which is the highest level. The group continues its work of recruiting and training new tournament directors to continue the excellent service provided at our national tournaments.

The County Working Group

The EBU County Working Group was set up by the Board to focus on County development, the key objectives of which include communications and relationships with Counties, Clubs, Members, and potential Members. The National County Working Group will explore development opportunities and make recommendations to the Board on ways forward.

The National County Working Group is currently made up of representatives from only two (Midland & Northern) of the five Regional County Working Groups (Eastern, Metropolitan, Midlands, Northern and Western), Board Members and the General Manager. Each Regional County Working Group is made up of Counties, based primarily on the Inter-County League Groups. Guernsey, Isle of Man, and Jersey (Provincial Counties) are, for geographical reasons, outside of the Regional Groups, but have each been contacted by the Group Chairman, and invited to send a representative to the National Meetings, or to communicate directly with him on any matters they would like to raise. The structure has proven successful in two Regions, Northern and Midlands, with groups starting in the Eastern and Western Region, but later folding. One meeting was held in the Metropolitan Region but, with no one to move things forward that did not progress. An attempt to form a Southern Group also proved unsuccessful. There has been no contact from the Provincial Counties.

To date the main national initiative to be developed by the County Working Groups and the Board is a Best Practice for County Associations Document. This 'work in progress' document provides a framework which Counties can adopt fully, or in part, or develop to their own requirements (feedback welcomed into the National document), which focuses on volunteering, standard practices and performance management.

There have also been some developments in the idea of Regional Support Officers, which will be trialled, in part, in the Northern Region. At a local level the Northern and Midland Groups have held Regional Improvers Pairs competitions, aimed at new players and those from unaffiliated Clubs.

In summary, where a Regional Working Group exists there is evidence that it can make a positive contribution to the development of Bridge, both locally and nationally. Where it has not been possible to form, or maintain a Regional Working Group we are not currently

engaging with Counties in those areas. The Working Groups and the Board will be looking at how to develop the National County Working group model, in light of the moderate success, with the overriding aim to ensure that all Counties have a route of engagement with the County Working Group Structure. It is important we recognise the hard work and commitment of those members who represent their County, and Region, in engaging in this process.

I hope that as many members as possible will make their views known to their Club, and County, so that we can all participate in shaping the future of Bridge in England

English Bridge

The Editorial Board for English Bridge is a subcommittee of the Board chaired by EBU Board Chairman Jeremy Dhondy. During 2015-16 we have seen a change of Editor. Elena Jeronimidis retired after some years. This is a good place to thank her for the excellence of her work and her successful efforts to move the magazine forward. The new Editor, Lou Hobhouse, has settled in well and made a modest number of changes and improvements. We have completed the archive of past magazines on our website going back to 1945 and our current magazine is available online to members with some additional content.

Library and Archive

The EBU Library has been sorted, catalogued and tidied with repairs being undertaken to some books. Thanks are due to member Gordon Bickley for this work. The archive of past results and other aspects of the EBU's history presented electronically has developed in the last year. One of our members is writing a book on the early years of the History of Bridge in England and it is hoped that publication will follow shortly after the publication of this report. Past magazines back to 1945 are available on the website.

EBU Headquarters at Aylesbury

We have a full time staff equivalent of around eighteen, serving over 54000 members through the provision of tournaments, regulation, international support, club and membership support services including a shop providing bridge books and supplies, and communications including Club Management Focus to affiliated clubs, and Events Focus to 'tournament players'.

We also provide assistance to English Bridge Education and Development in a number of areas.

It has been, as usual, a busy year with the following notable developments:

□ EBUScore

The EBU was grateful to receive from Jeff Smith the generous donation of his scoring software. This was rebranded EBUScore and was made available to download from the EBU website on 1st October.

It is available free of charge to all affiliated clubs and counties, and to full members of EBTA, the teachers' association. It is also available to other organisations and

individuals for £50, and to date has been 'bought' by two other NBOs, clubs in six overseas countries, and sixteen unaffiliated clubs in England.

Support for the product is available free of charge at present, and is provided by EBU staff member Ian Mitchell. To date, due to the high standard of the product and its ease of use, there have been very few enquiries requiring support, and it is therefore intended to continue to offer free support in the short- to medium-term.

At the Summer Meeting in Eastbourne Ian ran two free training sessions for the software. These were well attended with around 50 delegates across the two sessions. More sessions will be held in 2016-17.

□ **Media coverage**

The Judicial Review, which took place in September 2015, generated considerable media interest. In advance two 'special reports' were made – one by Al Jazeera London, who attended Wimbledon BC to get some footage, and one by the Wall Street Journal who filmed at the Summer Meeting. On the days of the review EBU staff and officials gave numerous television, radio and newspaper interviews. Bridge and the case featured on BBC Breakfast, BBC News, BBC World, ITV, Channel 5, Sky News, Sky Sports, Talk Sport, 5Live, Radio4, over twenty local radio stations, and many more outlets.

The newspaper/online reporting lasted for a few days and we received notification of articles in nearly 600 outlets around the world. The international coverage included much of eastern Asia, North America, and the Middle East. All major UK newspapers covered at least one day of the case, and many included opinion or editorial pieces.

Whilst the coverage of the EBU's position and legal arguments was often incorrect, and opinion on whether bridge should be viewed as a sport differed, the media's reporting on bridge itself was almost universally positive. Its attributes of mental stimulation and social interaction were positively promoted.

The print monitoring service which we use estimated the value of the print coverage to be £1.63m (i.e. that would be the cost of paying for the equivalent level of exposure) – this excludes the coverage on television and radio, the value of which, whilst unquantifiable, would have been considerable.

□ **Membership database software**

A replacement for our membership database software has been sought as our existing software was both outdated and no longer supported by the provider. We hope that the new software will allow for a more efficient service to be provided to the members. We are in the process of testing the replacement product, and hope that it will be in use in late 2016

□ Staff

Andrew Urbanski, the Club Liaison Officer, left his position in December as he wished to work closer to his home in Bristol. He was replaced by Bev Purvis who started in April.

Megan Kirk joined us in October 2015 on a one year apprenticeship scheme.

John Pain, who currently deals with Laws & Ethics matters told of us his intention to retire in mid-September. After his retirement the Law & Ethics matters will be handled by Ian Mitchell.

□ Diary

The diary was produced by Letts, as in recent years. Due to a printing error the wrong colour of ink was used, and the EBU accepted a discount on the total cost, rather than asking for a reprint – and in so doing a large amount of paper was saved.

General Meetings and Shareholdings

The EBU is a company limited by shares. Our shareholders do not get any financial remuneration, their shareholdings and voting rights are based on the number of members their county has. There are two shareholder meetings a year, one of which is an annual general meeting. This report will be presented to the shareholders for discussion at the Annual General Meeting on 23rd November 2016.

For full details of our constitution and structure please see the EBU's Articles and Bye Laws available on the EBU's website www.ebu.co.uk.

Jeremy Dhondy

Chairman

For and on behalf of the Board of the English Bridge Union

Staff Members and National Volunteers 1 April 2015 – 31 August 2016

Details of the directors, committee members and staff can be found at <http://www.ebu.co.uk/biographies/ebu>. We are also grateful for the assistance of:

Honorary Counsel

David Ewart QC

Pro Bono Advisor

Stephen Barnfield

Disciplinary Panel (this group hears and decides on cases that are prosecuted by the Laws & Ethics Committee)

Norman Innis Joy Mayall, Kath Nelson, William Nicolle, Alan Oddie, Jackie Pye, Paul Roberts, Ed Scerri, Paddy Seligman, Geoff Smith, Jeff Smith, Keith Stanley, John Williams,

Awards Panel (this group scrutinises applications from counties for the Dimmie Fleming Award and makes recommendations to the EBU Board)

Margaret Curtis, Philip Mason, Jeff Morris