



## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION

1 September 2021 - 31 August 2022

The English Bridge Union is the governing body for duplicate bridge in England, representing communities of bridge players at club, county and national level, playing face-to-face and online. It is funded by members for members and provides the infrastructure necessary for the development of the game in England. It is a not-for-profit organisation and all surplus is invested in our national game.

This report details the work that we do to support our clubs, counties and members.

In addition to the dedicated team of staff led by Chief Executive, Gordon Rainsford, we would like to thank all the volunteers that make up our national team - the Directors of the Board and all the members of its committees. Volunteers are a particularly valued sector of our community and without them organised bridge at all levels would be unable to function.

The statutory annual report and accounts will be able to be viewed [on our website](#) shortly after the EBU's Annual General Meeting on 30th November 2022.

### The Board

The Board is made up of eight directors elected by the shareholders (the representatives of our counties), and up to three further ones appointed by the Board, renewable annually, including an appointee director elected at the shareholders' behest by a vote among our member clubs, to represent their interests. That position has been filled by Gayle Webb. The directors receive no remuneration for the work they undertake. They have legal and financial responsibilities as set out in the Companies Act 2006.

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 organisation and the committees associated with it. For the year 2021-22 the responsibilities of the officers and other board members were as follows:

**Chairman:** Ian Payn

**Vice-Chairman:** Cath Fox (Gillian Fawcett until November 2021)

**Treasurer:** Kay Preddy (Jerry Cope until November 2021)

## Board directors' responsibilities

Board Member	Responsibilities
Jerry Cope Treasurer, until Nov 2021	Financial strategy; Staff Development; Editorial Board Chairman until Dec 2021
Adrian Darnell	EBED; education
Gillian Fawcett Vice-Chair, until end Nov 2021	Selection & internationals; sponsorship & fundraising
Cath Fox Vice-Chair from end Nov 2021	IT; communications; marketing
Anthony Golding until Nov 2021	County and club constitutions; bye laws; Articles; legal matters
Rob Lawy	Education; volunteering; competitions
Ron Millet until April 2022	Membership project; Awards; All Party Parliamentary Group; mini-bridge visits
Ian Payn Chair	Tournaments and competitions Board member: Selection; L&E; Tournament Panel; Editorial Board Chairman from Dec 2021
Kay Preddy Treasurer from Nov 2021	Finance; competitions; communications
Tony Russ from Nov 2021	Counties; competitions; membership; communications
Patrick Shields (appointed)	Future Strategic Plan; County Working Groups (CWG); Competitions WG and Education WG; Selection Committee
Gayle Webb (appointed)	Clubs and counties; communications; competitions; L&E committee

## **Finance**

The financial year April 21 to March 22 had a surplus of £31.5k. This was despite some of the challenges of that year due to the ongoing impact of COVID while not benefitting from the same government subsidies, or from a decrease in the cost of subscription to the EBL and WBF, as we had in the previous year.

Our main income source (UMS) was very close to what we had budgeted while income from the second main source (Competitions) was slightly above budget, mainly due to moving some competitions on-line. Licencing also saw an above-budgeted income.

The cancellation of the World Juniors that year reduced our spend on Internationals quite considerably, and our expenditure on L&E was less than we had thought.

However, English Bridge saw a reduction in advertising revenue due to the extended impact on COVID on socialising.

UMS continues to increase its dominance in our income as other sources, for instance from the shop and advertising, drop-off.

Planning for the future has sought to maintain services to clubs and members without significant cost increases by seeking to save money elsewhere (such as the audit and possible lease of the Aylesbury offices) and to revise the competition calendar to reconsider loss-making competitions and to satisfy the changes in players' preferences.

## **Clubs and Club Services**

During the course of this year clubs have been exploring what bridge is going to look like for them post-Covid. For some clubs online has now taken over and the club will remain online; others are back playing exclusively face-to-face and some clubs are doing both. Most clubs that have returned to face-to-face are seeing attendances lower than before the pandemic and this is particularly true for evening games. The main reasons given for this are: players have got out of the habit during Covid and in some cases are now doing something else on the night they used to play bridge; older players no longer feel confident to drive to the bridge club; players have died and not been replaced; having discovered online and become comfortable with this way of playing during Covid, players want to continue playing online and are not interested in returning to the club.

To help clubs with promotion the EBU provided free marketing materials to clubs and counties. These have been well received and are still available (see [here](#) for details) at the cost of postage only.

Around 35 affiliated clubs this year have closed due to the effects of Covid and in some areas clubs have merged. The EBU has continued to offer free trial affiliation for new clubs or clubs that have not been affiliated since in the introduction of Universal Membership in 2010 and so far 27 clubs have taken up this offer.

The free places on club teacher training courses have been popular this year with 29 free places being taken up. Each of those free places is a new teacher who will be teaching in an affiliated club. The free places are only a small portion of all the people attending club teacher-training courses, so it is encouraging to see there are plenty of people training to be teachers.

## Membership Development

In the last couple of years we have seen the impact of two major forces affecting the bridge world, the first being the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of lockdown, and the second being the demographics of our game and that the average age of our members continues to rise. While we celebrate the fact that bridge brings so much enjoyment and value to senior members of our community, we also recognize the implications for the future of our clubs, including the changing nature of the game as players learning later in life, in general, have a more social and less competitive approach.

This means that membership development has never been more important. How are we doing? As a quick snapshot, in August 2022 the number of player sessions in EBU games (excluding leagues and knockouts) was approximately 82% of what it was in August 2019, pre-lockdown. The number of unique players was about 78%, showing a small shift upward in the average number of sessions played by each person. The advent of online bridge has made it easier to play more often. Note that these figures are averages and there is wide variation. Sadly, the impact of lockdown also means that the number of active clubs has declined since 2019, by about 10%.

Needless to say, the picture would look much worse without the amazing work done by many of our clubs and teachers to bring new people into the game. This, combined with the positive impact of online bridge, means that some clubs are substantially larger now than they were in 2019. We have also been glad to welcome a number of previously non-affiliated clubs into the EBU. Over the past year, we have added over 3,600 new members to our records, and over 500 of these are on our records as bridge students.

Despite this influx, these are challenging times for bridge and we must keep our eyes open to the situation we are in. What are we doing?

1. We are continuing to communicate to clubs the urgency of bringing in new players to ensure a healthy future.
2. We are improving our promotion of clubs to the wider world. A key piece is the new club directory on our web site which includes details of forthcoming sessions, a map, and information about club facilities including the opportunity to learn bridge.
3. We are working on how we, together with our partners in EBED, provide teaching resources to clubs that cannot easily do this on their own.
4. We are focusing on some of the hard challenges around membership development at a club, including recruitment of students and retention of new players. This last point is critical as research suggests that only a minority, sometimes a small minority, of new learners end up playing in club sessions. Some clubs achieve much better retention so we must learn from what is most effective.

This year we have run a number of very popular online seminars for clubs on growing their membership and these will continue, with sharply focused sessions on teaching at clubs planned for the new year.

The number of EBU clubs means it is not possible to visit all of them, so we have embarked on a programme of calling all our clubs over the course of the year, to support them and hear both about issues they face, and about initiatives they are engaged in which are working well. We have made slow but steady progress with this and it is proving rewarding in all sorts of ways.

Bridge is a wonderful pastime that benefits players throughout their life, making the effort of membership development hugely worthwhile. However, it cannot be marketed like a box of chocolates; becoming a bridge player is a journey, which most often starts with a friend saying “have you thought about learning to play?”

Finally, the key to sustaining competitive bridge lies in teaching younger players. Much great work is being done here, but more is needed, so this is also a key focus for the future.

## **Executive Working Groups**

The Board has established a number of working groups, meeting regularly to consider specific areas of the EBU’s work, usually comprising one or more board members along with member volunteers and sometimes appropriate members of staff.

We currently have such groups for Marketing, Education, Competitions and IT. This approach to the work allows Board members and staff to use their time in a more focussed and productive way.

## **IT and Data matters**

Tim Anderson extended his work hours for us at the start of this year, to work with Harry Watson on IT development and administration, in addition to being our Membership Development Officer. The IT Working Group meets weekly and currently comprises Tim Anderson, Harry Watson, Jonathan Lillycrop, Kiat Huang and Gordon Rainsford. In addition to being active in modernising and rationalising our IT provision, and checking our agreements for value for money, they have been instrumental in providing a number of improvements, some of which are behind the scenes but others that members may well have noticed:

- New [Club](#) and [Teachers'](#) directories
- Online forms for clubs to update their details
- More information provided in My EBU, including account balances and an information ribbon at the top of members’ session lists
- More automation of results uploads from regular online games

Further, imminent changes include:

- Improved and extended master points reports, allowing rankings to be shown based on any of the three different types of master points that are regularly awarded
- A new, rotating display for club and county adverts on the front page of the website
- Information provided for members about numbers of entries received for forthcoming events

## **Media coverage**

Media coverage of duplicate bridge has decreased slightly in the past year. Most coverage in the national press has continued to be through the regular bridge columns, with the occasional additional article.

This year there were fewer local articles, both in print and on radio about bridge clubs and upcoming events than in 2021.

There were also fewer cases of cheating, and therefore fewer national and international articles printed about cases of cheating in the game.

A new bridge podcast has continued to be broadcast, “[Sorry, Partner](#)” is run by two American bridge players and often features British players in their interview sections.

Local news sites across the country covered some local bridge clubs' events, teaching initiatives and open days.

## **International Performances**

The first events of the year – the Channel Trophy in December, the Camrose in January and March, and the Junior Camrose and Peggy Bayer in February – were held online. England overcame Ireland to win the Camrose. In the Channel Trophy our U26 women's team won their category, and the other three teams came second in theirs. England won the Junior Camrose, for under-26 teams, with our second team, an under-21 team, a close second. In the Peggy Bayer, for under-21s, we fielded our under-16 team, which won the event by a huge margin.

Face-to-face international bridge resumed mid-March, with the Channel Trophy being held again! This time it was the U26 and U21 teams which won their events. Next were the World Championships, usually held in the Autumn but this time in April in Italy. Our Women's team reached the semi-finals of the Venice Cup, losing to an inspired Turkish team, but winning bronze medals. Our Open team also reached the knockout stages of the Bermuda Bowl, losing a close match to Switzerland, the eventual winners. Our Seniors' team finished mid-table in the d'Orsi Trophy round-robin.

Back in the UK, face-to-face international bridge resumed also, with the Lady Milne and Teltscher Trophy. Both our teams finished second less than one VP behind Scotland.

The international cycle had been greatly compressed by lockdown, so that the next European Championships were in June, on Madeira. With eight teams in each category to qualify for the World Championships, the Mixed, Seniors', Open, and Women's teams finished 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. This was a disappointing performance, which has caused the Selection Committee to reflect on our methods and circumstances. Part of the problem is a reduction in funding which, along with our choice of pairs trials in all categories, with the first three to qualify, has led some professional players to choose to enter with a paying partner rather than the strongest available partner.

In July, following an intense fundraising effort, our junior teams travelled to the Netherlands for their European Championships. Our U16 team was the most successful, winning silver medals. Our U21 and U26W teams will also be playing in next year's World Championships.

## **Regulation**

The Laws and Ethics Committee (L&E) is made up of seven elected individual members of the EBU and two appointed Board members. It is responsible for the regulation of the game in England. David Burn is the current Chair and Steve Green the Vice-Chair.

2021 saw a large number of cheating cases, resulting in many convictions. There are currently 30 sanctioned members listed on the EBU website. It is heartening to report that numbers in 2022 are much smaller. Indeed, as of today there are no cheating cases in progress. Hopefully the tough approach and hours of effort put into protecting honest members from cheats by volunteers, often in the face of intense criticism, has paid off in the form of a deterrent. We continue to be vigilant. Particular thanks must go to Sarah Bell who managed the investigations during a very stressful time for all those involved.

Since the AGM in 2021 work was undertaken to update the Disciplinary Rules. Consultation with Shareholders on a series of proposed changes took place in May and the resulting document was approved by an EGM in September. The four main policy changes are:

- i. Removal of the Interim Playing Suspension which effectively published names before a verdict

- ii. No publication of names until the whole disciplinary process has concluded, included the time for appeals
- iii. To encourage early admissions of guilt with known reduced sanctions
- iv. The introduction of a warning-led process for inexperienced players

The L&E produces two annual publications, the White Book (primarily information and guidance for Tournament Directors) and the Blue Book (primarily information for players). Both publications are available free from the website. With the rise in popularity of online bridge due to the pandemic, the L&E has incorporated regulations for this form of the game into the Blue Book.

## **Tournaments and Competitions**

One of the central issues facing the EBU in the last year was how to manage the transition from predominantly online bridge to the mixed offering that is emerging in the post pandemic environment. During the last year the EBU has retained a serious online presence. The seven daily online games have continued to attract good numbers, with well over 10,000 player sessions a month on average.

During this last year we have also continued to offer two regular daily Funbridge robot games and our daily 12-board robot game on BBO. We have four ladders based on these robot games, a monthly one from our 20-board match-pointed games and a further one handicapped on NGS, a quarterly one for our IMPs games and another combining the results of the two 12-board robot games. These ladders get between 70 & 300 players participating in them.

We tried out a couple of new events - a mixed online event in the space vacated by the Torquay Congress, for which there were 14 tables on first day for the qualifier and 24 tables on second day with the final and the Swiss event. We also had the handicap pairs for the first time, which proved a success with 196 pairs at ten venues, and we plan to run this again every year.

The Easter Congress went back to being face-to-face. It attracted 47 pairs for the main championship pairs event, 64 for the Swiss Pairs and 30 teams for the Swiss Teams. This is intended to remain a face-to-face event in the future. The Pachabo and Tollemache finals were held online last year with the Covid surge, and it is intended that the Pachabo will remain online but the Tollemache final will be face-to-face in future (with the qualifier still online).

The number of people who played at the Summer Meeting in Eastbourne was significantly up on the previous year, running over a long weekend rather than the full 10 days of the past, and the response was very favourable. The Spring Fours was held face-to-face with 37 teams, including a significant overseas entry. Crockfords final, and the plate final were also held face-to-face, and the plan is to continue that arrangement, with teams electing whether to play online or face-to-face in the early rounds. The original Lockdown league, which had begun to lose some of its early numbers, has been reconfigured to a Wednesday National Teams League with 16 board matches. There are currently 35 teams in three divisions. Some teams who wanted to continue with the 8-board format are doing so less formally.

The Competitions Working Group (supported now by an Advisory group) has been meeting regularly. Whereas this last year was about managing the events calendar, the idea now is to plan the new calendar for next year in a manner that protects the interests of Counties and clubs, alongside the income needed by the EBU to enable it to continue with its core functions. We have established a number of topic-based subgroups of the working group to look at NGS, masterpoints and our pairs competitions. The plan is to initiate some changes during the next

year. We have reduced congress entry prices for newcomers and have an early-bird scheme for entry, with some positive effects.

Although Arena Travel, which took over running our overseas holidays and finding us venues for competitions in England, has recently gone into administration, it has been bought in its entirety by the Leger Shearings Group and the expectation is that things will not change for the foreseeable future, so they will continue to find playing accommodation for us in England for our congresses and other competitions. In addition to our regular autumn and spring overseas congresses, last year we ran an additional river cruise, which was a qualified success for us given the Covid situation, although it was not financially productive for Arena. We would like to be able to continue to run an extra overseas congress each year, but this depends on Arena's ability to find us suitable venues that work financially.

### **Tournament Directors Development Group**

The Tournament Directors Development Group (TDDG) is a subcommittee of the Board which deals with the development and management of the EBU's active tournament directors, from trainee to National director. It is now chaired by Peter Clinch. We will be holding a TD training weekend in December 2022, to which all TD panel members have been invited. This is the first such weekend since 2018, and we will be focusing on trends since that time - online versus face-to-face directing, changing numbers of events and participants, and directing with screens.

### **EBU Counties**

The EBU, as an association of 39 different County Bridge associations, recognises the importance of liaison with its member counties and is very conscious of the vastly differing needs and aspirations of them. To this end, over the past twelve months we have worked hard at improving our communications in a number of ways.

During 2022 we arranged three meetings for county chairs. In each case a trio of county chairs was tasked with drawing up the agenda and chairing the meeting. These meetings were well received, will be repeated in 2023, offering an opportunity for counties to demonstrate their good practice and to stimulate discussion around various areas of interest. Minutes and videos of these meetings are available.

We also introduced the buddy system with each board member allocated to a few counties, to keep in touch with developments in those counties and to discuss areas of concern such as the recent ODGP issues. This has been more successful with some counties than others but is a system worth retention so that each county has direct access to a board member in case of need.

Sam Kelly and Louise Crisp provide a monthly update on EBU activities to all our counties so that everybody is informed about what is going on. Communication is a key driver of success, and we propose to continue to work towards better two-way conversations with County Bridge Associations.

### **EBU Headquarters at Aylesbury**

We have a total of sixteen EBU staff – a full-time staff equivalent of around twelve. They serve over 50,000 members through the provision of tournaments, regulation, international support, club and membership support services, including the Bridge Warehouse providing bridge books and supplies, and communications including Club Management Focus to affiliated clubs, and Events Focus to 'tournament players'.



We also support the charity English Bridge Education and Development, with whom we share offices and some administrative systems. EBED has a Chief Executive, Giorgio Provenza, as well as three part-time staff.

With the reduction in staff numbers during the Covid pandemic and the increase in working from home, we now have less need for all of our space in Aylesbury and are looking at letting part of it to provide us with an additional source of extra income.

### **Annual General Meeting 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. This report will be presented to the shareholders for discussion at the Annual General Meeting on 30th November 2022.

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](http://www.ebu.co.uk)



Ian Payn

Chairman

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

### **Staff members and national volunteers 1 September 2021 – 31 August 2022**

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 KC

#### **Pro Bono Advisor**

Joy Mayall (until spring 2022), Roger Karn

**Disciplinary Panel** (a committee drawn from this group hears and decides on cases that are prosecuted by the Prosecution Panel named below)

Geoff Smith (Convenor), Brian Callaghan, Frances Connell, Jerry Cope, Helen Erichsen, Gillian Fawcett, Jim Grant, Ben Handley-Pritchard, Andy Hughes, Norman Inniss, Adrian la Chapelle, Alan Mould, Kath Nelson, Paul Roberts, John Wilmott.

**Prosecution Panel** (members drawn from this group conduct prosecutions on behalf of the EBU)

John Dean, Richard Fedrick, Mike Graham, Stephen Green (L&E Committee Vice-Chair), Mike Huggins, Simon Husband, Jane Jensen, Richard Johnson, Jim Mason, Shirley Pritchard, Neil Rosen, Andrew Southwell, Nick Woolven.

	INCOME £k's	EXPENDITURE £k's
Membership, Nat Org, Admin	567.1	-521.5
English Bridge Magazine	29.6	-131.0
EBED *	18.8	-38.4
Comps, Licensing, MPs, Sims	420.5	-241
Internationals	33.2	-103.6
Bridge Warehouse	84.6	-67.3
Government Support	26.3	0
Laws & Ethics	0.1	-45.9
	<b>1,180.2</b>	<b>-1,148.7</b>

\* English Bridge Education and Development Charity

