



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION

1 September 2022 - 31 August 2023

BRIEF SUMMARY

- Accounts show a surplus of £24.8k against a budgeted small deficit.
- Club sessions, player sessions, session sizes and player numbers have risen.
- IT innovations make it easier for students to find suitable teachers.
- *My EBU* and *NGS* continue to be the most popular pages of the website.
- Although we had no national teams in the world championships in Marrakech, many teams with EBU members performed well in the transnational events.
- Face-to-face EBU tournaments continue to recover.
- The EBU Online One-Day Green-Pointed events are running successfully with good player demand.
- Face-to-face County One-Day Green-Pointed events are returning to the calendar.
- The number of disciplinary cases relating to cheating has reduced and the new inexperienced player procedure has led to a number of players accepting a sanction without publicity, avoiding costly and time-consuming hearings.
- Bridge Warehouse sales have recovered to an extent and it is producing positive income, although less than pre-pandemic, as well as providing a service to members.
- Reduced staffing over the last five years and increased home working since the pandemic have allowed us to let part of the Aylesbury building to increase income.

MAIN REPORT

The English Bridge Union is the governing body for supporting 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 help our clubs, counties and members enjoy the game.

In addition to the dedicated team of staff led by Chief Executive, Gordon Rainsford, we would like to thank all the volunteers who comprise the EBU by belonging to its committees and working groups. 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 viewable [on our website](#) shortly after the EBU's Annual General Meeting on 29th November 2023.

The Board

The Board is made up of eight directors elected on a cycle of three-year terms by the shareholders (the representatives of our counties), and up to three further ones 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 is assisted in its work by two elected standing committees (Selection and Laws & Ethics) as well as appointed working groups composed of board members, other volunteers, and members of staff.

Each member of the board 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 2022-23 the responsibilities of the officers and other board members were as follows:

Chairman: Ian Payn

Vice-Chairman: Adrian Darnell (Cath Fox until November 2022)

Treasurer: Kay Preddy

Board members' responsibilities:

Member	Responsibilities
Adrian Darnell Vice-Chair	EBED; Education Working Group (Chair)
Cath Fox Vice-Chair until Nov 2022	IT; communications; marketing
Paul Gibbons (appointed)	Competitions Working Group (member)
Rob Lawy	Competitions Working Group (Chair); Volunteers; Education Working Group (member)
Ian Payn Chair	Selection Committee (member); Editorial Board (Chair); Laws & Ethics Committee (member); I.T. Working Group (member); Marketing Working Group (member)
Kay Preddy Treasurer from Nov 2022	Finance; Staffing
Tony Russ	Counties; Competitions Working Group (member); Education Working Group (member); Marketing Working Group (member)
Patrick Shields	Bridge Warehouse; Strategy; Internationals; Competitions Working Group (member); Education Working Group (member); Selection Committee (member)
Ian Sidgwick (appointed)	Marketing Working Group (member); Procurement; Competitions Working Group (member)
Abbey Smith	Junior Liaison Officer; Safeguarding Officer; Selection Committee (member)
Gayle Webb	Clubs; Competitions Working Group (member); Marketing Working Group (Chair)

Finance 2022-23

The financial year April 22 to March 23 had a surplus of £24.8k (just under 2% of turnover) against a budgeted small deficit; the largest contributors to this variance were increased income from UMS (as numbers over the year were up about 5%) and various administration changes (including the switch from an Audit to an Assurance service, and certain unspent allowances).

Across the income from different types of game, we saw an increase over the budget from UMS (mostly club games) but less income than expected from Licensing, and much as planned in Competitions. The spend on internationals – in a busy year with seven teams competing in European Championships across adult events and junior events – was almost twice the net profits from competitions. Generous donations to fund the Juniors over the year came to £15.2k and this covered almost half the cost of supporting the juniors. Overall, internationals take about 10% of our turnover.

Activity in the Bridge Warehouse has continued to grow but has only reached about 60% of the pre pandemic numbers, and our margin is only about half what it was then. The cost of English Bridge has gone down a little, but so has the advertising revenue; it currently costs about £1 per active member per edition to produce and deliver the magazine.

In looking forward, we are expecting income from rental of space in the Aylesbury premises and continued small growth in the amount of play that takes place, but costs are expected to rise with inflation and this will keep pressure on the EBU finances. It is important to build a surplus in 2023-24, as it is a quiet year for internationals which will return in greater number in 2024-25.

Clubs and Club Services

Comparing figures for the 12 months to end of August 2023 to the 12 months before that the number of club sessions, the average number of players in a session and the number of distinct players have all increased which are all encouraging signs. These stats are for club and county games only (excluding EBU games):

	Sep 21 - Aug 22	Sep 22 - Aug 23
Average players per session	25.76	26.67
Number of club sessions	57,261	59,025
Total player sessions	1,474,853	1,574,352
Number of distinct players	37,749	38,347

Since 1 September 2022, 10 clubs have signed up for the trial affiliation offer and are regularly submitting sessions. Of the 21 clubs whose trial affiliation period has come to an end 13 have chosen to stay affiliated and one merged with an affiliated club. During the same period 25 clubs have disaffiliated or closed, some of these were online only clubs which were setup during Covid.

During the 12 months, 44 free club teacher training places were taken up, so this remains a popular benefit of affiliation and no doubt this increase in teaching has contributed to the higher numbers of player sessions seen above.

Club seminars have continued this year and have been well received. Topics covered have been: Gentle Duplicate, Charitable Status, Bridge Club Websites and Running a Teaching Programme. Recordings of all these and more are available on the EBU YouTube channel.

Tony Russ and the Club Liaison Officer (CLO), Jonathan Lillycrop, had three meetings with randomly invited groups of clubs to get their feedback on what the EBU could do better. These meetings were constructive with useful feedback and we are working on a number of actions from these discussions.

EBU ClubPairs is available as a simplified version of EBUScore and is being regularly used by four clubs. For clubs already used to EBUScore there is little incentive to change but ClubPairs should hopefully provide an attractive alternative for clubs switching from other scoring programs.

The CLO is always keen to visit clubs and usually does so in response to any request such as for training on EBUScore, or a club which is considering affiliation and would like a representative to speak to the members and answer questions, or a club which is having a special event and would like an EBU representative to attend. In addition, some clubs prefer virtual visits by Zoom, by which route things like EBUScore training can be offered. Clubs who would like a visit can contact him at jonathan@ebu.co.uk

Since he has just moved to the North-East, he expects to be able to visit all the clubs there in the coming year. Club visits often involve playing in a club duplicate which is a good opportunity to speak with members and get feedback and answer questions.

Membership Development

The EBU has a part-time membership development officer, Tim Anderson, but he will be retiring from this role at the end of the year, which will prompt a review of our membership development provision.

During 2023 we have seen continuing recovery from the periods of lockdown and health anxiety accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic though our numbers (people playing in EBU sessions) remain around 10-15% below where they were in 2019. However, we added over 4,000 new members in the 12 months to September 2023, reflecting the hard work and enthusiasm of our clubs and teachers.

We are also aware of the demographics of our membership and are tracking the age of our members so as to be better prepared for changes ahead. We are grateful to over 7,500 members who shared their date or year of birth in order to improve the quality of our statistics. The average age of a player in one of our sessions between August and September 2023 was about 73 years.

We are focusing on several things in the drive for new players:

- Making it easier for bridge enquirers to learn the game. We have introduced a new web-based service to help enquirers find appropriate courses and teachers.
- Supporting clubs in their teaching and marketing. We have run popular seminars for clubs on topics including running a teaching programme, improving club websites, and putting on gentle duplicate sessions.
- Retaining more students in clubs when they complete their courses. We support clubs with advice and sharing what we have learned from others about this often-difficult transition.

- Making our website and EBU services in general more attractive to novice and intermediate players.
- Promoting bridge nationally as well as locally, including a “Festival of Bridge” planned for September 2024.
- Preparing for a new focus on youth bridge as we believe this is critical to the future of the game especially the more competitive game.

In all the above we are working with our associated charity, EBED (English Bridge Education and Development), to implement an effective joint strategy.

IT and Data matters

The EBU’s IT services are managed by Tim Anderson and Harry Watson. A working group meets weekly, currently Tim Anderson, Harry Watson, Gordon Rainsford, Jonathan Lillycrop and Kiat Huang. There are several strands to the work:

- Maintaining the IT systems at the Aylesbury office
- Maintaining a cloud network with remote desktops for staff along with our Sage accounting system
- Running the EBU website
- Maintaining and developing custom applications including My EBU, Masterpoint management, SIMs, scoring, results and others.
- Supporting staff with IT issues

Goals of the IT team include enhancing and modernising our IT systems both internally and those which clubs and individual members use, automating tasks where possible to free staff for other work, and careful cost management.

Recent work includes:

- Creating a new “Find a club or teacher” service which enquirers can use to connect with suitable clubs or teachers. The service on our website automatically contacts potential teachers and nearby clubs, so they can present offers to the enquirer. We have seen encouraging take-up since its launch in Summer 2023.
- Developing our web bridge calendar to give an at-a-glance view of events in any month including competitions and EBED training events, and feeds to link with personal calendars. More work is planned to improve event details booking links.
- Replacing the Aylesbury server and wi-fi with a new and more cost-effective modern system.
- Developing a new event management reporting system to help us keep track of who is booked for our competitions and other events.

Media coverage

Media coverage of duplicate bridge has remained relatively stable from 2022 to 2023. The majority of coverage in the national press has continued to be through the regular bridge columns, with the occasional additional article.

Most local news coverage focuses on new lessons or open days being held at bridge clubs as local interest stories. Many clubs also celebrated anniversary years or moving premises, with stories in local papers and the EBU Blog. The Summer Meeting at Eastbourne was advertised locally online.

In February clubs held special charity tournaments to benefit earthquake relief funds supporting those affected in Turkey and Syria.

Later in the year Helen Erichsen wrote a murder mystery novel which prominently featured bridge. The book was featured in various book review columns including the Sunday Times.

The majority of people access the EBU website via desktop and laptop computers (58.5%), although mobile usage has seen a 30% increase in the last year, to a total of 33.5% of people accessing via mobile devices. 8% of people also access the website via their tablet. The most popular pages are the My EBU members area, NGS pages, Results pages and Competitions. Also popular are the Information Resources and Gradings and Rankings pages.

Cases of cheating continued to decline in 2023, and there were therefore fewer national and international articles printed about cases of cheating in the game. 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 all held as live, face-to-face events.

England retained the Camrose, ahead of the second placed finishers from Wales. In the Channel Trophy, the U21 team won their category, while the U26 women and U26 open teams finished second in their respective groups. England retained the Peggy Bayer, and the Junior Camrose, with an EBU team comprised of U21 players, finishing second in the Junior Camrose.

The Lady Milne and Teltscher Trophy also took place as live events, with England narrowly winning the Lady Milne, ahead of Ireland, and comfortably winning the Teltscher trophy to complete the domestic set of events.

With no English representation at the Open, Women's, Mixed and Seniors World Championships, the major international event for 2023 was the World Youth Teams Championships in August. Following a late invitation for the U26 team to fill a vacant spot, England were represented in the U26, U26 women's, U21 and U16 categories. The U26 and U16 teams failed to qualify for the KO stages, finishing 18th and 16th respectively, but the U26 women's and U21 teams both made it through to the quarter finals, where they were subsequently eliminated. The U26 women finished 4th and the U21s finished 8th in the qualifying stage.

In the 10th European Transnational Championships in Strasbourg, France in June, a number of EBU members reached the late stages of the various events, with three of the four semi-finalists of the Women's teams containing English players: the Tri Polar team including Nevena Senior and Nicola Smith were the eventual winners over the Baker team, including Sally Brock and Fiona Brown. In the semi-finals the Baker team beat Marcia Green's team including Heather Dhondy.

EBU players who reached the late stages of the Transnational teams in Marrakech this summer included the Knottenbelt team (Michael Byrne, Ben Handley-Pritchard, Maggie Knottenbelt, Ben Norton, Stefano Tommasini & Tom Townsend), Team Orca (Andrew Dyson, Espen Erichsen, Glyn Liggins & Richard Plackett) and the Rosenthal team (Artur Malinowski).

Regulation

The Laws and Ethics Committee (L&E) is made up of seven elected individual members of the EBU and three ex officio members: the EBU Chair, Vice Chair and Chief Tournament Director, as well as one appointed board member – Gayle Webb. It is responsible for the regulation of the game in England. David Burn is the current Chair and Steve Green the Vice-Chair. In addition, Robin Barker has been co-opted for the specific purpose of overseeing the Blue Book and the White Book.

2023 saw a much-reduced number of cheating cases and an increase in confessions in cases that progressed after an initial investigation. Notably, there was only one case which proceeded to a full disciplinary hearing.

There are currently 20 sanctioned members listed on the EBU website. Absent from the website are three members who confessed under the new *Procedure for Inexperienced Players* when first asked to comment on the allegations thereby avoiding publication on the EBU website and in English Bridge. There are a further three members who have confessed to cheating online whose names will likely appear on the website by the time of the AGM.

Unfortunately, cheating cases take many hours of work even in cases where confessions are forthcoming. Particular thanks must go to Steve Green for prosecuting and overseeing challenging cases and to Jonathan Cooke for his invaluable statistical analysis of data from online deals and the NGS.

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. The Blue Book was updated effective from 1st August 2023 in time for the Summer Meeting. Since the Blue Book was not updated for a couple of years during the Covid pandemic, there have been more changes to it than usual this year, but it is hoped that this will avoid the need for further changes for some time, other than for any points of clarification.

Tournaments and Competitions

This year has seen the competitions situation continue to settle down after the pandemic, with a more streamlined tournaments programme and a significant recovery of a number of our face-to-face events. Three of the events we had intended to discontinue, the Spring Bank Holiday Congress, Scarborough Congress and Northern Mid-Week congress, have now been taken over by Oliver Cowan on our behalf and they have been able to justify their continued existence.

The Tollemache Trophy continues to have its qualifying event held on RealBridge while the final is face-to-face. Both the Corwen and Pachabo trophies have recently been run online but from next year we are going to try holding one of them online and the other face-to-face each year. The National Teams League is now in its fourth season and currently has a total of 39 teams in three divisions, playing weekly 16-board matches online.

The Online One-Day Green-Pointed (OODGP) events introduced by the EBU to replace those run by counties over the previous two years have been successful, and 16 counties have run a total of 30 face-to-face One-Day Green-Pointed (ODGP) events in the six months since the new arrangements came into effect.

The EBU has continued to have a serious online presence with seven daily online games on BBO, which continue to attract worthwhile numbers, although an attempted extra morning game did not survive after its introductory period. We also still have two regular daily Funbridge robot games and, in addition to our daily 12-board robot game on BBO, we now have a second one that uses Acol bidding. We have four ladders based on these robot games, a monthly one from our 20-board match-pointed games with a further one handicapped on NGS, a quarterly one for our IMPs games and another combining the results of the three 12-board robot games – one Funbridge and two BBO. These ladders get between 70 & 300 players participating in them.

The Year-End and Easter congresses in London have regained their numbers to a fair extent and attendance at the Summer Meeting in Eastbourne, with its new reduced 3 ½ day format, was up a bit this year on last year. The Spring Foursomes, generously sponsored by Helen Schapiro for the twentieth and final time, recovered this year to have a very convenient entry of 48 teams, perhaps due to some extent to being part of the WBF's [World Bridge Tour](#).

As expected, the Arena Travel takeover by the Leger Shearings Group has not brought much change with it, and they have continued to find playing accommodation for us in England for our congresses and other competitions, as well as sponsoring our overseas congresses. We have held overseas congresses in Montenegro and Antalya in the last year, with forthcoming ones planned in Italy and Tunisia.

The Competitions Working Group (supported now by an Advisory group) has continued to meet regularly, though less frequently than last year. It has produced a new format for the Crockfords Cup which will start this year and is working on a programme of events for less-experienced players, run in conjunction with some of our counties.

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 held a successful TD training weekend in December 2022, to which all TD panel members were invited.

This was the first such weekend since 2018, and we focused on trends since that time - online versus face-to-face directing, changing numbers of events and participants, and directing with screens. We are happy that our three new young trainees, William Clennell, Megan Jones, Stephen Kennedy, were all able to attend and take an active part in the proceedings.

EBU Counties

The EBU collaborates closely with the 39 county associations to promote the game of Bridge. Effective communication is essential in this collaboration, which has been achieved by continuing with the programme of meetings of County Chairs. These have considered several issues, generally raised by County Chairs themselves but also those put forward by the EBU Board. We have continued with regular 'Updates from Aylesbury' and 'Crisp Competitions Communications' sharing information about upcoming events, results and important announcements.

Each county has a Board member as a 'buddy' so there is always an open channel of communication. The exact nature of the collaboration varies from county to county but the common goal is to foster the growth and enjoyment of Bridge in the county while aligning with the broader goals of the EBU at national level. During the last twelve months we have worked

on improvements to the support that we can offer to clubs and counties; there has been a significant return of face-to-face county One-Day Green-Pointed events following the changes that were introduced at the last AGM; and at the moment we are embarking on a major collaboration with our clubs and counties as we plan for a Festival of Bridge in September 2024.

EBU Headquarters at Aylesbury

We have a total of sixteen EBU staff members— a full-time staff equivalent of around 13, down from about 15.5 in 2018-19. They serve about 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”, so on average we have one member of staff for just under every 4,000 EBU members. In addition, we have 39 counties and about 600 clubs.

We also support the charity English Bridge Education and Development, with whom we share offices and some administrative systems. EBED has a Chief Executive, who was Giorgio Provenza for most of the year after which Mark Humphris took over this role, 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 as much space in Aylesbury and in response to this we investigated letting the building and moving to smaller premises, but we found that this would not save us much money, so we have recently let half of the ground floor, which will provide us with an additional source of income. We also now have a large meeting room on the first floor, available to let to commercial organisations as well as to bridge groups.

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 29th November 2023.

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



Adrian Darnell

Chairman from September 2023

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

Staff members and national volunteers 1 September 2022 – 31 August 2023

Names of the board members, working groups, staff and committee members can be found on the [EBU website](#). We are also grateful for the assistance of:

Honorary Counsel

David Ewart KC

Pro Bono Advisor

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), Sarah Bell, Brian Callaghan, Frances Connell, Jerry Cope, Helen Erichsen (until July 2023), 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 (L&E Committee member), Richard Johnson, Fiona Littlewood, Jim Mason, Shirley Pritchard, Neil Rosen, Andrew Southwell, Nick Woolven.

EBU Pie Charts of income and expenditure 2022-23

	<u>INCOME</u> £k's	<u>EXPENDITURE</u> £k's
Membership, Nat Org, Admin	633.4	-514.5
English Bridge Magazine	31.3	-144.5
EBED *	14.5	-46.8
Comps, Licensing, MPs, Sims	445.3	-308.2
Internationals	36.4	-118.5
Bridge Warehouse	140.8	-114.6
Government Support	10.0	0.0
Laws & Ethics	0.0	-39.8
	1,311.7	-1,286.9

* English Bridge Education and Development Charity

