



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNTY WORKING GROUP

AT West Midlands Bridge Club

ON Monday 8 June 2015 @ 12.30pm

Representatives:

Region	Name	Region	Name	Region	Name
Eastern (HRT)	Bernard Eddleston	EBU Board	Darren Evetts	Northern (YOR)	Lesley Millet
EBU Board	Ron Millet	Midlands (OXF)	Robert Procter	Northern (MER)	Paul Roberts
Midlands (GLO)	Alan Wearmouth				

Apologies:

Region	Name	Region	Name
EBU General Mgr	Barry Capal	EBU Board	Jeremy Dhondy
Western (HIW)	Andy Hughes		

Chair: *Darren Evetts*

1. Apologies
 - a. John Williams has stood down from this group. John was thanked for his work on the National County Working Group (NCWG) and for submitting papers in relation to Topic C, and his thoughts on the NCWG structure.
2. Minutes of Last Meeting (23 February 2014) – Already agreed by email
3. Matters Arising excluding Discussion Topics
 - a. The importance of tangible outputs - discussed at the County Chairmen's meeting - was emphasised, but which perhaps did not come through so clearly in the minutes.
 - b. IT User Group (Minute 6b 23 February 2015) - is with Jeremy Dhondy.
 - c. To access local publicity opportunities (minute 4.3, 23 February 2015) – It was felt that any publicity generated would help enormously in raising the profile of the game. BC agreed to liaise with Peter Stockdale with a view to producing some sample press releases, letters, and to produce a general 'how to' guide for Clubs and Counties – Available here: <http://www.ebu.co.uk/newsletters/?id=29&page=14>. Our thanks to Barry and Peter for actioning this point.
4. Discussion Topics
 - a. Topic A (Lesley Millet) - Improving the relationship between the EBU/Counties and unaffiliated Clubs - After consultation with Andy

Hughes and through the Northern Counties Working Group the following points were noted:

- i) A County has been working to create a relationship with the unaffiliated Clubs in their County
 - a. They have made a decision in principle to revise their policy regarding unaffiliated Clubs, and they will assess the field to engage with them. One volunteer has telephoned every unaffiliated Club in the County.
 - b. Research has identified that there are more unaffiliated Clubs than there are EBU affiliated Clubs. Some, with more than 16 tables, often play in the same premises as EBU Clubs.
 - c. They have made an active decision to put all the unaffiliated Clubs in the area on their Website.
 - d. A marketing sub-committee is to be set up with projects, some requiring finance and some that can be started immediately. This involves posters with times and dates of events, flyers for teaching and more.
- ii) Yorkshire – after their Bridge Development Meeting they are developing a new Website on which they will also be including unaffiliated Clubs.
- iii) Manchester already list unaffiliated Clubs on their website.
- iv) The experience of Leeds is different, with little interest shown – despite one person contacting all the local unaffiliated Clubs. Areas do appear to differ dramatically. In the Leeds area some unaffiliated Clubs are getting 12 tables plus. Again, comments are that they prefer a ‘softer’ game of bridge, but there is a cross-over of membership.
- v) Discussions have once again raised the possibility of a different membership level for people who do not want to play in competitions, but who do want to play a more social game of bridge.
- vi) The Merseyside area has 66 Clubs (excluding Clubs with a Bridge section golf, etc) of which only 17 are affiliated - 8 to Merseyside, 7 to Manchester and 2 to Lancashire. The other 49 are unaffiliated.
- vii) Merseyside are keen to train more teachers, and are hoping to increase the number of Teaching Sessions. The EBU, together with EBED, will hold at least one Teacher Training Course in the near future.
- viii) This raised some interesting questions within the Northern RCWG Group:
 - a. Are we too structured, especially on TDs and the rule book (attention was drawn to the new slimmed down Blue Book and how rules on bidding, etc, were at the option of individual Clubs).
 - b. Should there be a publicity campaign to attract members - there are arguments for this, but what PR is there to encourage Clubs to join the EBU.
 - c. Merseyside’s experience is that the league is not affiliated to the EBU, but most individual members are! What does this say about how we are perceived.
 - d. Players are nervous about playing in competitive Bridge Drives and prefer to play with no pressure at their own level.

aa. The NCWG Commented:

- i. Significant time has been spent on this area, and it is good to see that Counties have been consulted on their views.
- ii. It is clear that some Counties include unaffiliated Clubs on their Website, and some do not.
- iii. The question asked, of a recently affiliated Club, was why have you affiliated? The answer was to ensure the future of the Club, because the exposure gained through affiliation, etc, will encourage new membership.
- iv. There is no quick fix it is a 5-10 year programme, a very slow process.
- v. Unaffiliated Clubs – should we focus on local/County approach, with support materials from Aylesbury.
- vi. Perhaps we should accept where we are and concentrate on, 1) reaching out to unaffiliated Clubs and non-Members who wish to join the EBU and, 2) Focus on encouraging our teachers to promote affiliated Clubs, and membership, as well as making affiliated bridge more attractive (technology etc).
- vii. Should we concentrate on people, rather than Clubs, remembering that unaffiliated Clubs are a conduit to potential Members
- viii. Use practical Club experience to define strategy.
- ix. Recommendations to the Board/Next Steps
 - a. National Bridge Week should be considered.
 - b. Future EBU Strategy Meetings should include people from the field.
 - c. The EBU should take advantage of press related features and generate an action plan to enable maximum exposure.
 - d. Explore the idea of Counties/EBU supporting smaller Clubs to increase sessions – daytime for example.

ab. Regional Support Officer (RSO)

- i. How would Counties feel about a Regional Support Officer. The role would need to be clearly defined.
- ii. Would Counties see this as interference/imposition - is the EBU trying to police Counties.
- iii. Should the post focus on a person with experience of Club/County administration, or focus on an admin person to draw on the expertise, etc, of our volunteers.
- iv. Should Counties be working within a framework. Other sports have minimum requirements for Clubs/Associations clearly defined, and a clear scale, ie gold/silver/bronze. Could this be used to measure a County's progress, and for support to be offered to assist in reaching the next scale. Would it be help, or hindrance, for this accreditation to be published. Should the same apply to Clubs.
- v. How does the Club Liaison Officer feel. Is the one person Club Liaison Officer too big a brief. A RSO role could end with the same challenge.
 - i. Who funds this post, as some Counties may be reluctant to contribute, though it could be expected if the Regional Working Group wanted a significant say in the activities of the RSO.
 - ii. This post would need control and direction; there are issues to address, and objectives of what the person is supposed to do.
 - iii. What are the results supposed to be. The prime objective is the resulting increase in membership numbers, and increased play

- sessions at EBU Clubs
- iv. How long will they work in that post, and what resources will they need.
 - v. The role, as envisaged, would involve much travel and out of hours commitment. Can this be achieved.
 - vi. There is a need to research what the picture on the ground is, and to bring this to the Counties for them to act. However, there may be a need for support for some Counties.
 - vii. More information is needed on where Clubs and teachers are located.
 - viii. There is an abundance of good information coming out from the EBU, and elsewhere, which does not always reach the intended reader. An RSO could ensure, monitor and disseminate.
 - ix. How do people come to Bridge.
 - x. The increase in membership and sessions played was emphasised as the prime objective.
 - xi. The post has to be largely self-financing over a 5 - 10 year period.
 - xii. Focus is needed. Break the work down into categories. Would this be the function of Counties.
 - xiii. Could the role of Club Liaison Officer and Regional Support Officer become one role, or maybe a shared role.
 - xiv. If the position is filled in all Working Group Regions, there should then be liaison between the Regions.
 - xv. A different skill set is required for different areas of focus. If there were joint roles skills could be covered by different people.
 - xvi. Salary scale would depend on the person specification.
 - xvii. Perhaps initial development funding could come from the EBU/EBED, and when predetermined results are measured successfully then the Counties could consider making an ongoing and sustained contribution.
 - xviii. Who trains RSOs, and who do they report to.
 - xix. There needs to be a central register support system of specialist services that the Counties and an RSO could call upon.
 - xx. An RSO could be Regionally based working with the Counties, with National support
- b. Topic B (Alan Wearmouth) - Developing a Value Proposition and a Progression Strategy for Players at all levels that revitalises our membership

The following was identified as what the EBU offers to players:

- i. A National body which organises, administers and regulates competitive bridge.
- ii. A programme of good quality bridge competitions, advertised well in advance, catering for progression and achievement through a variety of formats, including flighted and stratified events.
- iii. A National ranking scheme offering both lifetime and current indications of individual achievements within the game.
- iv. An interesting, lively and informative online (or printed) bi-monthly magazine.
- v. Programmes of training and support for Tournament Directors.
- vi. A structure of County Associations (which own the EBU) to guarantee that voices can be heard.
- vii. Good quality bridge variety, competitive, preparation for EBU tournaments.

- viii. A number of weekend events for all standards of player.
 - ix. Local Green Point/Blue Point events with open entry, and friendly local faces, to support members wanting to play more widely.
 - x. Training events open to all, with an expanding programme of mentoring and nurturing.
 - xi. Opportunities to represent the County, either by right (Pachabo, Corwen) or by selection (Tollemache, Leagues, Invitational events).
 - xii. Help and support with Club events (Directors, Bridgemates, etc.).
 - xiii. Advice and support by the EBU with Club Constitutions and procedures.
 - xiv. Financial support for Club Director training and publicity.
 - xv. County website and National website and magazine (EBU).
 - xvi. Recruitment youth bridge; publicity.
 - xvii. The ability to issue Master Points with an accompanying ranking programme.
 - xviii. A central hub which can supply an archive of materials, advice, help and support across a range of areas, supported by both paid and volunteer staff.
 - xix. A variety of National teams to aspire towards, and to support.
 - xx. Recommendations to the Board/Next Steps
 - 1. Further refinements were suggested.
- c. Topic C (Rob Procter) - Structuring, staffing and motivating the volunteer workforce that we depend on at National and County level
- i. It was agreed to produce a summary sheet, as the body text was extensive.
 - ii. Recommendations to the Board
 - a. Already agreed to be presented at the County Chairmen's meeting.
 - b. Ideally Counties to decide what areas they can focus on. Support could be available from Regional Groups, Neighbouring Counties, EBU and, perhaps, Regional Development Officers.
 - c. Produce a Map of what each County is good at, which could be a basis for sharing best practice.

5. Eastern Counties – Update

- i. Hertfordshire has produced a one page summary of their overall aims and objectives (circulated to NWG).
- ii. At the next meeting of the Eastern Counties WG (September) Bernard will be stepping down as Chairman, having now retired as Chairman of Hertfordshire. Therefore, the Eastern CWG will require a new Chair.

6. Midland Counties – Update

- i. A paper on Blue Points was referenced. As Competitions are not currently the focus of this Working Group it will be passed to Gordon Rainsford for consideration.

7. Northern Counties – Update

- i. A very successful Improvers event was held within the Northern Counties. Further details will be presented at the next meeting.

8. Southern Counties – Update

- i. Andy has made some positive progress with a few Counties. It is hoped that focus at the County Chairmen's meeting will encourage further engagement.

9. Provincial Counties - Update

10. AoB

- a. It was noted that it is important that any recommendations made by this group should, if not implemented, receive feedback from the Board.
- b. The issue of Shareholders raising questions was touched upon. There is a clear process for raising Shareholder questions at Shareholder meetings. It was noted that responses to questions raised at meetings without notice should be handled carefully, so as not to be perceived to be dismissive, but rather to point Shareholders to the correct process.

11. Date of Next Meeting – DE to circulate