



Minutes of the Northern Counties Working Group

At Chez Millet, Leeds at 11am on 3 May 2017

Present:

David Adelman (DA) from Manchester, Jeff Morris(JeM) from Manchester,
Julian Merrill (JuM) from Merseyside & Cheshire, Richard Alcock (RA) from Merseyside & Cheshire,
Jeff Smith (JS) from Lancashire, Deirdre Fell from Lincolnshire,
Nigel Durie (ND) from NEBA, Lesley Millet from Yorkshire,

Invited Members:

David Guild, Yorkshire Regional Development Officer

Agenda Items:

Leslie Millet chaired the meeting and first welcomed members of the working party.

1. Approval of Minutes:

The Minutes of the 18 Jan 2017 meeting were considered. An error in stating that Richard Alcock represented Lancashire was noted to be amended to “representing Merseyside & Cheshire”. The minutes were then approved.

JS queried the accessibility of NCWP minutes to interested clubs. LM confirmed that, once approved, NCWP minutes are openly available on the EBU website under the “Minutes” section heading.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

3. Apologies:

Liz Muir from NEBA, Trevor Ward from Cumbria, Paul Roberts from Merseyside & Cheshire

4. Role of the County Working Party – Value Proposition

Darren Evetts of the EBU has produced a draft paper on a “Value Proposition for the EBU County Working Group”. This outlines a national working group consisting of the five regions and EBU representations. Also to operate as a focal point for direct county engagement where no regional structure exists. LM circulated this draft to the meeting attendees.

The Working Party (NCWP) noted that the draft use of the word “competitive” for bridge play, as the future of bridge for everyone in the draft introduction, is contentious and alternative wording such as the “social” experience of bridge has wider relevance.

Actions: LM to circulate a digital version of this document to all.

All attendees to communicate this draft with county execs/clubs to obtain feedback comments.

All to send Comment summaries digitally to LM on/before 25 May deadline.

LM to collate and then forward to the EBU in good time for national discussion.

JS queried the availability of the NCWP Terms of Reference (TORs) to be used to compare with the draft.

Action: LM to circulate TORs of NCWP to all.

LM said that the future for bridge development working parties at the regional and national level (proposed as draft) will be debated at the County Chairmen’s meeting to be held early July at the Imperial Hotel, Russell Square, London. Also that the EBU will circulate discussion papers prior to this meeting.

LM noted the previous NCWP meeting had identified that Northern Counties and Midlands working parties were functioning well but that other regions were struggling. LM said it is important that counties have their say. A debate ensued on the merits of working parties:

DF said that Lincolnshire has particular problems with attendance at county and national events. This is militated by the rural nature of the county and large distances involved. DF questioned whether Lincolnshire had been represented at prior years National Chairmen’s conference and Shareholders Meetings. JS said that the full Minutes archive, including attendees, are openly available on the EBU website under the Minutes topic.

JS queried what are the successes implemented to date by NCWP? JuM suggested best practice documents, competitions such as four county and creative initiatives such as Flexibridge. (JuM and JS discussed the problems of the administrative burden to run Flexibridge and JS said that this limits Flexibridge application).

LM said that the communications network role should not be underestimated (to/from EBU, EBED, Bev Purvis particularly, counties and clubs).

This debate widened into the benefits to clubs and members of participating in the formal bridge structures at County to EBU levels. Comments included:

The benefits focus is wrong with the bias to competitive play rather than the vast majority of players at the social play level. DA said that there needs to be more done at the grass roots for benefits assistance and that teaching is the main driver for club replenishment and should be financially supported where difficulty is found; such as small clubs finding teaching venues rental a burden beyond their resources.

All agreed that the EBU matched funding grant to clubs was a welcome development but that it was at a low level and should be extended if possible. The debate contrasted the high level projects costs, such as Bridge as a Sport and the Vat designation, with the level of local clubs’ assistance. For example, there should be “off the shelf” promotional materials, posters etc, available to smaller

clubs. LM said that Bev Purvis/ Richard Banbury and Peter Stockdale are working on standard event posters but timing is not yet known.

JuM said that the EBU are not consistent in the benefits to clubs. As example, the free teacher per club benefit has been downgraded to 20% subsidy but bridge teaching is the major factor in replenishment of members. This cost being particularly an issue for smaller clubs and it is irrelevant whether the subsidy is channelled through EBED or the EBU.

DF noted that the fee structures of clubs has changed with “social bridge” now the major contributor to club finances and also the substantial movement to daytime bridge. The Working Party concurred on the decline in clubs’ evening attendances vs increase in daytime. Where clubs have promoted “premium play (high level) sessions”, these are now poorly received. It was agreed that more club session variety, including more social bridge, was necessary and that this to be replicated for events and in promotions. JS noted that Pivot Teams has been introduced successfully as a lighter play session in many clubs. Also Café Bridge has had some success.

DF questioned how relevant bridge play members generally felt towards the EBU communications and benefits. The NCWP agreed that some of the benefits such as NGS and Master Points have declined in relevance to the average player. Also that communications are most often targeted to the finer points of card play and competitive play rather than local club developments and suggestions. DF noted that club ambience is the major factor for most members, particularly car parking and room warmth.

JS said that, in France and the USA, standard play systems are the norm and the complexity/variety of play systems in the UK may be discouraging to the bridge improver. RA suggested that hosts in clubs should use a standard play system rather than negotiate the system to fit with that used by the partnering player and this should be the EBU Bridge For All system. RA questioned whether standard system summaries are readily available and was assured that they are from the Bridge Shop.

Action: **All to consider whether club hosts should adopt the standard play system when partnering.**

DA said that perhaps the EBU needs to have more emphasis on simple bridge play.

7. Bev Purvis Follow Up

Further to Bev Purvis’s recent meeting with NCWP, Bev has sent two promotional items passed as paper copies to all during the meeting by LM:

1. The Oxfordshire’ Innovation Plan for a Bridge Festival.

A short debate followed. The thrust of the plan; to be fun and targeted at social bridge play level with instant prizes rather than Master Points. The Festival to embrace both affiliated and non-affiliated clubs. The plan was well received by all and to be discussed at county level. Action: **All to consider**

DF said that whenever a “well-known” empathetic bridge teacher event is held, this attracts large numbers of attendees and, if sufficiently publicised, will include attendees beyond clubs’ membership. All concurred that this is an excellent way to bring social bridge players into formal club structure. RA noted that we “miss a trick” in post publicising the success of these events in the local media. Action: **For all to consider inclusion of “leading teacher” sessions in any festival event.**

2. The Play Bridge poster

The light approach to bridge play as introduced through this poster was also well received by all. DG queried whether the permissions have been granted to use the personalities and Snoopy imagery as they are copyright. A number of members questioned whether the digital imagery for this poster can be accessed (not pdf) so that counties/clubs can put their contact details on the poster

Action: **LM to contact Bev Purvis to answer the questions above on the Play Bridge poster. LM to circulate all with digital imagery for forwarding on for county/clubs consideration for use.**

The WP expanded this discussion into wider methods of promotion for bridge play expansion. This included a short discussion on Schools Bridge:

DF said that she has successful bridge play in three schools and a direct schools approach is the best way to get them started. DA said that he has extensive experience in schools bridge and has a "Teach yourself minibridge" pack that he has used successfully. Minibridge can be learnt in a couple of hours and the children enjoy it. Taster sessions and keep it fun are the watchwords for schools teaching. DA added that barriers to schools teaching include the perception that bridge is a gambling game. Also that the play activity is seen as too passive by some schools.

JS said that the Australian Bridge Union has an on line teaching course and this could be of interest to WP members. Action: **All to consider**

RA suggested that Teacher Conventions have break-out sessions and that minibridge could be shown there to interest teachers in schools bridge. Action: **DG to investigate.**

JS noted the decline in University Bridge and that even Cambridge University, formerly a major centre for bridge play, now struggle to get four tables.

6. Regional Development Officer – EBU and YCBA initiative.

DG explained his role to substantially raise the volume of bridge players in Yorkshire - this being the business of bridge and its continued existence. This being differentiated from "bridge development", meaning the play level, play quality and frequency of play, which is already well-addressed by the EBU, YCBA and Clubs.

The funding of this initiative being funded partly by the EBU through £5,000 European Bridge League funds for the campaign costs and also separate funding by the YCBA for the Development Officer position.

DG explained that the main thrust is for a summer campaign, July to September, to increase teaching volumes in the Autumn.

Preliminary work to map affiliated and unaffiliated clubs is completed. Also local press and local/community radio has been mapped. Digital media have yet to be determined but will include community websites including the "About Your Area" local websites. The audit for teachers' availability is yet to complete.

The discussions to finalise the marketing plan to be completed this month by the YCBA Management Board. The plan will include mixed media and both local and regional initiatives.

It was agreed that a copy of the final marketing plan will be circulated to the NCWP members and results obtained report to be also circulated at campaign completion Action: **DG to send to all**

The WP had a short discussion on campaigns experience and suggestions:

RA commented that there is not a strong direct correlation with a club's catchment population and size; some small community bridge clubs being very successful and some urban clubs failing.

JS mentioned bridge writers could do more promote bridge participation. DG said that bridge writers cover obscure hands and high level play. This re-enforces general public perception that bridge is a difficult intellectual game not for the faint-hearted and may be a barrier to some new starters. It was agreed that we need more media coverage on the social and personal benefits of being a club member. Action: **DG to build into marketing plan.**

Golf clubs were discussed and LM said that we have contacts. There is a Yorkshire Golf Clubs competition. Action: **LM and DG to discuss**

RA suggested that people "coming back to bridge" could be a theme Action: **DG to explore**

JS said that as so many clubs are on Bridgewebs, could we have a common digital promotion? Action: **DG to explore.**

DG asked if anyone had tried marketing to the Business Executive sector and set up specific executive play and teaching. No member had tried this niche approach.

LM said that the EBED campaign in the Daily Telegraph is not to be repeated. It was agreed that we should contact EBED and see if any feedback or materials can be used for the Summer Campaign structure. Action **LM to contact Sue Maxwell.**

DG agreed to include his contact points in these minutes. Action: **Mobile 07 407 261 545**

Email: dguild1338@aol.co.uk

5. Future Advertisement/Editorial By NCWP in Local/regional Press

All agreed that this to be put on hold awaiting the outcomes of the Yorkshire Summer Campaign.

8. NCWG Improvers Pairs Final 14 May 2017

LM said that there are approximately 10 tables of qualifiers at York final. Georgina Wooler is the organiser. Nick Woolven and Phil Godfrey are responsible for hands. JS said that we will need printed booklets as well as digital versions. Actions: **LM to obtain hands from Nick and print and distribute booklets in time for event. The digital hand files going to organisers from LM.**

It was suggested that Paul Hackett could be approached to give an inspiration talk at an Improver Event (too late for this May event) Action: **Speaker to be considered by organisers of future events.**

Next Meeting: **To be confirmed by LM**

End