



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

at Dunchurch Village hall

on Thursday 13th September 2018 at 10.40am

PRESENT:

EBU Clubs Liaison	Bev Purvis(BP)	Nottinghamshire	Clare Batten (CB)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Proctor (RP)
Leicestershire	David Pollard (DP)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Northamptonshire	Nicky Bainbridge (NB)		

(ITEM 1) APOLOGIES:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot
Nottinghamshire	Graham Bindley	EBU Board	Ian Payn

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 2 : Minutes of Last Meeting (21 Jun 18)

1. The minutes were approved, and PS will arrange their publication. Under matters arising we noted the follow-up from the EBU to all counties on the EBU/Yorkshire recruitment strategy. The following emerged -
 - a. Merseyside & Manchester are actively pursuing the approach suggested, and have appointed a development officer. Somerset were reported to also being active, but as a single county. EBU has appointed Tim Anderson to further develop promotional materials for recruitment purposes.
 - b. CB reported that the matched funding was a show-stopper for Nottinghamshire who could not afford to do this. Gloucestershire, Leicestershire reported as not ready yet to react to this. MW reported a clear target in Worcestershire which BP will come visit.
 - c. A number of those present reported on the success of daytime sessions, shorter (usually 2 hr) sessions, and non-duplicate bridge (Chicago mostly).

ITEM 3a : News from EBED

2. BP reported on feedback from Donna Wright (EBED CEO) and in the discussion which followed it emerged that
 - a. There is little value seen in the database to which access is given on the EBU web site. The main issues are that the list is of paid up members, and it reflects nothing of the quality of the teacher, whether they are active or not, which clubs they support, and it misses a large proportion of active teachers. [Although many searching for a teacher will just try google on “learn bridge location” – which works very well for locations in Yorkshire, but not everywhere]. County websites have a better chance of reflecting the teaching available, and some do that well.
 - b. BP reported than an offer was in the pipeline, but not yet announce, of some free teacher training for affiliated clubs.
 - c. There was some discussion of what value our counties and clubs obtain from EBED, and we agreed this was not clear. We all took an action to provide 3 bullets on what, from EBED, would be seen as useful by our counties and clubs, and we will collate these next meeting and feed them back.

ACTION 13sep18.1 (ALL) : provide EBED value indicators

- d. There is an EBED Teacher’s Forum just started up (<https://www.ebedcio.org.uk/forum/>) on which anyone can register, and supposedly also a Teacher-Educators’ forum.
- e. On TD training and development, there was discussion of County-wide, or an EBED-led national TD-newsletter to provide regular refreshers. The TD forum (<https://www.ebu.co.uk/forum/categories/ebu-tds>) does some of that already and might provide good material for a newsletter. PS reported that he runs (every six weeks) a one hour session before bridge for TDs to share experience and ask questions. BP offered to raise these ideas with Richard Banbury.

ITEM 3b : News from EBU

3. BP reported that on the County WG front, the Southwest had expressed interest in forming a group but travel issues and an aversion to video-conferencing were delaying things. They might try a meeting to precede an EBU organised meeting (eg AGM) which they all attend.
4. The success of the “Jack High” competition held in London at Easter was mentioned, and we had a discussion about the purpose of restricted competitions, homing in on the fact that the main issue was to ensure that those coming along were comfortable playing against the others present, and did not feel out of their depth. Using NGS rankings for this purpose is a rough and ready guide but can also lead to anomalies (experienced people with low grades) and challenges (if someone’s grade rose after entering, or the grade cannot be checked).
5. BP had nothing to report on the EBU’s Strategic Aims, and the group re-iterated its belief that unless plans are made, and made visible, and someone is held accountable for progress – then the aims are just paperware.

ITEM 4 : MIDLAND COUNTIES LEAGUE – ALIGNMENT AND SCORING

6. Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire had raised questions about the variations in the use of computer scoring for these matches, and the appetite for standardisation. In the discussion which followed
 - a. We agree that the one consistency we did need was that the official match score was calculated the same way.
 - b. CB was advised to put the relevant directors in touch with Paul Hammond of Worcestershire for advice on how to arrange that EBU Teams Score could be used. [PS had investigated with Ian Mitchell what the options were for making this simpler, and the answer was that without a lot of work, there were none]. It was also suggested that those unfamiliar with this use of the scoring system might get help from a visiting team who had used it successfully.
 - c. We agreed that using the same boards across venues was an issue to tackle further down the line.

ITEM 5 : MAKING GREEN POINT EVENTS VIABLE

7. CB reported that Nottinghamshire has cancelled their July GP Swiss Teams for lack of entries and we had a discussion about what can be creating difficulties in attracting attendance. The following points were made
 - a. The cost to players was deemed an issue to some; the TD costs for EBU TDs increase when sessions are 49 boards (rather than 48) although local TDs are being used more and they cost less; the license fee for Green Points events is about three times that for a Blue Points event.
 - b. There is a general issue that the volunteers who organise these events are getting older and some are standing down, and replacements are hard to find.
 - c. We are aware that the age demographic and competitive nature of the bridge playing population has changed over the years, and our expectations for the level of interest in GP events should not be the same as it was 30 years ago.
 - d. Timetabling these events can be difficult and decisions made by the Tournament Panel in isolation from counties can create conflicts. A means by which Counties could better engage with the Tournament Panel would be most welcome.
 - e. Lower attendance causes a reduction in the number of Green Points which can be won, and this causes another reduction in attendance. It might be time to consider whether the GP Scales for such events should be changed.

ITEM 6 : SAFEGUARDING GUIDELINES

8. It was noted that questions arise in both County and Club events about appropriate Safeguarding for juniors and for the increasing number of vulnerable adults, and an organisation classed as a Charity has an extra duty of care to the last category. A number of Counties have built a Safeguarding Policy on the framework and details provided by the EBU ([click here](#)).

9. A number of potentially problematic scenarios were mentioned and we all agreed that it would be best if we could be consistent in our approach, and that was best done by taking advice from EBU-central. In order to facilitate this we all agreed to capture the questions we would like to see answered in an FAQ, and submit these to EBU-central (probably Donna of EBED) to ask if advice could be given.

ACTION 13sep18.2 (ALL) : provide Safeguarding questions we wish answered

ITEM 7 : PLANS FOR NOVEMBER MEETING AND NEXT YEAR

10. NB reminded us of the intent and noted that while November 7th was not ideal in some ways, it was the only date we could have the desired facilities, and that Gordon Rainsford had declared a willingness to get as much as possible of the EBU AGM material to us ahead of that date.
11. We agreed that NB would arrange (probably via EBU-central – and since done) for the meeting to be advertised to all Counties, and that we would start at 1100 that day (stopping by 1530). Realistically, we can only expect a few extra faces. The meeting will cover our normal business, looking at relevant items on the EBU AGM agenda, and enthusing any visitors of the value of having an active Counties Working Group. A general topic worth considering (following from 7.d) is how Counties in general can engage better with activities in EBU-central.
12. For 2019, NB offered, and everyone was pleased to accept, that she would draw up a timetable for our meetings to align as best possible with key EBU meetings. BP advised that Kay Carter at EBU-central might be able to advise on prospective but as yet unpublished dates.

ITEM 8a : REPORT ON “Dialogue with Teachers” MCWG TASK

Issue	Task	Owner
The County and National bodies are not well placed to provide support to bridge teachers whom they cannot identify or communicate with.	to uncover ways in which identification can happen and a dialogue can be initiated.	NB

13. NB had nothing to report on this item, but see paragraph 2 above.

ITEM 8b : REPORT ON “Classroom to Clubroom” MCWG TASK

Issue	Task	Owner
A serious proportion of those going through classes do not progress to duplicate bridge.	to identify the causes and the remedies for this, noting in particular the ideas put forward by Abbey Smith.	GB

14. GB produced the summary at Appendix 1 of the support being given across different Counties in the form of “supervised play”. We commented that it would be helpful for County websites to start to advertise in one place the supervised play options in their area.

ITEM 8c : REPORT ON “Club player to tournament player” MCWG TASK

Issue	Task	Owner
There is a growing gulf between the non-competitive duplicate player and the competitive duplicate player and this impedes the transition of newcomers to the latter camp.	to understand why this is so and to propose solutions to it.	PS

15. PS had provided the report at Appendix 2, and he reported on the discussions held in Cheltenham on the gulf between experienced plays and new players in enforcement of the Regulations, which has concluded that rather than rushing to bring newcomers up to speed, a better approach was to persuade the experienced players to take the attitude that Regulations (eg use of stop card or announcing) are there to help and are not as fundamental as the need to follow suit. When people do not adhere to the Regulations it is important for nobody to be upset, as the damage caused will often be nothing or negligible. It wasn't however clear whether setting too low a bar was a derogation of responsibility.

ITEM 8d : REPORT ON “Unaffiliated Clubs” MCWG TASK

Issue	Task	Owner
Many duplicate clubs are not affiliated to the EBU and many are not known to the county associations, and therefore not supported by these bodies.	to understand if and how a county and a national body can provide support to these clubs in order to better promote bridge.	RP & MW

16. MW had provided the report at Appendix 3, and said the main issue still was providing a Value Proposition which would encourage clubs to affiliate. He made the point that the wording in a VP is vital, for example in talking about the UMS fee, it is better described as costs 10p/person per hour than as 40p/person per session.

17. BP reported that she finds that the non-affiliated club all advertise that they are “friendly” and that those clubs have a perception of Bad Behaviour (in the BB@B sense) at affiliated clubs and they don't want to be associated with that. It can be difficult to distinguish “unfriendly” from “competitive” but it is a serious issue. CB reported that unaffiliated clubs in Nottinghamshire were negative about the (UMS) costs, about Master Points, and about the funding of International Events.

18. BP noted that the Somerset County Association had appointed someone to specifically be their Unaffiliated Clubs Liaison. NB mentioned the article by Jeremy Dhondy in the Mister Bridge magazine on whether or not clubs should affiliate. A suggestion was made that a County offering to support (perhaps sponsor or underwrite) extra sessions for an affiliated club at it starts up or expands, would be seen as a useful incentive to others to affiliate.

19. We remain in the dark as to the EBU-central level of ambition for persuading non-affiliated club to become affiliate, and would welcome guidance so that we can integrate our efforts with that target.

ITEM 8e : REPORT ON “Transparency of EBU Finances” MCWG TASK – TASK OVER

ITEM 8f : REPORT ON “Usefulness of EBU IT” MCWG TASK

Issue	Task	Owner
The IT systems managed at Aylesbury cause frustration for a number of county and club managers, and some fixes would be very helpful.	to identify (with GR) the best approach to aligning the interests of clubs and counties with the capabilities of the EBU in the future.	CB & NB

20. Ongoing.

ITEM 9 : Midlands Schools Competition

21. NB had prepared a proposal but we lacked time to examine it. It will be circulated separately and discussed at the next meeting.

ITEM 10 : AOB & Date of next meeting

22. BP brought to our attention

- a. There are experiments ongoing on cashless payments for bridge session (eg at Cheltenham Bridge Club).
- b. Café Bridge continues to be popular around the country (and abroad) and for some is turning into a major money earner.
- c. The success of the Farnham Festival of Bridge (from the website “There were over 160 participants, making this the biggest bridge event to be held in Farnham for decades”) which involved both Duplicate Bridge and Chicago Bridge, and all ages ranges.

23. The next meeting is scheduled for the morning of 7th November 2018. The 2019 timetable is under construction.

END OF MINUTES

FROM CLASSROOM TO CLUB

I have looked at the county web-sites and followed links to clubs offering sessions aimed at people who have attended a beginner's programme of study. In some cases, it has proved difficult to find out more information, even though suitable sessions for improvers are known to exist in these counties.

Worcestershire

County is arranging structured follow-up sessions from beginners' classes. One pilot scheme starts in September; it is hoped that three more will start soon.

Derbyshire

Ripley Bridge Club : The club runs a weekly beginners/improvers session involving supervised play.

Staffordshire & Shropshire

There are five venues offering improvers sessions; some take place in the daytime, others in the evening.

There is a Shropshire Beginners and Improvers Club running "managed practice" sessions. Here is a quote taken from the web-site "Managed practice means a prepared set of hands will be played at a comfortable pace (i.e. a bit slower than in most clubs) that allows everyone to ask questions, consult their crib sheets, discuss options at the table, or get Dom to suggest possible bids or lines of play. The aim is to improve through practice with plenty of support available and without the competitive pressures that characterize some other clubs. We also look at any difficult hands that you nominate from the previous session, with Dom's suggestion as to possible auctions and lines of play. For those who wish, there will be copies of articles on specialist topics from the Bridge literature and DVDs for loan (just ask Dom). There's also a *Hand of the Week* and a *Tip of the Week* on the notice board (paper copies available at the end of each month)"

Gloucestershire

Cheltenham Bridge Club : The club has a staged process for new players; bridge lessons, then beginners practice sessions, followed by "Gentle Bridge" sessions.

Newent Bridge Club : Newent Bridge Club also offers "Gentle Bridge", for those members and visitors who want to play a more social game of bridge. This latter session started as a mechanism for last year's students to start playing in a Duplicate with limited number of boards and advice and guidance available if they got stuck. Other people have now joined the sessions, both members of the club and visitors who will join the club in September. They play 15- 20 boards per session using standard ACOL (with a few simple variations) and Masterpoints are **not** awarded.

Nottinghamshire

Several clubs offer sessions aimed at players who have recently completed a beginners course. The county also runs an afternoon drive aimed at players who do not feel ready for club events. This involves supervised play. Nottingham Bridge Club offers a Friendly Friday and a Relaxed Friday sessions. Friendly Friday is for beginners and crib-sheets may be used. The Relaxed Friday enables beginners to play in a normal drive, with the director being aware that there are beginners present.

Oxfordshire

The Learn Bridge tab on the web-site leads to no less than eight clubs offering sessions suitable for beginners transitioning to playing in a drive. In fact one club was initially set up to cater for this type of player.

Leicestershire

No information available

Northamptonshire

The county has an active County Youth Officer, with a well defined role. The Stamford Youth Bridge Academy is to be congratulated on its work with schoolchildren. In the past the county has run a mentored team event. Rugby Village Bridge Club runs two supervised play sessions weekly. Gives a clear explanation of the difference between lessons and practice sessions.

SUMMARY

All counties appear to have clubs offering suitable sessions for players new to duplicate having completed a "learn to play bridge" course. Should all counties have a tab guiding people to these sessions? It may be that the people running the beginners classes direct students to appropriate drives. Should the counties collate the number of people who move on to playing regularly in clubs after lessons? Should we try and find out why learners give up the game? It is vital that counties take on board best practice in encouraging learners to continue to play. The Shropshire Improvers and Beginners Club is an excellent initiative, but whether it could be emulated elsewhere is debatable.

FROM CLUB TO TOURNAMENT

Since June

- I have spoken to Robin Barker about the “fierceness” of some of the regulations (what happens when you cannot produce two convention cards was one which was advertised recently) and he advised writing to the Tournament Panel through Nick Doe at EBU HQ.
- I have come to the conclusion that rather than working to help club players play bridge with the same regulations / rigmarole as we are accustomed to, it would be better for more competitions (and more club events too) to take a more lenient attitude to the regulations, and to follow up the option identified by Gordon Rainsford to be selective in which of the regulations to adopt in different circumstances.
- A few instances have arisen recently where players were quite argumentative with the volunteer Tournament Directors who were managing their (club and county) sessions. When this happens in the hearing of any newcomers, it can significantly discourage them from returning. As a result, we are now actively promoting “the TD is your friend”, acceptance of any TD decision, and we are thinking about creating a “Be grateful for our TDs week”.
- Our larger GCBA/CheltenhamBC plans for an education campaign, to encourage regular players to be more forgiving, are still being formed.

NON-AFFILIATED CLUBS

Note: Paragraphs 1-3 below simply restate for convenience what was included in the June 2018 Report

ISSUE

Many duplicate clubs are not affiliated to the EBU and many are not known to the county associations, and therefore not supported by these bodies.

TASK

To understand if and how a county and a national body can provide support to these clubs in order to better promote bridge.

INTENDED OUTCOME

Subject to approval by the EBU Board, to try to develop a value proposition and so affiliation package that will attract non-affiliated clubs, including those that rejected Universal Membership, into the EBU bridge community.

While I don't currently believe that is either desirable or possible to achieve, the following Possible Outcome is added to that set out in the last report for completeness.

Alternatively, to develop a value proposition that can be offered by affiliated clubs to the members on non-affiliated clubs in order to attract them to the affiliated clubs.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- In my June report, I identified building a relationship with non-affiliated clubs as an important stepping-stone to finding out what they value. GDPR has caused a bit of a setback here because only about half the non-affiliated clubs returned GDPR consent forms. However, we have been successful in strengthening our relationships with some of the non-affiliated clubs, in particular those in the Worcester area that are run by members of affiliated clubs and deliver useful teaching. We also continue to circulate our Newsletter to them and, again as stated in my June report, a second (the bottom) division of our Inter-Club League will run alongside our EBU-affiliated division and will include non-affiliated clubs.
- Perhaps most importantly, our club chairs have initiated a biannual club chairs' meeting and have decided to invite the chairs of non-affiliated clubs. This will help us with the intended outcome set out in para 3 above. It is intended that emphasis will be placed on the value that the EBU and the County Association offer to affiliated clubs – to emphasise what the non-affiliated clubs are missing out on. Necessarily, building a relationship with these clubs takes time but progress to date is encouraging. However, we really need the EBU to give some clarity on the questions posed in my June 2018 report. These are reprinted in Para 5 below.
- While I am not really the best person to be talking about this, we should also note the very significant efforts that Oxfordshire CBA are making via the Oxford Festival of Bridge to engage the social bridge player.

DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN

My current view, which I acknowledge to be somewhat superficial and lacking in justification at the moment is that the EBU has two alternative strategies with regard to non-affiliated clubs: -

Try to engage in dialogue with them and recruit them into the community of affiliated clubs in some way.

View them as competition and support affiliated clubs to provide a better product/service in order to poach their members.

COMPLETION

Rightly or wrongly, the nature of a part of this task, being the building of relationships, is that it will remain ongoing. While we are gaining a better understanding of what all clubs, both non-affiliated and only-just-still affiliated, value, we do not yet have any firm conclusions. Whether this work should continue is, to a large extent, dependent on the EBU's stance on the points in para 5 above.