



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

at Dunchurch Village hall
on Thursday 21st June 2018 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

EBU Board	Ian Payn (IP)	Nottinghamshire	Clare Batten (CB)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Nottinghamshire	Graham Bindley (GB)
Leicestershire	David Pollard (DP)	Oxfordshire	Mike Robinson (MR)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton	Oxfordshire	Rob Proctor (RP)
Northamptonshire	Nicky Bainbridge (NB)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

(ITEM 1) APOLOGIES:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker	EBU	Gordon Rainsford
Worcestershire	Dave Thomas	EBU Board	Ron Millet

It was noted that EBED had not replied to the invitation to attend.

CHAIR: Nicky Bainbridge

ITEM 2 : Minutes of Last Meeting (18 Jan 18)

1. The minutes were approved, and PS will arrange their publication.

ITEM 3 : EBU Shareholders' Meeting of 23 May 2018

2. The attendees had included DP and NB and NB had circulated some notes on the meeting, highlighting the near completion of the GDPR work (contracts between clubs/counties and EBU still to come), comments on County Working Groups, the report on EBED's research into the neurological behaviour of the brains of bridge players, the membership report by Ron Millet, and the discussion about the future of such meetings.

3. The following points were made in the discussion

- a. Too much of the agenda is tied to minutes of committee meeting and this is not productive; but the suggestion of merging this meeting with the Chair meetings, so that with the AGM there are two meaningful discussions every year, was appealing – for county coordination with EBU and with EBED.
- b. The GDPR material from the EBU has proved very helpful, although many have still to organise signing of contracts with the EBU as data owners/processors.

- c. The potential benefit of the EBED sponsored research into the “Sociology of Bridge” was proving difficult for any of those present to identify. With membership numbers being a priority for the EBU and for counties, it was surprising that EBED sponsored research could not be linked to this concern. IP pointed out the statement in the EBU Strategic Aims indicating as an intention “Ensuring the EBU membership gets value-for-money from its investment in EBED”.

ITEM 4 : EBU Strategic Aims

4. IP made the point to start with that publication was less than a month ago (although some of us had been aware of the words for five months) and a number of strands were/are already active. Those around the table emphasised the need for plans both in order to make tangible progress on the Aims, but also because lack of plans was a serious de-motivator for potential county volunteers. PS made the point that Counties need to work on their contribution to the Strategic Aims without waiting for EBU-central to produce its plans.
5. The top listed item in the Strategic Aims matched the biggest concern of a number of the counties in attendance – that with the demographic profile we have, future membership levels are such a concern that the financial future of the EBU, and the future of Tournament Bridge (as opposed to more social/club bridge) was in doubt.
6. IP reported that the Yorkshire membership initiative was about to be reincarnated for a group of counties, although exactly which had not been finalised. The following comments were made in the ensuing discussion
 - a. Matched funding (as in the Yorkshire project) was a problem in some parts of the country – not all counties are equally wealthy.
 - b. Oxfordshire has helped clubs which have approached it, but the county has not approached those which appear to be struggling. Worcestershire have a club that wants help but it is not clear that the EBU/Yorkshire approach will help them.
 - c. South Notts and NB have used Facebook in advertising and it has seemed (proof is just too difficult a task) successful enough to be cost effective. Having better documented details on how Yorkshire and others have used Facebook would be useful to many.
7. The decline in the Portland Pairs and the costs of National events was brought to everyone’s attention. IP pointed out the key difference between EBU and County events – that in county events so much of the work gets done by local volunteers, which saves enormously on wages, travel and accommodation (to which the EBU also has to add VAT). Also relevant -
 - a. The point was also made that newcomers to National events, being fewer in numbers, no longer have the peer newcomers we all had when we started to play, and the encouragement that gave us is lacking for them. MR reminded us that the “easy pairs” which ran alongside the Oxford congress let newcomers see large numbers of tournament players enjoying themselves, and this was a good advert for the game,
 - b. RP suggested that events where people had no chance of winning (eg a local team entering the NICKO) were not attractive, and that perhaps a handicap could be introduced into such an event. PS countered with a proposal to celebrate rather more thoroughly local achievements in getting through N rounds, without necessarily winning the event. IP Pointed out that Sussex CBA does a good job in this respect – the web site offers a tracking of all county teams in national competition.

ITEM 5 : PROGRESS ON CWG REJUVENATION

8. County Chairs had this week received a broadcast from Peter Stockdale intended just for counties not in Regional WGs. We all felt the broadcast was welcome and should have been to all Chairs. The position it described, disappointingly, was one of little change over the past two years.
9. There was some discussion of the National WG concept, and a re-affirmation from this group that – with the improved publicity through minutes on the EBU website, and the presence of an EBU Board representative – there was no value to be found in an additional construct.

ITEM 6 : EBED TEACHERS' SURVEY RESULTS

10. It seems a survey has gone out to all EBU TA members, but nothing has been heard since. IP noted the desire to hear from EBED more about this (and a response to other communications too!).

ITEM 7 : EBED TEACHERS' CONFERENCE

11. There had been a suggestion heard that, following the success last autumn, another conference might be held this autumn; once again communications on this from EBED have not been forthcoming. ☹️

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

12. NB reported that the Northants County newsletter had been used to collect teachers names, and PS had done the same in Gloucestershire (finding a few new names). In Oxfordshire, RP is now chair of an "Education, Social & Promotion team" bringing together teaching with certain other aspects of the game. PS reported that following requests made by a bridge-playing U3A leaders to the U3A organisation in Gloucestershire, a number of U3A branches had contacted him about the potential to for the county to help them.
13. We discussed publicity for bridge and the use of networks such as the U3A and the WI, both of whom arrange talks for their members; it was agreed that it would be a Good Thing if we had a (shared) ready made presentation for us in such circumstances.

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. We discussed the various experiences of different attendees, noting

- a. Newcomers like to talk about the hands but cannot remember hands for long, and so have a tendency to discuss each hand as soon as it is played; this is a natural instinct and must be allowed for, but means integration into 8-boards-per-hour bridge is difficult.
- b. More than one of us had replayed hands used in a previous duplicate session with newcomers, and the ability to compare their result with that obtained by others was very popular.
- c. GB reported that, following work on two Fast Track groups, the newcomers were very keen to gain experience playing amongst themselves before venturing to play with others. He also commented that too much was packed into the final section of the FTB.
- d. RP reported on doing a 2-table session at home, with discussion of the hands, and exposing those newcomers to a tailored version of the Junior Award Scheme, to show them the learning opportunities for future sessions. They were very enthusiastic.
- e. The suggestion was made that we should find better ways to let newcomers kibitz experienced players, to get a feel for “normal” duplicate.

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 produced some notes, at Appendix 1 of these minutes, but at the meeting concentrated on the discussions he had had with various TDs about the enforcement of Regulations. A key point in the discussion came the declaration in the EBU TD Forum (by a person unknown) that the TD had three functions and the first of these was to ensure that everyone enjoyed the game; this received positive support. “Customer Care” was identified as the keyword.

16. Others reported on instances of people avoiding competitions because “they didn’t want to be hammered” and on the length of the game (49 boards) being a discouragement for newcomers considering entry to a county Green Point event.

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

17. MW produced the summary report which is at Appendix 2 of these minutes. He said it was proving difficult to identify any ambitions held by unaffiliated clubs, except perhaps maintenance of membership levels. MW suggested that while there are some concrete benefits of affiliation, adding 25% to a club's table money was not given enough justification by these. More likely to win the day is the altruistic argument than they should affiliate to support the game they love.

18. Discussion brought out these points

- a. Somerset County BA has now take as a new committee member, a representative of non-affiliated clubs.
- b. A number of people spoke of the option for a graduated UM fee for new clubs, and for the option to run events without NGS/MPs at a reduced rate.
- c. Our approach to affiliated clubs (engage or poach their members) needs to be consistent with that of EBU-central.

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

Issue	Task	Owner
There is a lack of understanding of where EBU revenues come from and go to; concerns and any false perceptions need to be addressed.	to understand what the true position is and to find a way of presenting this that is informative and transparent.	DT

19. In the light of the previous report and the absence of DT, this task was declared completed.

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. NB explained that the intent of this task was wider than systems at Aylesbury, and the recent request for help in scoring the Midlands League team-of-8 matches was one example. We need somewhere to advertise and to go to for solutions, and the EBU-Forum-Scoring seems to be one possibility, which NB will now investigate.

ITEM 9 : Midlands Schools Competition

21. NB reported on the successful schools event held last year (and due again tomorrow) at Stamford Bridge Club and suggested that across multiple counties we should be able to do something similar. The costs would include hiring a venue, travel costs for competitors, advertising and trophies. There was generally mild support and NB will prepare a budget for such an event to give us a better basis for decision. RP encouraged using Joan Bennett & Holly Kilpatrick rather than himself for Oxfordshire issues on juniors.

ITEM 10 : AOB & Date of next meeting

22. PS asked if any county had experience of running a county event mid-week day-time, but none had.

23. RP asked if we were all willing to distribute adverts for the Oxford Bridge Festival, and we agreed to.

24. The next meeting is scheduled for the morning of 13th September and then for 7th November.

END OF MINUTES

FINAL DRAFT

REPORT FOR JUNE MCWG

Since April I have

- spoken to National TDs about the question of rule/law enforcement and received sympathetic feedback;
- been informed by Robin Barker that some of the mood music (eg rules about completed CCs) comes from the instructions which the Tournament Committee gave to the TD community (but the TC no longer exists!);
- prepared the questionnaire below in an attempt to refine the understanding of the issues, but have not issued it yet to anyone; it needs refinement before publication but I worry it comes over as a bit negative;
- agreed that jointly with Cheltenham BC, the GCBA will instigate a poster campaign aiming to combine education with reminders on the issues which cause most friction between newer and more experienced players. The list below is the current draft of the set of messages we intend to spread out over a year+, and then repeat as necessary. We will do this through posters at events and reminders in TD notices as events start.
 - The TD is your friend and is present to help recover from accidents; the TD is called by the table to resolve a problem; the Laws say to call the TD on almost every accident; the TD will always come with a smile.
 - Pauses in bidding and play are not a part of the game; pauses happen, and we should acknowledge them when they do; partner must never act based on your pause; if you keep your bidding/play in tempo, you avoid creating problems for partner; if a break in tempo might have caused an issue, the TD is the only person to sort it out.
 - The STOP card makes a small contribution to avoiding breaks in tempo; ignoring the STOP card comes with risks but not with penalties; it is better to avoid these risks and use the STOP card; if someone doesn't pause this could be a break in tempo.
 - Alerting exists to support "full disclosure" which is integral to the game; the alert rules are designed to help, but will never be perfect; mistakes in alerting raise a risk but does not stop us playing bridge; everyone should seek full disclosure at the start of the play by asking if there is anything they should know.
 - Announcements exist to make alerting more slick; mistakes in announcing create risks but do not stop us playing bridge; mistakes can be corrected, but the TD should be called; alerting rather than announcing or vice versa will rarely hurt.
 - System cards exist to help with "full disclosure" but they are not the only means; providing a system card is a courtesy to the opponents; announcing your basic system and carding to a new pair compensates a lot for not having a CC; system cards matter a lot more with a mixed community playing different systems.
 - The Laws exist to rectify errors, not to punish those who slip; some Laws still have, to keep things simple, an element of punishment; the Law Book is comprehensive and therefore complicated – so be sympathetic to the TD; very few know the Laws well – don't try – call the TD.
 - Claims are a valid way to save time; if a claim is made but you have lost track of the play, you can say "play on"; if a claim is disputed even in the smallest detail, call the TD; disputed claims will be resolved to the expected result, but any doubt will favour the non-claimers; not mentioning an outstanding trump creates doubt about it making a trick.

NON-AFFILIATED CLUBS

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

As set out in my April 2018 report, I have drawn up a list of non-affiliated clubs and now moved on to trying to build some kind of relationship with them. Again, as set out in my April report, we have: -

- Involved their members in a number of activities with a view to building relationships with them. These already included café bridge to which we added limited improvers classes, both of which were well-received.
- Invited them to participate in a "No-Fear" division of our Inter-Club Team competition. We have received provisional acceptance from two non-affiliated clubs.
- Sent out GDPR consent forms. To date, we have received eleven back (out of some thirty sent out). However, some of the non-affiliated groups are run by existing county members, so the picture may be slightly better than is at first apparent.
- Continued to send them the County Newsletter.

CONCLUSIONS TO DATE

- There are more non-affiliated clubs/groups than the EBU figures would suggest (in Worcestershire there are some 30 non-affiliated clubs and twelve affiliated, suggesting a market penetration of less than 30%)
- A number of members of non-affiliated clubs also play in affiliated clubs – that was already obvious.
- There are services that the County Association can offer or assist with in which the non-affiliated clubs find value. This is primarily teaching and a limited number of events (primarily café bridge).

However, many of the non-affiliated clubs don't know what they don't know. Many of them simply don't know what other bridge-playing opportunities exist. They tend to overestimate their standard of play and their ability to run themselves in a way that attracts members is often limited – some are closing down.

Having said that, some are successful and flourishing, so there is a wide variety.

Again, some acknowledge the value that the EBU delivers in terms of a regulatory framework and the contribution to the future of the game. This is an area in which we need more information – how much value do they put on these?

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: -

1. Try to engage in dialogue with them and recruit them into the community of affiliated clubs in some way.
2. View them as competition and support affiliated clubs to provide a better product/service in order to poach their members.

The current EBU position seems to tend towards the second alternative and, for example, the current Membership Campaign might support this view. Clearly this isn't a simple matter and I don't intend to dwell on it here. However, as a County we have to decide to some extent on our attitude towards non-affiliated clubs – to co-operate or compete and that is partly dependent on our local environment and also partly dependent on the articulated and implemented EBU strategy. Once the County has decided on its direction it will be easier to decide where to focus our resources.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do non-affiliated clubs value (examples may be: teaching, recruitment, the regulatory framework that the EBU provides, English Bridge, the status that affiliation confers)
2. What are they prepared to pay for these?
3. Should we concentrate our efforts on courting non-affiliated clubs or on attracting their members?

The first two questions are carried forward from the last report and are work-in-progress. If the answer to the second question is “zero”, then the answer to the third question is almost certainly the second option (and so Decision 2 above follows). Inevitably the strategy that the County adopts needs to be consistent with the EBU strategy and so the forthcoming meeting represents a valuable opportunity to address both in tandem.