



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

at Dunchurch Village hall

on Wednesday 13th February 2019 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

EBU Board	Ian Payn (IP)	Nottinghamshire	Clare Batten (CB)
EBU Clubs Officer	Bev Purvis (BP)	Nottinghamshire	Graham Bindley (GB)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Leicestershire	David Pollard (DP)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1 : Welcome & Apologies

We had apologies from Jim Parker (Derbyshire) and Kathy Talbot (Oxfordshire) and Dean Benton (Leicestershire). Nicky Bainbridge called in to welcome us and reported that a Northamptonshire representative to the MCWG was not yet arranged but was coming.

ITEM 2 : Minutes of Last Meeting (10 Sep 18)

1. The minutes were approved, subject to one change of wording proposed by Gordon Rainsford. In matters arising (not covered below) we talked around
 - a. EBUScore and MCL Leagues : we welcomed that the James Vickers documentation has reached the EBU web; CB told us that Notts had not yet started scoring by computer, but she would put their scorer Keith in touch with PS to tie up the loose ends and get started.
 - b. Green Point Event dates : it was agreed that clashes hurt all the parties concerned, and it was noted that too much freedom had created problems in the past (although 95% of cases cause no issue). IP reported that there was a Tournament Panel who considered these issues, and that requests for changes should go there. The Selection Committee also had a role in setting dates, but late date setting by the WBF & EBL can cause them problems with dates for trials. It was agreed that anything the Tournament Panel could do to engage more openly with Counties would be a Good Thing.
 - c. Lessons Learned ref Membership Campaigns : the contribution from Tim Anderson (attached as Appendix A) was welcome. The new [Membership Campaign website](#) was recommended to all parties. Tim's [blog on NGS ratings](#) was also recommended reading, and in there is useful information on the different types of EBU-licensed events a club can run. Full access to the ebumemberdevelop.org.uk site requires a password (available easily on request) and is strongly recommended.

ITEM 3 : Management of the MCWG

2. A very positive thanks to Nicky Bainbridge was expressed for seeing this group through an awkward period; she will be missed. It was proposed and agreed that PS should continue as Chair/Secretary, and that MW should adopt the role of Vice-Chair in order to provide support and backup.

ITEM 4 : News from the EBU/Aylesbury (BP and IP)

3. BP reported on ongoing work on the affiliation offer being made to clubs. Aspects included
 - a. The much appreciated offer of free places for bridge club teachers. It was noted that the course was based on the Bridge-For-All material, but that the use of this material was not mandated on attendees.
 - b. Grants to affiliated clubs from the EBU will become available again in April. (There are also grants available from EBED). Newly affiliated clubs (this is more for new setups) get a 10% discount on their first major purchase from the EBU Warehouse.
 - c. There are updates to the EBU web site including the listing of membership benefits, and the Clubs Home page (which perhaps Counties could advertise more).
4. BP reported that EBED have introduced a new Teacher's Award, to be given for the first time at the Teacher's Conference in June 2019. IP noted that the Dimmie Fleming award was given for volunteer contributions to Counties, and there was a gap for volunteer contributions to clubs, and that might be something Counties themselves could consider.
5. IP reported that there were two spaces on the EBU Board, and that one person had been appointed, but that a gap remained. If Counties had any ideas of suitable candidates (key was bringing in some different skills), he would welcome them.
6. IP reported that the EBU relationship with EBED was re-structuring, and that officials had met in January; future EBU funding for EBED would be partly general, but some of it would be specifically focused.
7. We discussed the "Keep Bridge Alive" campaign being promoted by Sam Punch (of Stirling). It was noted that many clubs/counties had been contacted, and that reactions to the request for crowd funding had been varied. It was noted that contact with clubs had not been made through EBU channels, and that the KBA initiative was independent of the EBU, although the EBU was supportive of the idea.
8. RP suggested that the EBU Chairman (outgoing or incoming suggested by IP) might write a one-off e-mail to all members - primarily to encourage all members to think about what they could do to enhance the membership campaign through their friends, club and county - painting the campaign up as a positive opportunity to strengthen the game.

ITEM 5 : MCWG Task Reviews

9. PS indicated that the purpose of this agenda item was to clarify where we had reached on the various tasks before discussing their relevance to the EBU publication of "putting the new strategic plan into action".
 - a. Support to teachers : nothing new to report, and the Nicky Bainbridge proposal would come up when we discussed EBED later.

- b. Classroom to Clubroom issues : we noted that more clubs are now organising transitional games to support people in this space. RP reported that Oxfordshire was offering help with the hire of premises to new start-ups, but there had been no take-up yet.
- c. Clubroom to Tournament issues : it was agreed that the rigid enforcement of the Laws and Regulations was a major turn off, and that what was needed was a change in attitude by the experienced players. It would also help a lot for new players to be given better warning of what to expect, eg a lesson on what happens after a revoke, and on the issues around Bidding-in-Tempo. The TD also has a role in setting the atmosphere, and need to be more active in this. DP reported that the county-wide non-expert teams in Leicestershire was running with 10 teams tonight, up from 2 and 5 in previous years.
- d. Non-affiliated clubs : MW reminded us that a major question remained unanswered – as to the EBU-central level of ambition for persuading non-affiliated club to affiliate, and Counties would welcome guidance so that we can integrate our efforts with that target. We noted the gripes some have with funding of International Bridge, and that the international players were rarely visible to the bridge playing population – some marketing and promotion skills could well be applied in this area.
- e. Understanding EBU Finances : closed
- f. Engaging with EBU on IT issues : closed

ITEM 6 : The EBU Strategic Plan

- 10. MW opened the discussion by welcoming the existence of the in-year plan, but expressing disappointment that it was still some distance from being what was necessary and sufficient to achieve the Strategic Aims; even when the action to take is not clear, identifying that research / thinking / planning was going on would increase everyone's confidence in final delivery. IP reassured us that a process had been followed in getting to this point, and that any plan has to develop over time, so this is not the end of the story.
- 11. PS proposed that we step through the headline Strategic Aims and consider (a) what we would encourage EBU-central to consider in developing the plan further, and (b) what the counties can/should be doing to complement the plan. [Various of the headlines irrelevant to the Counties are not listed below]
- 12. Sustaining & Increasing Membership Levels : the current plan focusses entirely on existing (failing) clubs and then only for a small number of counties – this needs to expand. On the question of non-affiliated clubs, it was noted that engagement was easier for Counties than for the National Body but that ambitions were unclear. Interest was expressed in the difficult task of tracking those who had gone through bridge teaching and the idea of giving to learners "tokens" for free sessions at the bridge club was thought useful. It was also suggested that a "County slot" at the end of a learner's course might be a useful way of raising awareness with newcomers of the structure of bridge organisation in this country.
- 13. EBED : it was agreed that we lacked the relationship we need between the Counties and EBED, and with the arrival of new leadership in EBED, it would be opportune to use the next MCWG meeting as a chance to meet with EBED and work out the extent to which our missions overlap and how we might be able to help each other. It was suggested that the Counties bring along educators from their area to that meeting. PS will liaise with EBED about the feasibility of doing this.

14. Tournaments : the same attendance issues are hitting County and National events. It was noted that most feedback on the tournaments we hold come from those who attend, not from those who do not attend. We have all, so far, been trying to tweak past arrangements to make them more attractive, but there is a feeling that something more radical is needed.
15. It was noted that the FunBridge games, and the new FunBridge Teams, were going well – but might need more promotion. We were reminded that a while back we had postulated on-line bridge games across our counties (perhaps practice for top County Teams) but had never followed through on this.
16. Volunteers : Counties have difficulties with various roles that need to be filled; there are overlaps with the club roles for which job specifications have been developed in the Club Handbook. If any County was to develop these in the CBA context, the product would be much appreciated by other counties. PB offered to check if anything suitable already existed.
17. Archives : we noted that many Counties have archives of material going back decades. Ensuring these are well organised and preserved would be a useful task for any county to undertake.

ITEM 7 : Schedule and Plan for the MCWG Year

18. The proposal attached to the previous minutes was confirmed as the best we could see. The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 17th April, at a venue which will be determined once we are in contact with EBED about their attendance. The agenda for 17th April will need to include any preparations for the Chairs' meeting in May.

ITEM 9 : AOB

19. Novice Events : the need for supervised play has been accepted by all but there was concern expressed that the EBU rules governing such sessions were too restrictive. BP explained that these issues had been raised before, but that there was a need to ensure that UMS avoidance did not hurt the EBU financially. The last review of the rules was about 18 months back. It was agreed that advertising the available session types would be useful, as would having a feedback channel to inform future reviews of the regulations.
20. EBU Chairs Meeting : this happens on 15th May, and the Counties have been asked for input on the topics. No County suggested it had yet input, but the assumption was expressed that the focus would be the Strategic Aims and the County contribution to their achievement.
21. The meeting concluded at 1300.

END OF MINUTES

RECEIVED BY EMAIL FROM TIM ANDERSON : 17 Jan 2019

>> in response to the question : were there any lessons from the Yorkshire campaign from things that proved ineffective?

Inevitably our reports from Yorkshire focus more on success than failure. That said, there were certainly some things that were discovered to be less effective than expected.

The most obvious example is leaflet distribution. Two clubs did widespread leaflet distribution eg 8500 leaflets were dropped door to door with poor response. Word of mouth, social media, community websites and publications are all more effective (of course they may be exceptions!). This does not mean leaflets are no use; it is how they are distributed. Giving one to a friend works, posting it through a letterbox with all the junk mail does not.

Press advertising. I can't find a case example for this but it is easy to waste money. Very targeted local press is both cheaper and more effective, eg "community news" that goes to a nearby housing estate rather than say a city newspaper. Getting editorial stories is better still, eg a club which got a story about a member's 100 year birthday onto local radio with a pitch for joining the club included.

Facebook advertising: not from Yorkshire, but I heard of a Cheshire example that was ineffective. In other cases it has been very effective, so what makes the difference? With Facebook the key is to have a clear call to action "Learn bridge now in Beeston - taster session March 10th", and to target it carefully for age group (don't be too ambitious) and location.

Club commitment. Again I can't find a specific case but a club committee has to be solidly on board. One enthusiastic member is not enough.

It goes without saying that there what works in one place won't necessarily work in another so local brainstorming is essential.

Tim Anderson

Membership Development Officer

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