



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

at Dunchurch Village hall
on Wednesday 17th April 2019 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

EBU CEO	Gordon Rainsford (GR)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Leicestershire	David Pollard (DP)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Nottinghamshire	Clare Batten (CB)		

+ two visitors representing the teaching community
from Warwickshire: Myra Scott (MS) from Worcestershire: Mike Vetch (MV)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1 : Welcome & Apologies

We had apologies from Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Graham Bindley (Notts) and Pam Booth-Jones (Staffs) and Judith Currie (Warwickshire), from Peter Shelley (Avon) and Tony Russ (Somerset). Nicky Bainbridge had informed us that the previous plan for a Northamptonshire representative had fallen through but another might be forthcoming.

ITEM 2 : Minutes of Last Meeting (13 Feb 19)

1. The minutes were approved, and no matters arising missing from below were raised.

ITEM 3 : News from the EBU/Aylesbury

2. GR reported that there had been a number of staff changes at Aylesbury, with Bev Purvis leaving and a replacement coming in (but not yet announced) from the start of June.
3. GR reported that plans were being made for the Chairs' Meeting on 15th May, and that some of the activity was going to be based around County Groups, with the hope of encouraging others to emulate the MCWG. When pressed about progress with the "Putting the Strategic Plan into Action" GR indicated that there will be reports on some strands at the Chairs' Meeting, although a number of targets are set for much later in the year.

ITEM 4 : Planning our session with EBED

4. PS reported that various factors had interfered with the presence of Donna Wright here today, but that this gave us a useful chance to clear our collective minds on two topics –
 - What is the responsibility of a County Bridge Association for teaching and education in its area? And
 - What do Counties and the Clubs and Teachers within our counties expect from a national body such as EBED?
5. To help address these questions, each County provided a summary of what their position as a County Bridge Association was on education –
 - RP reported for Oxfordshire that they have had an “Education Officer” for a serious number of years (now merged into a group with a wider remit) but in practice this had no effect. The County was there to support educational needs, rather than to lead on them. RP indicated the County did look at availability of teaching across the county and provided financial support for training for teachers and TDs. KT emphasis the importance of supervised play. Across Oxfordshire, three clubs are doing all of teaching, transition-to-duplicate and daytime bridge – and these are thriving while the other 18 clubs are in slight decline.
 - MS reported for Warwickshire that she has held the title of “Newcomers Officer” but is now the “Player Development and Youth Officer”. She noted that while it up to clubs to choose their path, she has spent time building a relationship with teachers and clubs (aiming to visit each every two years), and encouraging the students to step out of their comfort zone into County events.
 - MV reported for Worcestershire that WCBA had no formal Education Officer for a long time, but he now has a role in the spread of teaching across the county, most recently filling a gap in Redditch (Further Education). He commented that the bulk of activity had been daytime teaching which gathers an audience who have retired, but his foray into evening lessons (4 evening groups now active) has opened up opportunities for some new people. He commented on the fact that there are some learners who seem to be perpetual students, and that there was also a desire to develop existing players.
 - PS reported for Gloucestershire that there was no formal role within the County around education; with Cheltenham Club dominating the County as a centre for bridge, the success of the Cheltenham Club in teaching has allowed the GCBA to sit back. He commented that some teaching follows EBED book/guidance but the majority does not. The EBED hand bank is much liked by all teachers.
 - CB reported for Nottinghamshire noting the value of Supervised Play as a means of getting non-club learners involved. She has tried a club conference, inviting all teachers, and aiming to map out the gaps. There can be issues with openness when people are earning a living from teaching bridge. CB reported on an attempt to get University Bridge going, and some success by working through the Chess Club who already had a stall at the Freshers’ Day.

- DP and DB reported that Leicestershire had only recently staffed their Education Liaison Officer role. Delivery is through clubs, but the County BA has ring-fenced some money for education (not all of which has been spent). DB expressed the view that unless we find significantly more opportunities for teaching (in clubs which aren't teaching, and outside), then bridge will fade away as a pastime. A recently created subcommittee is aiming to create a bridge teaching forum, something which will be much facilitated by Leicester Bridge Club's acquisition of new premises. Encouragement is also being given to U3A bridge activities (although reports suggest these vary enormously in style and standard – as one might expect). DB reported that some Andy Robson style teaching (delivered by local teachers) had been done in Leicestershire and had generated a lot of interest.

6. More general points which came up included

- The correlation between high NGS ratings for a club and its sessions, and the lack of new members was noticed and confirmed in a number of areas.
- The fact that unaffiliated clubs often trade on the fact that they are “friendly”; GR pointed out that we must fight the false impression that organised Duplicate Bridge is not friendly, and that teaching Duplicate from the beginning helps learners to see that.
- Continuity (time/day) of Lessons and then the follow-on Supervised Play is important in order to keep the commitment of the learners, who are often engaged in other activities at other times. This can be difficult for small clubs.

7. PS tried to summarise the County responsibilities which had been illustrated and mentioned as

- That there is adequate availability of teaching in the county – and that is adequate geographically, adequate quantity, and at enough different levels to satisfy the demand.
- That there are paths available from lessons into Supervised Play and into Duplicate (“classroom to clubroom” as our earlier task described it).

and offered

- That newcomers understand the bigger picture of the County and National bodies which take care of bridge, and of how the masterpoints and NGS worlds work;
 - there was concern expressed that this might be too much for those who were struggling with when to open 1N.*
 - the EBU Welcome Pack might cover some of this but it was created as one-size for new members coming from many different directions, so might not be ideal.*
- That appropriate standards of teaching were being maintained.
 - It was recognised immediately that this is a very difficult topic to tackle, but that there were some strange things being taught (particularly under U3A, “bidding off this planet”).*
 - Where teachers are paid, then there is clear scope for dropping teachers whose work does not fit. In other cases, there is little scope for control over quality, and the best a CBA can do is offer advice.*

8. The second question was what we expect of EBED, and the discussion highlighted two major threads
- Training of teachers & scorers : issues have arisen about availability and flexibility. The recent offer of free places has fully loaded EBED, and they have not been able to provide requested support for others as a result. We recognised the need to keep the amount of teacher training balanced across years.
 - Quality Measurement / Control : levels of accreditation of teachers do exist, but there seems to be little use of them.
9. The EBED constitution identifies two aims, one being the “promotion of duplicate bridge for public benefit” to which the above related, but also “the advancement of the education of young persons in full time education in the playing of duplicate bridge”. This is a much less visible topic in County agendas (but note Nottinghamshire’s work above). It was noted also that EBU membership does not feature in EBED’s aims.
10. We noted that teacher training for schools takes years, and that we need to develop a realistic expectation of what EBED can do in teacher training over a weekend; neither creating a teacher from scratch or even fully evaluating a teacher can be done in that timeframe. What we do see a potential teacher come away with is some new ideas and more confidence than they started with.
11. The following points were made during the discussion -
- There is more to running a bridge club than teaching and TDs, but the other aspects on which training might be useful (eg Safeguarding, Managing Accounts) are thought to fall outside EBED’s remit.
 - There are some who prefer that all teaching is done from the same syllabus, but others who prefer their own approach (in particular, not using the Bridge for All red book).
 - There is great appreciation by teachers of the EBED hand bank. There was concern that the wording on the website - the Hand Bank webpage includes “Please note that EBED do not allow any material to be copied, or in any way reproduced” - did not allow the use of these hands in the expected manner. This was deemed to be a mis-interpretation, but clearly the wording is found disturbing by some users.

ITEM 5 EBU CHAIRS’ MEETING

12. PS introduced this as our chance to start thinking of the issues which will be raised at the Chairs’ Meeting on 15th May. GR had indicated that the agenda might be wider than the documentation suggested, although membership issues will be a priority, and on this we focused our discussion. Points which emerged were –
- Some felt it strange that people didn’t want to join the EBU, and it was noted that the decision tended to lie with clubs and for clubs – particularly the smaller clubs which run with low table money – the UMS charge is a key issue.
 - Some small clubs who, by necessity, combine sessions for experienced players and for newcomers run into a conflict between allowing newcomers to use crib sheets, and the awarding of Master Points – the Licensing Handbook records under Type 11 subscription code “and no Master Points should be awarded (e.g. some players receive guidance).” We questioned whether it has to be so.

- GR reported that EBU membership numbers were holding steady, but that the Board was very conscious that the best projection is a decline and possibly a serious decline. We agreed that the influx of new players of an older age group means that the number of players at the top levels will become a smaller proportion of the total (the pyramid will get flatter) and we all see this reflected in the numbers playing in the more competitive events.
- This fact is also disturbing the previous pattern whereby profits from Tournaments would fund the Internationals; an alternative strategy is not yet in place. GR made the point that while players in International events all give up their time for free, and that expenses are kept to a minimum, the increasing number of International Events is further escalating this issue. The point was made that visibility of the International Players would be appreciated by all, and could be a useful lever to persuade unaffiliated clubs to get involved with the EBU.
- Although Regulations tend to be associated with “unfriendly”, GR pointed out that most people do not appreciate that the existence of good Regulations is the best way to handle any unfriendly behaviour. We all need to promulgate this wisdom.

13. It was pointed out that the Board’s “Putting the Strategic Plan into Action” made no mention at all of club affiliation; GR stated that, despite that absence, the question of unaffiliated clubs permeated the thinking of Board members. [But that does mean nobody is accountable for this issue, and might account for lack of visible action on it] It was pointed out that the County Bridge Associations were much closer to the unaffiliated clubs and that we need Counties and EBU to work together on attracting them.

ITEM 6 : Schedule and Plan for the MCWG Year

14. We agreed to aim for Thursday 20th June for the next meeting, subject to confirmation that we could have use of the West Midlands Bridge Club, and a (second) confirmation that it was possible for Donna Wright (CEO of EBED) to attend.

15. Later meetings are currently penciled in for 16th October and 13th November.

ITEM 7 : AOB

16. Midlands League - Lincolnshire : a suggestion had been received that Lincolnshire re-join the Midlands Counties League in 2020 (they dropped out in summer 2014, Northamptonshire used to play but dropped out in 2001). The general feeling was that the disruption to the timetables (an extra weekend for each team, at a time when teams were struggling to staff away matches) was undesirable. There was also the question of whether Lincolnshire would mesh in with any of the other regional leagues more easily – something perhaps EBU central could look into. [Should a national body own the issue of allocation to leagues anyway?] We concluded by making the point that

- There was a Midlands Counties League committee which comprise the county organisers for the MCL, and that they had more authority as a decision making body on this request that had the MCWG.

17. The meeting concluded at 1305.

END OF MINUTES