



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 23rd July 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Devon	Geoff Clements (GC)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Hampshire & IOW	John Fairhurst (JF)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Nottinghamshire	Sue Wright (SW)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Nottinghamshire	Sue McIntosh (SM)		

Apologies: Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Sue O'Hara (Avon) and Patrick Shields (Gloucestershire)

CHAIR: Kathy Talbot

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. **KT** issued a welcome to Geoff Clements from Devon on his first visit to the group. This was also a first visit (not visible at first to KT) from Sue Wright from Nottinghamshire. We approved the minutes of the meeting of 16th July 2020. On matters arising
 - a. **MW** asked about the extent of any feasibility study on the English Bridge School initiative. **KH** replied that EBED had decided that an online e-learning platform was necessary. They had examined a large number (over 50) of existing candidates over a number of months and reported their findings to the EBED Trustees, who concluded that a fresh start built on Google's "G Suite" was the best way forward. **KH** noted that it would have been better if this development had happened in collaboration with other National Bridge Organisations, but NBOs were not ready for this. **FD** asked about the role of EBED's Youth Advisory Group (YAG) in this and **KH** reassured the meeting that the overlap of membership with EBED management and trustees would ensure good coordination.

ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. **KH** reported that the EBU negotiations with BBO were (confidential but) ongoing and there are improvements on the table but yet to be agreed (eg a flat rate per table independent of what a player pays). **KH** has started the development of an online-platform vendor assessment process to support choosing the best platform. Many necessary business processes which BBO needs are not yet in place and this delays progress, and the contract is needing a re-write. **KT** pointed out that a number of clubs were becoming concerned about BBO charges. **KH** reminded us about Stepbridge (used by WBU, free to clubs for 2020) and that there were others also in development. **PC** expressed concern were EBU to insist on clubs/counties using a particular online platform, and **KH** agreed that exclusivity in this sense was not acceptable.

3. On the question of face to face restarts, **MT** asked: (1) Are the EBU currently pro-actively engaged with the government on this topic?, and (2) Did the EBU intend to pursue the matter in the near future on behalf of their member clubs? No activity was known to **KH**, and his investigation of parallels suggested there was no one-stop shop in government for this and that all venues and sports were chasing down the mass of government publications for advice (and in this, consistency and completeness was often lacking) . **FD** suggested that the peers engaged in the annual match between House of Lords and EBU Juniors might be useful contacts. **KT** pointed out that even if legally permitted, the appetite for face-to-face bridge might not exist yet. In proceeding, public liability insurance could be an issue. [LATER: checks with Third Party Marsh Commercial who provide EBU affiliated clubs with insurance reveals that if government guidelines are followed the (original) insurance remains valid, and that activities opening up again is a case-by-case judgment by the people in charge]
4. The question was raised of the marketing of English Bridge School (EBS) and whether there was a role for County BAs in doing that. **KH** reported that EBU had offered to help EBED on this (the advert on EBU website for candidates to join a Marketing Executive Group being one step, and offering staff help is another). **KT** expressed concern about the impact of EBS on existing teachers, and **JP** expressed concern about non-EBTA teachers. **RP** suggested that County BAs could (financially) support EBTA membership. **KH** suggested we have an EBED attendee (perhaps the new CEO, Giorgio Provenza) at a future meeting, and offered to put him in touch with the MCWG Teaching Subgroup.
5. **RP** raised the question of contributions to the EBU Vision / Mission / Values development, and asked how many had had success in reading the forum (a minority said yes). He re-iterated conclusions that he has mentioned before, viz (a) the EBU should be the national body for all bridge players, (b) if so, EBU needed to consult outside its membership on the design of its future, and (c) a one-size-fits-all does not work. The forum comments suggest support for these views, and the message would come through more strongly if MCWG members said so on the forum. It was suggested that EBU licensing of events was an issue (illustrated with the Oxford Festival, and by **MP** from Suffolk), and EBU (or equivalent) membership is often a requirement on entry forms for county events. **KH** asked if we as CBAs were willing to act ourselves in this way that was proposed for the EBU? Should county constitutions now be dropping the word "Duplicate"? If all the CBAs did then the EBU would surely follow. It was suggested that all CBAs look into this.

ITEM 3: SPECIALIST GROUP REPORTS

6. On the pilot engagement with non-affiliated clubs, **MP** reported that a draft text had been prepared and was circulating in the group and had input from Patrick. It might be ready next week.
7. On technology, there was interest in having a session on alternative online platforms. Those interested should contact **KH** who will arrange a session. **KH** has prepared a list of the available platforms (BBO, Stepbridge, BridgeClubLive, OK Bridge, LoveBridge, Funbridge, RSVP Bridge, Swan Games, Play Elephant, RSVPBridge) – and of these has tried BBO, Stepbridge and RSVPbridge. Discussion came up later about an evaluation, and the possibility of combining our efforts on such an evaluation received support; **KH** suggested that a suitable spreadsheet could be constructed. [LATER : it is now live – [click here](#)]

8. On teaching, things have stalled. **FD** reported that local to him more mentoring and improvers groups are planned, but there is a shortage of volunteers. He suggested that a standard roadmap for learners would be helpful, and that it was proving awkward to decide on the right level of payment for online teaching. **JF** added that Basingstoke BC is actively trying to create a pool of teachers, and it is looking for help to EBED and Douglas Wright's planned Teacher Training session; again the correct charging model is unclear (EBED's charges have not changed with the move to online, where it was expected to be cheaper). **KH** will make contact with Giorgio Provenza on this.

ITEM 4: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES LEAGUE

9. A proposal written up by Patrick Shields had been circulated (quite late) and **KT** asked for reactions. **DT** confirmed that the current MCL organiser, Paul Hammond, has declined to get involved in any online competition. There was concern in Worcestershire about labelling this online game as "Dawes" and the candidate players felt that the name should be retained for the face-to-face league. There was general support for this being an online parallel competition during the coming year.
10. There was some debate about what the appetite would be in future years for an online league, and questions about the range of players that get catered for in these events. Recent experience of inter-county games suggests a large appetite at this time and a wide range of players are interested.
11. We agreed that more time was needed to examine the proposal, so we would discuss this more fully at the next MCWG meeting, at which point we would also look for nominees as the league organiser.

ITEM 4: UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

12. Some reports were received offline:

- a. Derbyshire : concerns are growing about the existence of different payment structures for Virtual Clubs and a definitive characterisation of the options would be welcomed. DCBA has completed its main team-of-four event on-line and will be sending the competition info off to the EBU for masterpoints and creation of UMS invoice. DCBA plans to run its handicapped Pivot teams on BBO commencing in August.
- b. Suffolk : would welcome confirmation of the charging position BBO are taking for teams games which are currently free (a quick confirmation as future plans and adverts for congresses and the like are being finalised). They are concerned that if rules are changed then they might find that some future events for which plans have been advertised would be breaching revised BBO regulations; in particular, if a need to charge differently emerged it could be awkward.
- c. Leicestershire : more Clubs are now playing, with two more clubs in the near future. The first County pairs will be on the 1st August. The Committee is having monthly Zoom meetings and are planning to have the County AGM in September. The LCBA Tournament Sub-Committee have been asked what competitions should be organised – with the hint that there are too many competitions already.
- d. Staffs & Shrops : another club has set up on BBO (7 tables at their first session, which is as good as most of their F2F sessions), but the County no fear session is still disappointing (although up to 4 tables yesterday).

13. **GC** reported from **Devon** that they have held a Charity Simultaneous Pairs across the county, involving a number of non-affiliated clubs, but had issues with the EBU requirement for table money from these clubs. DCBA is looking, because of size of the county, to continue an online competition weekly in perpetuity.
14. **JP** reported on his survey in **Derbyshire** and is finding a much wider geographical spread of players getting involved and this is likely to encourage online events continuing.
15. **KT** reported a similar picture in Oxfordshire, and that they run a monthly Swiss Teams in which all teams play the same hands.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

16. **MW** reported that an article about “Bridge during Lockdown” was due to appear in the Sunday Express magazine this coming weekend, and should be useful publicity for the game.
17. The question was raised again of how often we should meet, with different memories expressed of previous discussions on this. There was a suggestion of actions being taken forward over email.
18. The next meeting will be at the same time in two weeks' time, on Thursday 6th August. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES