



Minutes of NCWG Online Meeting 30 June 2020

County Bridge Associations Present:

Yorkshire - Lesley Millet (Lesley) & David Guild (David); North East - Nigel Durie (Nigel) and Adrian Darnell (Adrian); Manchester County - Irene Davis (Irene) and Adam Wiseberg (Adam); Lancashire – Jeff Smith;

Invited Members:

Ron Millet (Ron) – EBU Director, Gordon Rainsford (Gordon) – EBU Ceo, Tim Anderson (Tim) – EBU Membership Officer, Geoff Morris (Geoff) Retired member of Manchester CBA, Patrick Shields (Patrick) – EBU Director and Chair of MCWG; Sue Friedman (Sue) – Chair of Leeds BC, Kiat Huang (Kiat) - EBU Technology Director

Lesley chaired the meeting and welcomed the members of the working party and invited members to this online meeting

1. Apologies – Trevor Ward from Cumbria County BA; Westmorland – Mike Rothwell (Mike); Merseyside & Cheshire – Christopher Raymond (Chris) & Richard Alcock (Richard).

2. Previous Minutes - The minutes of the meeting of 20 May were approved without amendment.

3. County Reports and 4. Clubs Reports re Online Activity

Manchester County – Manchester County is now a BBO Virtual Club since beginning of June. Adam is running seven duplicates per week plus Saturday friendly. He runs a monthly charity event, the last raising over £4k. In June also ran a swiss, two Imp pairs, an experts' only (J plus) and a nonexperts' competition in June and had 1200 players in the month (including multi-plays). Play minimum 20 boards per session (16 for non-experts). Evening online sessions are less popular. Popular events average 20 tables.

Manchester County have 1400 registered players of which 420 are BBO registered and 358 have played on BBO. Adam estimates that 25% of county players are active online. Gordon agreed that nationally an estimate of 25% playing online is reasonable. Patrick said that due to a forceful campaign, Cheltenham have 60% of their members playing online.

Ashton BC is now a BBO virtual club playing 3 times per week. Stretford/Warrington/Brierfield have linked to form a virtual club and having inter club teams of 8 matches. Similarly, Altrincham/Cheadle/Bessies' have linked and are running online sessions although only light activity. Bramhall is also light active online.

Manchester is starting an online league with 25 to 30 teams across 6 divisions.

Irene is seeking to make play more inclusive. More people are moving to online over time, once the club facility is formed. Manchester County are taking a central role and engaging with members directly to push online. They have a six person "online subcommittee" focusing on this campaign.

Irene observed that **new leadership structures are forming**. Irene also voiced concern that some clubs are moribund, falling by the wayside, and their future is at risk.

Manchester City Club Their virtual club is getting good numbers. Now running online lessons for continuing beginners on Sunday mornings and they play set hands on Zoom/BBO with more experienced members with breakout oversight by Gordon Bickles, the teacher.

Jeff has been involved with Adam on the creation of the new "Manchester Club online" web site and is running a charity event. Jeff made the point that many clubs have poor coverage of online opportunities shown on their websites and that this should be addressed.

Short discussion re the **difficulty of teaching large numbers** via this online method. Concern that if larger numbers cannot be accommodated online or clubs do not offer any online teaching that potential students/ existing students will be lost to commercial operator alternatives eg No Fear Bridge, Bernard Magee, Robson etc and will be lost as players to clubs for the future.

Short discussion re **online TD's** Adam said that the burden of arranging and being TD for online events is heavy and that he is wilting under the strain they impose. Also, the remuneration of TD's is an issue. Patrick said "professional online TD's" should be paid to train local voluntary TD's (the EBU proposed model). Lesley said that remunerated County level TD's are not generally interested in online TD roles. Adam added that the skill set required is very different; online being more IT skills based. The meeting discussed local/club online TD's also participating in play. Gordon does not recommend this. Volunteer local/club TD's will likely be non-players. Gordon suggested that cross club TD arrangements could assist this issue.

Yorkshire

Lesley said that the Yorkshire County virtual club is a success and now have a competitions schedule of at least one competition per month (including swiss pairs and teams). The recent virtual Mixed Pairs competition had 62 pairs compared with 19 pairs offline last year. The County are running their virtual AGM open to all members on a.m. 18 July followed by a p.m. Swiss Teams event.

Leeds BC – Leeds have an active online league and are beginning to open this up to other club players. Sue said that lots of Leeds members play online bridge socially – using What's App and BBO Casual Rooms (Free) for playing. The delay in forming virtual clubs is partly the reason for this and many prefer this free lighter form of play. Another substantial cohort do not want any involvement in online bridge.

North East - Adrian said inter-county online competitions have been played with Scotland (2 teams of 8) and Gloucestershire and this is being expanded. Also, they have entered the President's Cup via online.

Durham was early online and is running a successful club league ladder. Online pairs are on Tuesday afternoons over last 6 weeks and getting 50 players average. Weirside are also running an online club league. Darlington are online this week and encouraging local clubs to participate with them. Castle Morpeth and Morpeth have linked to be online and have run charity events. St Georges are online this week and are also using online for continuing student course teaching.

Lancashire – Jeff said that County is starting its online activity. A league is underway with 41 teams entered across 8 divisions running every Thursday with teams of 8 playing 14 boards.

Clubs online activity is light. Bolton have had an online AGM and are playing two 18 board sessions per week of 20 tables. Bolton/Preston/Southport are linking to play and pay UMS from July 1st. (Not sure of the mechanics of results payment as system is unproven)

Jeff alerted the Group that an unaffiliated club called The Friendly Club, run by Des King, is very active online for social play and teaching.

Merseyside/Cheshire – c/f

Cumbria/Westmorland – c/f

5. Covid Risk Assessment – Rugby BC

The group considered this report. David said that Rugby BC have some 150 members and only 30% of pre-covid demand can be accommodated if this post covid model is followed. If members can only play once every few weeks in the club, many will vote with their feet and only main sessions will run, squeezing out such as social play and teaching.

The Group consensus was that clubs should not be opening at this time and that the proposed model is not viable but a welcome addition to our knowledge. The report is a good starting point to consider the format of clubs at post covid but it is not a template for recommendation to clubs.

6. New Technology/Platforms for Online Play

Lesley said that new Pianola platform is starting a trial mid-July and is on schedule for end July launch. It will initially be a “pairs” only offering.

Tim said that he is also continuing to develop his platform, Your Bridge Online, and it is running live at Winchester with other clubs to trial. Tim pointed out that his financial resources are limiting and Gordon/Ron offered a separate EBU discussion external to this meeting.

Kiat said that new platforms are proliferating with large scale operators having their own products under wraps in the wings. Smaller platforms include OK Bridge, Swan Elephant and Step Bridge. Step Bridge is actually 10 years old but has had growth as more recent involvement with the Dutch Bridge Fed and the Australian Bridge Fed. Interestingly, it has struck a recent deal with the Welsh Bridge Fed which gives this Fed free bridge access for the whole of 2020. Also, the Bridge Hackathon has yet to show its own results.

The discussion moved to in-club technologies. Kiat said that the EBU is looking at sourcing Perspex screens for under 60Euros. David said that not all solutions are large scale digital and we should also consider inexpensive play solutions. The Group discussed curtain cards, own playing cards pack for the session, own laptop for in club play and clubs as a social location role only and other possibilities. One interesting point developed was that online play and **in club play may have a pricing difference** with in-club play being (say) twice the price of online.

7. Membership Development

The meeting focused on teaching. The meeting again raised the issue that it is difficult to teach, even with breakouts, for a number beyond 8 students. This affects the economics of teaching as well as the quality of delivery. David said that there is a substantial requirement for an inexpensive, standalone teaching platform; piggy-backing large platforms is clunky. The solution is required to

enable simultaneous multi-window overview for supervised bridge. Kiat suggested that the audio service , Dischord, may be a part solution.

Patrick said that the MCWG have set up a subcommittee to look at teaching and invited Adam and David to attend the next meeting (David attended the same day evening). Kiat said that the Group should poll teachers, assemble their thoughts and direct teaching requirements to EBED for their development.

Jeff asked whether the EBU have influence on BBO. Gordon replied that BBO have been responsive recently but we are not their main customer base and our influence is limited. Also, the imminent BBO pricing structure changes will have relationship impact.

Ron said that immediately before Covid, the EBU membership was showing growth. Online offers opportunity to also develop younger age sectors than our presently aged players as well as the obvious threats such as that online players may be have lower club loyalty than a traditional club player . Kiat pointed out the poor number of English bridge players per capita compared to countries such as Holland and Scandinavia et al, so there is a long way to go.

Next Online Meeting: Provisionally 28 July 2020

End