



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 2nd December 2021 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Essex	Cath Fox (CF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Hampshire	John Glasscock (JG)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Warwickshire	Myra Scott (MS)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Wiltshire	Gayle Webb (GW)
Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)		

PLUS : Shireen Mohandes (SM, RealBridge)

Apologies: Dean Benton (Leicestershire), Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire),

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We welcomed John Glasscock from Basingstoke Bridge Club who had come to support JF in doing a demo of their latest development. We approved the minutes from the 4th November 2021 meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 3: Briefing on RealBridge Developments

2. **SM** talked us through the latest developments at RealBridge, and some which are just about to be released. The slide show is [available from this link](#). Points which emerged in discussion included:
 - a. Material from Neil Rosen's recent book on 5-card majors and 2-over-1 is coming to the collection of learning opportunities on RealBridge.
 - b. Some are using RealBridge to provide a different sort of hybrid game, with small groups gathering in different locations to play online as a single competition – which allows the group to socialise and discuss the game face-to-face when the play is over.
 - c. **SM** confirmed that she has been engaging with EBED (via Giorgio Provenza) but noted that the RealBridge interest is rather wider than the EBTA teachers on which EBED focusses, and each organisation has its own project plans.
3. A number of those attending commented on the amazing customer service which has been forthcoming from RealBridge over the past year, and we all congratulated the company of being given the Tony Priday award at the recent EBU AGM.

ITEM 4: Demonstration of Basingstoke BC's (Un)Assisted Play

4. **JG** reported that this was a response to a desire by newcomers for more practice games, and was developed with help from Sam and Shireen from RealBridge. The presentation used by **JG** is provided [is available at this link](#). The following points emerged in discussion
 - a. The product exists in one-table and two-table forms, and takes only a few minutes for the Basingstoke Bridge Club (BBC) organiser to configure once the booking is made. There are currently 7 topics available and more in the pipeline. The club is making the service available to non-members.
 - b. Key to the success have been the new "Info" button available on RealBridge, and the use of the html-online.com/editor to update the configuration files. Tutorial material is loaded as images to the club's Bridgewebs system.
 - c. Sessions are 16 boards as a convenient default (EBU hand banks are organised so each seat declares 4 times), but sessions can be split over different times of day (across days is awkward given the pricing model and some other technicalities at RealBridge).
5. The use of random (open) club sessions as deals for this facility is being considered as an option. **PS** reported having done exactly that in face-to-face training, using deals from international matches as learning material for county players. **JF** welcomed ideas on how this capability might develop further.

ITEM 5: New Experiences with Online Bridge

6. NTR

ITEM 6: Experience of the return to Face-to-Face Bridge

7. The reports given were a mix of positive and negative:
 - a. **FD** has seen a number of clubs, and a weekend hotel event, all doing well with numbers increasing.
 - b. **MP** reported that in Suffolk one club has stopped its face-to-face games and reverted to purely online, and two others have made mask wearing compulsory.
 - c. **PS** reported a small expansion of face-to-face at Cheltenham, but the game was remaining predominantly online. The Gloucestershire CBA has run a second face-to-face day and saw an increase in numbers, although still only 75% of the pre-Covid numbers.
 - d. **RM** reported that in Lincolnshire numbers for face-to-face are limited, and the County's attempt to plan the Garden Cities as a face-to-face heat is getting very limited entries.
 - e. Jim Parker reported from Derbyshire that some clubs are back to 75% levels of attendance and one even back to pre-Covid numbers. Although not yet using Realbridge in the county for inter-club team-of-8, two of the new scoring offerings from RealBridge are in use today.
 - f. **MT** from Warwickshire report that, across several smaller local clubs the picture is varied; while some clubs are gradually improving their numbers, one or two smaller ones appear to be struggling to survive, and this is a concern.

8. It was noted that at the North American Championships in Austin this week, the ACBL have mandated mask throughout (sensible when such a diverse crowd are gathering) and the players have been willing to cooperate.

ITEM 7: The Future of Teaching

9. **MS** noted that EBED were actively developing their Smart Bridge course at the moment, and they had the Transition Course available now to help existing bridge players move into Duplicate Bridge.
10. **SM** explained that she edits the magazine for the [American Bridge Teachers Association](#) (ABTA). In the US this organisation sits alongside the [ACBL Education Foundation](#). ABTA membership is available outside the US (\$50 annually). The Education Foundation provides a significant starter pack (including boards) to anyone who have taken their Best Practices teacher certification and has never been paid to teach a class.
11. **MS** reported that (a) there will be a Club Teachers Course @ West Midlands BC on 2nd/3rd July 2022 and (b) any other County interesting is hosting a course should contact Jacks Morcombe at EBED for possible dates.

ITEM 8: The Midlands Counties Online League

12. There have been some issues in the last match with email reception of corrupted RealBridge links; experience has suggested the best approach is to put the link on a website the participants can easily access, and let them click on it from there. SM was able to tell us that BTinternet has been going through a very aggressive phase in removing spam emails and that might also be contributing.

ITEM 9: The Midlands Counties Restricted Swiss Teams

13. We had to cancel the last (6-high) run of this for lack of entries and we discussed whether these events had run their course. We agreed that competition for players' time had increased, but that these were important events, and we needed to find a way to get the pattern of these events into players' diaries. We agreed that the series should continue, and the following suggestions were made as to how we might promote entries further –
- Advertising the series and encouraging teams to commit ahead of the month involved. Might be worth marking the games off as the Spring / Summer / Autumn event in the series.
 - Offer an experienced player as a mentor or NPC for the team, to give them guidance and encouragement at the event (something the new Team Captain feature on RealBridge will support).
 - We would consider running the 9-high every two months, as four months between games is a long gap.
 - Encouraging team names would help the players identify with the team and make repeated appearances more meaningful.
14. We agreed that it was appropriate to give Sarah Amos some compensation (50% of the regular fee) in recognition of her keeping herself available for the cancelled competition. We agreed that the surplus built up from this series should be passed onto EBED as soon as convenient.
15. The next event, 9-high, is due on Saturday 29th January 2022.

ITEM 10: Feedback from EBU AGM

16. There was too limited an overlap of meeting attendees to generate any discussion. The AGM had taken place on 30th November. There was plenty of routine business plus two serious discussions about

- a. The robustness of the Disciplinary Rules and the extent to which the process was being well followed, and
- b. The setting of Universal Membership fees for the year starting April 2022 (it will rise by 2p, roughly inflation).

The [minutes](#) and a [recording of the full event](#) are now available via the EBU website.

ITEM 11: Round-Robin from Counties

17. Inputs at the meeting and by email were incorporated in the record above at relevant points.

ITEM 12: AOB and NEXT MEETING

18. **PS** pointed out that in accordance with the [Terms of Reference of this group](#), the Chair of the group needs to be re-elected at the first meeting of the year, so this will be on the next agenda. There is also a requirement to elect someone to be responsible for communication with the EBU.

19. We agreed that the next meeting will be in accordance with our pattern of first Thursday of the month, and therefore Thursday 6th January 2022. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES