



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Oxfordshire	Robert Procter (RP)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Essex	Cath Fox (CF)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Herefordshire	Keith Stait (KS)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

and we had **Giorgio Provenza** (GP) CEO of EBED

**Apologies:** Dean Benton (Leicestershire), Mark Goddard (Nottinghamshire)

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 17<sup>th</sup> December meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.
2. In accordance with the TOR for the group, the meeting agreed that **PS** would continue as Chair/Secretary for the next year, but he warned that he must then stand down.

## ITEM 2: EBED – Status, Cooperation and Issues

3. We welcomed **GP** to the meeting; **PS** noted that the last visit we had from EBED staff was only 19 months ago (June 2019) but a lot had changed since then. **GP** summarised what EBED had been up to since the pandemic arose, highlighting:
  - a. The first step was to encourage and enable teachers to get started online and a number of Zoom seminars held in the spring proved very effective and popular.
  - b. The next step was to bring forward the plans for creating online resources in support of bridge teaching, and that led to the launch of the EBS (English Bridge School) in the summer. This provides both a framework for teaching (the Google Classroom) and a bundle of material for teachers (initially the EBED Red Book, and to be announced soon the Green Book).
  - c. Youth Bridge has suffered from the inability to engage with schools, but plans are being made to run the Schools Cup online in March, and EBED is looking to new approaches to teaching youngsters to play bridge.
  - d. EBED has had to cut back and is currently running with 5 part-time staff (3 full time equivalents).

4. **PS** raised the question of how teachers and potential teachers are discovered. **GP** told us that the Club Teacher Training (CTT) courses had initially been run on demand but had switched to an annual series before lockdown. The courses restarted in September. It was noted that some counties (eg Oxfordshire) have plenty of teachers while others have few teachers (and maybe should be doing more to recruit for CTT course?).
5. The next question is how to find the students. **GP** reported on his experiences when leading the teaching at Wimbledon BC; referrals were identified as the greatest source, and a campaign was launched to get clubs' members each to refer one newcomer (every member doing that successfully once every ten years would provide an adequate supply) – but it wasn't until members were offered a reward (so many free plays for a student who stayed) that the campaign took any real hold. He made the point that we would never be able to afford an effective (national) publicity campaign and that a consequence was we needed all existing players to get active in recruiting new members. **RP** suggested that a central gathering of promotional material might still be worthwhile, and would give teachers support in generating enthusiasm within those inquiring about the game.
6. **JF** reported that when seeking new players in lockdown, they have found U3A bridge lessons to be a fruitful source. It was suggested that the informality of U3A learning and the willingness to engage in non-competitive bridge made this an easier environment for newcomers to enter. The issue is the transition from classroom to clubroom, and we are now recognising that this is a multi-stage process – moving through different levels of bridge standard and speed of play. It is difficult for small clubs to support newcomers with different card playing backgrounds, and once playing, to support the necessary multiple stages. It might be that small clubs need to work together (which is much easier online) in order to provide sufficient different (but homogenous) sessions to support players through this transition.
7. Another issue identified by **FD** is the need for long-term commitment from a teacher (and also from students), when courses are expected to run through say 30 lessons. This problem is much alleviated with online teaching, where recordings of lessons can be played back at different times to support pupil holidays and other absences. But if and how one would transition from online teaching to face-to-face teaching is not clear. **JF** noted the contrast of this discussion with the reaction of some Scottish Bridge Clubs which have rejected online learning because the lack of locality meant insufficient benefit for the club after lockdown. Many present see in online teaching sufficient advantages, such that it will continue post crisis. This observation led to a discussion of the fact that there were different types of teacher – those who did it all as a volunteer, those who were paid by a bridge club, and those who did it in order to populate their own bridge club. Being clear about the advantages of online learning will help us take best advantage of those.
8. **GP** highlighted the value of sharing best practice, and how this had worked well for Youth Bridge – in which EBED (through Giles Ip) had been providing training to County Youth Officers. An equivalent regime could help County Education Officers, although it's not clear how many counties have one. With the option now of meetings online, CEOs might be able to generate more coordination amongst, and engagement with, teachers than they were able to do in the past. We noted that some teachers might not want to engage with others.

9. We discussed the marketing of the game, and who was responsible for raising the profile of the game nationally. **GP** suggested that this was a very difficult task (look at other countries and other games like chess which also struggle) and that the profile of the game relies on us all. Even with massive success in Junior bridge in 2018, and the consequent fund raising, EBED/EBU could not reach the interest level for the national press. There is also a need for a constant effort here – no one-off venture will be enough. One aspect of the game we might need to consider – in order to make it more marketable – is the labelling of our games (“gentle” implies other games are not) and the style of scoring we use. Match-points is a difficult concept for newcomers and non-players (“I made my contract and still scored 10%”), and we may need to be playing more aggregate games and simple win/loss events to make the game accessible and more exciting. Clubs will need to support a bigger variety of games, both non-competitive and competitive, in order to thrive in the future.
10. **PS** asked whether Counties (rather than clubs) should be more active in supporting the classroom to clubroom transition, but others felt this was more an issue for clubs – and this was best done by introducing club players as buddies to play with these newcomers. The strength of linkage between teachers and clubs varies between counties, those with only small clubs having a more difficult task.

### **ITEM 3: Midlands No Fear 8-High Swiss Teams**

11. **PS** asked for confirmation that everyone was happy with the plans. **PC** reported few entries and some frustrated 9-High players who were not eligible. **PS** reminded everyone that the current arrangements rule out only a third of our population. A number of counties have yet to start advertising the event.
12. For the record the following points had been made in email before the meeting:
- a. There are opportunities provided by RealBridge for the world at large to try out the system every week. Counties should advertise these (go to [realibridge.online](http://realibridge.online)). I will run additional sessions on the Wed/Thu/Fri preceding the event. This is all now advertised at [https://www.bridgewebs.com/cgi-bin/bwoo/bw.cgi?club=midlandcc&pid=display\\_page21](https://www.bridgewebs.com/cgi-bin/bwoo/bw.cgi?club=midlandcc&pid=display_page21)
  - b. We should not be restrictive about non-EBU members – as any such person is a potential EBU member.
  - c. If there is doubt about NGS levels we should be flexible, if they enter in good faith we should not throw them out.
  - d. **PS** asks, as TD, for a list of captains names to arrive at least by COP on 29th January. Entrants can be give [patrick@gcba.org.uk](mailto:patrick@gcba.org.uk) as emergency contact.
  - e. On the day before a link will be placed on the web page referenced above, which all players will use to access the event.

### **ITEM 3: AOB and NEXT MEETING**

13. **MT** reminded us that the Midlands Counties Congress was this coming weekend, and reported that the numbers were looking quite good.
14. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES