

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 5th October 2023 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Herefordshire	Rob Wilkinson (RW)	Wiltshire	Gayle Webb (GW)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	REALBRIDGE	Shireen Mohandes (SM)
PLUS: Mark Humphries from EBED			
Apologies: Keith Stait (Herefordshire)			

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 7th September 2023 meeting. All past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website, and all meeting notes and papers presented, and a variety of papers distributed by the EBU, and more, are held on an MCWG OneDrive share; any attendee needs only to ask to be given access.

ITEM 2: BRIDGE TEACHING

2. Mark Humphries (MH) was introduced as, since June of 2023, the CEO for EBED. EBED as an organisation comprises a group of (volunteer) Trustees, plus Mark and four part-time employees. They are supported by a dwindling network of TD trainers and teacher trainers. He offered us an overview of EBED priorities, for which the foci are currently:
 - A national, consistent, and high-quality Education Framework: this includes the Bridge for All materials (the new Blue Book is coming soon), management of EBTA (the Teachers' Association) and the training of teachers (over 100 since lockdown) and club directors (200 since lockdown, in 23 locations).
 - Youth Initiatives: of which the most prominent is the [Summer Camp](#) (75 attendees this year), and the support given to a variety of schools initiatives. EBED is committed to working with the EBU on a new strategy for Youth Bridge.
3. The highlights for 2023 are:
 - An organisational refresh with new staff, and an agreement with the EBU about how to align the interests of the two organisations.
 - Expanded use of online teaching methods to support TD training, and the launching of a new website [Teaching Hub](#) (with support for all the Bridge For All materials) to replace the Teacher Zone.
 - Development of [Smart Bridge](#) which is now entering an operational pilot phase. Currently this is a tool to allow a teacher to aggregate demand, but in the future, it could become used for centralized teaching.

4. **JF** asked about apps which could support the TD, but **MH** pointed out that without visiting the later implications in the Laws, a player cannot make sensible choices – so that such apps and flowcharts are of limited value. **PS** noted the need for more education of TDs on the mechanics of movements and **MH** pointed out an EBED online tutorial on that topic which is now available.
5. **JS** asked whether it was worth having a national teaching initiative along the lines of the Yorkshire CBA model which was developed during the pandemic – but **MH** reminded us that not all online teaching works well, and we noted that the YCBA model is in very limited use currently even in Yorkshire.
6. **RM** asked about whether any flexibility was allowed in the use of the 'Bridge For All' slide deck; **MH** agreed that lack of permission to alter the slides was a difficulty and that EBED had heard this from others; current EBED policy is to protect the Intellectual Property and not allow that.
7. **SM** reminded us that the timetable for the RealBridge-led Teaching Conference has now been settled (7-8 October) and that information about this is [now available from the RealBridge website](#) (under the Events menu) and people can sign up for the event there. There are 29 presentations with 32 speakers and 13 videos on offer in advance.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

8. **SM** reminded us that the online Women's Coaching sessions were continuing on RealBridge, as did the Junior events (53 tables recently, and divided into different pools to cater for different ability ranges). She informed us that Andrew Robson plans to run an open online session on Wednesday 8th November, discussing the hands from the Children-in-Need Sims Pairs of the previous two days.
9. **PS** asked the company how they felt about the use of screens in RealBridge games, and who should be responsible in those cases for explaining the bidding to the opponents. **PC** made the point that the best answer might depend on the type of event, and **SM** raised the idea – for suitable events – of running different sections under different regimes.

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

10. **PS** asked for thoughts on the role of the County Associations in running NGS-limited events – was this a Good Thing or is it competing with clubs for business? **GW** noted that most CBA-organised events come at weekends while club games are mostly weekdays, so the level of competition is limited. **MW** expressed concern that the introduction of CBA-led events of this nature might be generating an excess of supply. **JP** reported that in Derbyshire, the CBA runs an NGS-restricted event as a consolation alongside the County Pairs Championship.

ITEM 5: MIDLANDS COUNTIES GAMES

11. On the Midlands Counties League, for which the second round comes in a few days' time, there were no issues to raise.
12. We noted that the plan for a 9-High Swiss Pairs on 30th September had been pulled for lack of entries, and we needed to decide whether to continue with the planned event on 2nd December. **GW** suggested we might have to make the entry process slicker particularly where we are gathering entries through the CBA; now we have a generic form on the MidlandCC website, this could become simpler. **RW** made the point that we have yet to persuade clubs that this is an opportunity for their members, and to have the clubs advertising the event. We agreed that we would continue with the next event, but a strong push was needed from all counties – or we might cease to run these events.

ITEM 6: UNAFFILIATED CLUBS

13. **RP** reminded us that before the pandemic, the MCWG had spun off a group to look at how County Associations could or should interact with Unaffiliated Clubs, and what might persuade them to join us and the EBU. From our notes in June 2019, “those present agreed that

- Unaffiliated clubs are not affiliating because their members do not see a need to pay for all the services provided by the EBU; that
- The EBU should nevertheless aspire to be the national body for all bridge players; and that
- It is necessary to speak to all bridge players, affiliated and unaffiliated, to determine how to reconcile these points.”

14. It was suggested that more engagement with unaffiliated clubs would be good for both parties. One concern expressed was that the focus is often on interaction with these clubs’ management but it is really interaction with their membership where we see benefits. **GW** noted that in Wiltshire a club had recently affiliated without being approached. **RP** reported that OBA had spoken to several Chairs from unaffiliated clubs – and found some to be very parochial, with no interest in what happens outside that club. Café Bridge events are one avenue for bringing together players from different clubs.

15. We agreed to continue this discussion at our next meeting.

ITEM 7: COUNTY UPDATES (no time at the meeting)

16. Offline, by email we heard from:

- Leicestershire: **DB** reported all the teaching efforts in the county are showing an increase in the interest to learn bridge this year.
- Nottinghamshire: **JS** reported that she is collecting the data for teaching that is taking place in the county, to allow the County Committee to review the position. The first of a series of improver seminars took place last month, attended by 21 members and these will continue monthly.
- Derbyshire: **JP** informed us that face-to-face events are doing well enough but RealBridge turnout remains a struggle, that the county lacks enough interest to field a team for the Tollemache, and has had to reduce to 8+4+4 for the coming MCL match on RealBridge.

ITEM 9: AOB & DONM

17. **JF** ask those present how often their CBA gathered together the Chairs of their clubs, and the few answers which emerged were “only very occasionally”. **GW** reported that pre-pandemic the Wiltshire CBA had assigned a committee member to each club (affiliated or not) and gave that person the responsibility to visit the club at some point; this has not yet restarted.

18. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, 2nd November 2023, again at 10:30am. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES