



**Notes from the EBU County Chairmen's Meeting
held at the Imperial Hotel, London,
at 12:45pm, on Wednesday 5th July 2017**

Present:

Jeremy Dhondy	Chairman	Anthony Golding	Board Member
Jerry Cope	Treasurer	Ron Millet	Board Member
Ian Payn	Vice Chairman and Tournament Committee Chairman	Graham Smith	Board Member
Barry Capal	Outgoing General Manager	Peter Stockdale	Note Taker & Communications Officer
Gordon Rainsford	Incoming General Manager	Bev Purvis	Club Liaison Officer
Darren Evetts	Board Member	Kay Carter	Reception
		Lesley Millet	Chair of the Northern Counties Working Group

	Chairman or designated substitute			Chairman or designated substitute	
	Present	Apologies		Present	Apologies
Avon		Peter Shelley	Lincolnshire	-	-
Bedfordshire	-	-	London	Dominic Flint	
Berks & Bucks	Dick Davey		Manchester	Irene Davies	
Cambs & Hunts	Adam Bowden		Mersey/Cheshire	Julian Merrill	
Channel Isles - Guernsey	-	-	Middlesex	Peter Hasenson	
Channel Isles - Jersey		Norman Le Cocq	Norfolk	Graham Hardman	
Cornwall		Mike Booth	Northamptonshire	Nicky Bainbridge	
Cumbria		Trevor Ward	North East		Liz Muir
Derbyshire	Ken Smith		Nottinghamshire	Clare Batten	
Devon	Geoff Clements		Oxfordshire	Robert Procter	
Dorset	Andy Kittridge		Somerset	-	-
Essex	Margaret Curtis		Staffs & Shrops	Linda Curtis	
Gloucs	Jim Simons		Suffolk	Peter Bushby	
Hants & IoW	Richard Ray		Surrey	Trevor Hobson	
Hereford		Christine Barnes	Sussex	Andy Ryder	
Hertfordshire	Gary Conrad		Warwickshire	Myra Scott	
Isle of Man	-	-	Westmorland	-	-
Kent		Malcolm Lewis	Wiltshire	Roger Karn	
Lancashire		Bill Aston	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby	
Leicestershire	David Pollard		Yorkshire	Nick Woolvern	

Apologies from: Heather Dhondy (Board Member), Darren Evetts (Board Member), Rob Lawy (Board Member)

Opening comments

Jeremy Dhondy (JD), Chairman, opened the meeting by welcoming all those present.

He gave thanks to General Manager, Barry Capal, who was retiring at the end of the week after eleven years of service, and added that Gordon Rainsford would be replacing him.

JD gave a short overview of the goal of the meeting. He expressed his disappointment that not all counties were involved with their regional County Working Group (CWG), and that not all of the CWGs were functioning effectively. He hoped that the meeting would help to identify the right structure for addressing common areas of concern amongst the counties, and for capitalising on the things that counties were doing well – in this area he cited the running of competitions, and the

counties which organised good activities for young bridge players. He also asked everyone to consider how things may look in 10-15 years, rather than simply at addressing 'short-term issues'. He concluded his introduction by advising that Darren Evetts had stood down from his position as the member of the EBU Board with responsibility for the CWGs. How he might be replaced would be dependent on the outcome of this meeting.

Graham Smith (GS) gave an outline of the structure for the afternoon:

- Those present would split in to four groups
- Within each group they should agree on common areas of success, and of concern
- The groups should then prioritise the areas of concern
- If possible they should identify ways in which these concerns could be addressed in future
- It was hoped that at the end of the meeting a project group would be formed. This group would meet in future to propose the ways in which the main issues of greatest concern could be addressed

Prior to the meeting a survey of the counties had been undertaken to gather some data, and this had then been circulated for consideration. GS gave the following 'bullet point summary' of the survey's results:

- Competitions were an area of success
- Most counties had specific goals towards which they were working
- The key service provided to the counties by the EBU was to provide a national 'structure'
- Whilst the skill set of the volunteers available to the counties was adequate, there was often insufficient volunteers, and they were often unable to provide sufficient time
- The financial position of the counties was rarely of concern
- The demographics of the membership was of concern
- There was not enough engagement with the counties/EBU by the membership
- There was a consensus that change is needed to meet what bridge players now need/want
- Attracting and keeping players is an area of concern. GS advised that Club Liaison Officer, Bev Purvis, reports that unaffiliated clubs see the EBU/counties/affiliated clubs as "cold and unapproachable"
- The levels of use of 'modern technology' is good

Identifying the common issues

After the first group discussion to identify common issues, the groups were invited to report on what they had discussed and that they had written down. These notes should be read in conjunction with those transcripts. Those making the presentations noted that there was a lot of overlap in the issues which had been discussed, so often did not cover areas which had been addressed by previous presenters.

Group B

- A primary issue is whether counties understand what the members want, and whether the members understand what the counties do
- Have counties updated their constitutions since the introduction of Universal Membership, or are they still operating as before?
- The resources available to smaller clubs are an issue
- Teaching is the key to increasing membership
- University bridge used to be a way to produce players, but nowadays it is very hard to get that going
- They questioned why more 'social players' aren't members – is there the right environment? They noted that a lot of bridge isn't covered by Universal Membership
- There needs to be succession planning and ensuring there are enough volunteers
- Inter-county interaction is a positive thing. It should be used to share ideas and best practice

Group A

- There is a definite split between affiliated and unaffiliated clubs and their members, and between competitive and social players
- Intercommunication throughout all levels is an issue
- There is a lack of skills and personnel – how can the county supporting failing clubs?
- The ageing membership is a cause for concern
- Could work be done with the U3A? Its structure may make this difficult, but teaching materials and support could be provided
- Could tiers of membership be introduced to involve social clubs, and teaching clubs such as the U3A?
- The atmosphere within bridge needs to be more friendly

Group D

- They considered both the 40-60 age group, and 'youth', to be within the 'younger age group'. The 40-60 group would likely play for longer and be more involved, so would provide value for money on the investment to get them involved. Engaging with schools/youth would be a membership strategy with only direct benefits in the long term if they returned to the game, albeit there would be an altruistic element – as it didn't provide an immediate answer it may not be something to be considered by counties which were struggling financially.
- Something needed to be done to engage with, and 'capture', unaffiliated clubs
- How can counties help to support struggling clubs?
- Are there enough volunteers and do they have enough skills?
- How should counties engage with clubs and members?

Group C

- Is the age profile any older than it was before, or are we simply more aware of it?
- The numbers and quality of volunteers should be addressed as some people are doing too much/everything
- Lots want to learn to play, but keeping them in clubs is a problem
- There should be communication between counties to share successes
- Most clubs seem to be happy, and are resistant to change, even if they are simply surviving rather than thriving.

Prioritising the issues, and identifying solutions

After the second group discussion to prioritise the issues and identify solutions, the groups were invited to report on what they had discussed and that they had written down. These notes should be read in conjunction with the transcripts of their notes. Those making the presentations noted that there was a lot of overlap in the issues which had been discussed, so often did not cover areas which had been addressed by previous presenters.

Group C

- The main issue is teaching, but also nursing the interested players through into affiliated club sessions. This could possibly be done through 'feeder clubs' (which may or may not be affiliated)
- There were no specific ideas on how the lack of volunteers could be addressed, but they suggested that each county considered what would happen in the hypothetical situation

that all their committee were “in a car crash” – could all positions be filled and the county continue to operate successfully?

- It is important for the counties to share success stories. ‘Connecting people’ is important.
- The CWGs add value and should be continued. Semi-formal groups could also form, and then share with others what they discuss and achieve
- The key to solving the ‘age profile’ problem is to ensure people learn and progress in to clubs

Group D

- Other problems cannot be resolved without sufficient volunteers
- Personal contacts are an important way of getting people involved on committees
- Expand the volunteer base by involving unaffiliated clubs in the running of county affairs
- Break down the roles in to smaller tasks so they require less time commitment
- To address the 40-60 age group the county should run Fast Track Bridge courses
- Use youth bridge as a way to engage with the parents and interest them in playing
- Café bridge is a way to bring unaffiliated/social players in to county activities
- There should be more flexibility in how teachers are trained. The county should fund teaching projects
- Possibly give more free entries to competitions when certain Master Point levels are reached – possibly for county events at lower levels, and national events at higher levels

Group A

- Successes should be promoted, and best practice should be shared
- ‘Beacon clubs’ should form part of the EBU’s strategy
- The EBU should help with succession planning, and provide training in certain counties
- Consideration should be given to ways to attract unaffiliated clubs – possibly offer affiliation to the club, but not membership of the EBU to the clubs members.

Group B

- Need to address the issue of the members who have no interest in the EBU or the county
- Possibly the county should undertake a survey of its members to identify what the membership want, and whether they want to move things forward. Do they want to be part of looking for a solution to move things forward, and if so change should be driven from the membership up, rather than the committee down
- Should investment be made in helping successful clubs to continue growing? Or in trying to support failing clubs? Which gives a better return on investment?
- Provide help in areas of marketing and advertising
- CWGs are ideal for tackling problems and for working together with neighbouring counties on common issues. CWGs are needed to facilitate the discussions which can take place, and to help form policy from the ground up.
- IF CWG’s fulfil their potential it may necessitate a review of the EBU Constitution with respect to the relationship of shareholders.

Conclusions

The possibility of forming a new project group, made up of volunteers, to look at the issues raised was considered. The majority present preferred that this process not be devolved from the CWGs. The possibility of the group being formed by members of the active WGs in the North and Midlands was considered, however it was agreed that there should be a national consensus, so involvement from southern counties was needed. It was agreed that counties in the south should make greater effort to hold meetings, using Skype if necessary. This would then enable the nationwide network of CWGs to be involved in the process.

A transcript of the groups notes, and a summary of their presentations, would be circulated to all Chairmen, including those which did not attend the meeting.

Closing comments

JD gave the following pieces of news

- The work on Fast Track Bridge would soon be completed, and the books would be ready for the autumn. There would be a series of presentations in August at venues around the country to introduce the material.
- Online games, hosted by Funbridge, would be starting in September. It is hoped this would meet the needs of the increasing number of members who play online, and may also act as a way to encourage more people to be involved with EBU competitions.
- Following the consultation which took place earlier in the year, it had been decided to maintain the exemption within the NGS system which was available to hosts. Gordon Rainsford's report on the consultation would be made available in the near future.
- The preliminary VAT ruling had been in the EBU's favour – although that did not mean it was guaranteed to be approved by the judges hearing the case. Should it be approved then it may have implications for clubs which are member-owned, and VAT registered. There had been offers from experts within the membership to give free advice to the clubs which may be affected in the event of good news.

JD thanked everyone for attending. The meeting finished at 4pm.

County Chairmen's Meeting – Transcript of notes

To be read in conjunction with the notes from the meeting.

A dashed line indicates the end of a sheet of the flipchart used to make the notes.

Group A

Berks & Bucks
Dorset
Hertfordshire
Manchester
Northamptonshire
Worcestershire
Ron Millet

Document self-evident

- Main issue
 - Affiliated/unaffiliated
 - Competitive/social
Transition
- Relationship between EBU + counties - communication

1

- Role of county ???
 - Comps
 - Support for failing clubs
- Question of lack of skills and personnel club/county

2

- Ageing membership

EBU

Tier of membership for social clubs
1st time buyer regime
U3A

Atmosphere at clubs/EBU events needs to be more friendly

Communication – EBU → Counties → Clubs → members

Communication of successes – e.g. Stamford

Bottom up – ideas

- EBU strategy
 - Delivery through expertise + case studies communicated
-

Study of how to best use teachers to feed into clubs

Succession planning
EBU → selected counties
 training admin – jointly financed?
Online courses? Organisation teacher → counties
National school day for bridge administrators

Identifying and nurturing home grown skills

Transition beginners → club → competition

Transition social → competitive
 Membership officers – Yorks experience

Offers to social B Clubs to get them into EBU

Development + implementation

Working groups with EBU board member present but not running it. County members.
EBU needs to resist being a barrier to the counties.

Group B

Cambs & Hunts
Essex
Leicestershire
Merseyside & Cheshire
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Yorkshire
Gordon Rainsford

Common issues

- Apathy towards EBU by counties/apathy towards counties by the membership
 - Constitutional issues for counties – what is a member?
 - Counties understanding what membership needs?
-

- Resources (teachers/premises) for smaller clubs
 - Marketing/advertising in bridge 'deserts'
 - Teaching → membership ↑
 - Engage young people (university bridge, twitter/facebook)
 - Schools?
 - Weekend bridge
 - Social players not members – why? Provide environment for them
-

- Succession planning (clubs & counties)
 - Volunteers
 - Inter-county coordination (sharing ideas/best practice)
 - U3A
-

- Inertia
 - Apathy of bridge players towards EBU/counties – satisfied with club membership
 - Do 'we' understand membership needs

 - Identify problems
 - Feedback from county (survey?) – suggest solutions or get ideas
 - Act on main issues
-

- Failing clubs – why?
 - Movement to bigger clubs
 - Natural wastage
 - Move to 'social' bridge
- Helping growing clubs – win/win

- Teaching (if possible)
 - Trouble shooting (identifying problems)
 - M & A help
-

Regional Working Groups

Use these groups to look at issues arising and provide ways forward.

Working groups to drive 'policy' changes at EBU level.

'Bottom' up

Group C

Derbyshire
Gloucestershire
Middlesex
Suffolk
Surrey
Sussex
Lesley Millet

Working groups – meet 3 times/year

Frustration

Midlands

- 4 Age profile
- 2 Volunteers
- 1 Keeping new players. Education (ongoing)
- 3 Sharing successes (e.g. youth bridge)

Do sufficient people want change?

- 1 Education
 - Ongoing education
 - Progressed
 - Non-affiliated feeder clubs
 - 2 Volunteers
 - Succession planning
 - 3 Sharing successes
 - Working groups
 - Communication
 - 4 Age profile
-

Group D

Devon
Hants & IOW
London
Norfolk
Staffs & Shrops
Wiltshire
Warwickshire
Bev Purvis

Younger demographic – 40-60	(2)
NA club	4
Support for failing clubs	4
Quality + commitment of volunteers	1
Engagement with members/clubs	
Youth	
Teaching	3

Volunteers

Personal contacts/clubs
NA clubs
Smaller roles

Younger demographic 40-60

County fast track w/e lessons
Engage parents through children
Café bridge

Teaching

Training

- more flexibility
- Funding
