



**Notes from the EBU County Chairmen's Meeting
held via Zoom, at 14:00, on Wednesday 20th May 2020**

Present:

Ian Payn	Chairman	Gillian Fawcett	Vice Chairman
Jerry Cope	Treasurer	Gordon Rainsford	Chief Executive Officer
Anthony Golding	Board Member	Kiat Huang	Board Member
Rob Lawy	Board Member	Ron Millet	Board Member
Bev Purvis	Board Member	Patrick Sheilds	Board Member
Sam Kelly	Note Taker & Communications Officer	Andy Margetts	EBED Chairman

	Chairman or designated substitute			Chairman or designated substitute	
	Present	Apologies		Present	Apologies
Avon	Sue O'Hara		London	Dominic Flint	
Bedfordshire	Colin O'Hara		London	James Smith	
Berks & Bucks		Dick Davey	Manchester	Alan Mould	Irene Davies
Cambs & Hunts	Paul Barden		Mersey/Cheshire		Christopher Raymond
Channel Islands	Andy Hall		Middlesex	Peter Hasenson	
Cornwall		Liz Perry	Middlesex	Lyn Fry	
Cumbria	Trevor Ward		Norfolk		Graham Hardman
Derbyshire	Jim Parker		Northamptonshire		Chris Wormleighton
Devon		Geoff Clements	North East	Adrian Darnell	
Dorset		Tim Dunsby	North East	Nigel Durie	
Essex	Paul Mollison		Nottinghamshire		Toni Smith
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields		Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot	
Hants & IoW		Andy Hughes	Somerset		Tony Russ
Herefordshire		Christine Barnes	Staffs & Shrops		Pamela Booth-Jones
Hertfordshire	Gary Conrad		Suffolk	Jeff Orton	
Hertfordshire	Andrew Davis		Surrey	Trevor Hobson	
Hertfordshire	Keith Strait		Sussex	Peter Clinch	
Isle of Man		John Large	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley	
Kent	Pail Gibbons		Westmorland		John Ellwood
Kent	Norman Inniss		Wiltshire	Lucy Cross	Richard Gwyer
Lancashire		Bill Aston	Worcestershire	Barbara Griffiths	
Leicestershire		David Pollard	Yorkshire	Nick Woolven	
Lincolnshire		Reg Loosley	Yorkshire	Lesley Millet	

Apologies from: Heather Dhondy (Board Member), Gillian Fawcett (Board Member), Anthony Golding (Board Member), Rob Lawy (Board Member), Ron Millett (Board Member)

Opening comments

- Ian Payn (IP), Chairman, opened the meeting by welcoming all those present.

Financial Strategy

- Jerry Cope (JC) (Treasurer) circulated a report prior to the meeting and highlighted some of the points made in the paper

Strategic Approach

- Patrick Sheilds (PS) talked about the longer term strategy for the EBU.

PS highlighted three key points:

- Online bridge is here to stay, we have to find a way to make online and face to face bridge work together and complement each other
- Have to find a way of better integrating teaching bridge with the playing of duplicate bridge in EBU clubs
- Make sure what we are doing benefits all players and EBU members, not just the top players

Working Group

- Gillian Fawcett (GF) Vice-Chair, and Chair of Working Group.
- GF noted the informality of the working group and how the meetings are a place for the board to discuss new ideas and share information
- GF asked for Counties to email her with any ideas they wished to share

Online Games

Gordon Rainsford (GR) gave an update on the online games being run by the EBU and EBU clubs. GR circulated a paper prior to the meeting. He highlighted a couple of points from the paper:

- Player session for EBU BBO games have now surpassed the 50,000 mark
- We have over 90 EBU clubs signed up for virtual clubs
- The EBU acted faster to Covid-19 than many other National Bridge Organisations (NBO's)
- GR stressed the importance of all clubs and counties submitting sessions for UMS

Education

Rob Lawy (RL) gave an update relating to education and bridge. He stated that education is central to the survival of bridge and the EBU. He highlighted two main points that the EBU should focus on:

- The facilitation of teaching bridge online and face to face
- The enabling of bridge players to easily progress from social games to club games

Membership

- Ron Millet (RM) gave an update on the membership campaign
- He highlighted details from his paper that was circulated prior to the meeting
- RM urged every club and county to open a virtual club. This will boost income for both the clubs/counties as well as the EBU, but also keep the social contact for many of the club members and keep the club communities together
- RM also encouraged counties to take up online teaching as the appetite for learning among new players is there

Clubs

Bev Purvis (BP) gave an update on clubs.

- BP highlighted the initiatives from Somerset, Suffolk and Surrey, but noted that there were lots of counties and clubs working hard during this time and getting members set up and playing online.
- GR also confirmed that there are lots of opportunities for online TD training.
- BP encouraged clubs and counties to set up new virtual clubs to attract non-affiliated EBU members.

COUNTY CHAIRS' MEETING: EBU FINANCES

SOME BACKGROUND

1. Based on the 19/20 budget, the EBU turns over a little above £1.7m a year, and we aim to break even, or preferably show a small profit, over the 4-year international cycle. Last year was a deficit year, with a budget deficit of £22.9k, which we were on course to meet, until a disastrous March caused by the virus, leaving an out-turn deficit of over £60k. Our reserves finished the year at just under £500k
2. Our income is broadly made up as follows:
 - Membership (Mainly UM): 41%
 - Bridge warehouse 15%
 - Competitions 26%
 - Other (including Sims, Licences, English Bridge advertising): 18%
3. Our staff costs make up about 25% of our expenditure, remembering there is a big non-staff cost in staging competitions, buying goods for the warehouse, posting English Bridge, Council rates, IT, subscriptions to WBF/EBF, EBED etc.
4. In terms of contribution to our cost base Membership Income, the key number is the contribution we get of **£570k pa from Membership**.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

5. With that normal Membership contribution dropping close to zero, we have had to take some drastic cost-cutting activity whilst still trying to provide a service to our Members, not least in the new online world, where we have rapidly built capacity. With our premises currently effectively closed we have (highlights only, all costs have come under scrutiny):
 - Successfully applied for and received a government grant of £25k
 - Secured a rates holiday for 12 months
 - Furloughed staff and are considering more
 - Eliminated Competitions expenditure
 - Eliminated expenditure on Internationals, except where committed
 - Put the June issue (at least) of English Bridge online (which does affect advertising)
 - Eliminated, at least for Q1 and Q2 payments to EBED, which has caused them to furlough half their staff, and means some of their activity/support has ceased;
 - Virtually eliminated cleaning for our building
 - Reduced our IT licences
 - Deferred our VAT payment to March 2021
 - Unilaterally deferred our payments to WBF and EBF (we await their response!)
 - Closed the Warehouse apart from probably a brief opening once a month;
 - Postponed/eliminated the club equipment grant scheme;

WHAT IS THE EFFECT?

6. April is a high expenditure month with annual payments, such as insurances, and not a full month effect of some of our economies, so we were cash-flow negative for that month of around £70k.

7. It looks as if May through July will be cash flow negative of around £25-30k if we can get online income up to £20k or more. As the furlough scheme is wound down, without further action, that will increase from August onwards, although we await details from the Chancellor. We may need further action on staffing to deal with the furlough wind down.
8. As an example, if this rate of cash loss is maintained until November, I estimate our reserves by then will be around £250k, and I would not want to see them sink below £200k. In any event if we do return to anything close to normality, the reserves will need rebuilding, almost certainly at least partially through pricing action. (Remember we have only deferred some of our expenditure not eliminated it.)
9. **So, we still need to close the cash-gap** by:
 - (CRUCIALLY) increasing our online income, not least that all our Clubs pay what they should be paying through the terms of their affiliation – we would be grateful for County assistance in this; we would like to get our online income consistently above £40k a month;
 - Continuing to examine our costs and processes, including future issues of English Bridge;
 - Looking to Counties and Clubs to use their own cash reserves to stimulate and facilitate income-generating online activity, invest in teaching new players and preparing for some return to face-to-face bridge. For the moment we would prefer Counties/Clubs to use their cash this way rather than (say) make donations to the EBU – that may change!
 - Everyone ensuring has a greater understanding of the EBU's parlous financial position.

Jerry Cope
Treasurer

The EBU board C19 working group

This was set up in response to the government lockdown, initially to consider how to help counties and clubs get people back to the tables after lockdown. As it became clear that the restrictions would last longer than we might have anticipated, the group has met every couple of weeks or so to ensure that the board is up to date on activities during lockdown, and to make recommendations for ongoing support to clubs.

The minutes of the C19WG are available on the EBU website and can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/minutes-and-reports/C19/7-April.pdf>

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/minutes-and-reports/C19/22-April.pdf>

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/minutes-and-reports/C19/5-May.pdf>

In summary, the group has:

- Kept up to date with the EBU's online offering, and made recommendations where appropriate to ensure that clubs as well as individual members can benefit from opportunities to play on BBO;
- Made recommendations to EBED in order to facilitate more online teaching;
- Made recommendations regarding EBU communication with clubs;
- Collated ideas and encouraged debate about what we can do to help when the lockdown restrictions start to ease for bridge.

EBU online bridge in the time of COVID-19

Prior to the lockdown the EBU's connection with online bridge was:

- An arrangement with Bridge Club Live (BCL) that they are an EBU online club and give master points for their games;
- Daily robot games on Funbridge;
- An annual Online Knockout Teams competition;
- Provision for other online knockout teams matches to be played online with the agreement of both teams;
- We had tried running online tournaments on Bridgebase Online (BBO) in 2013 but they never attracted enough players to succeed; we were in discussions with BBO early this year to restart these games and this meant that we were in a good position, by comparison with other NBOs, to start running online tournaments when bridge clubs stopped running live games.

The position for organised online bridge now is:

- BCL continue to run their games and have provided a way of clubs' members competing with each other on the platform;
- Our Funbridge games continue and Funbridge have also introduced a way for clubs to run competitive robot games among their own members;
- Online knockout matches continue to be available and have been taken up more than before, since the alternative is that matches do not get played;
- We have run two seasons of our "Lockdown League" with over 160 teams in 12 divisions playing eight-board matches against all other teams in the same division, each season lasting four weeks;
- We started running 12-board tournaments on BBO in the middle of March and now have five of them every day, averaging around 50 tables, the largest having been 97 tables;
- We introduced Virtual Clubs, which had first been created on BBO for ACBL clubs to run games the way they wanted, for their own members, setting their own price to create income for the club;
- We currently have 80 clubs and counties signed up for this and most afternoons see about 15 virtual club games in progress;
- Many members play bridge online in a less formal way, either by playing teams matches they set up themselves or by using provisions like the BBO Casual area.

Income from online games

The EBU BBO games are currently bringing in about £10,000 per month to the EBU after the TDs have been paid.

There is an additional income of over £8,000 a month which has been agreed by BBO as a temporary contribution to a fund for our EBU clubs. We intend to use this initially to pay the club affiliation fee for all clubs.

Funbridge robot games bring in about £1,000 per month and BCL fees amount to a bit over £200 a month.

We are going to start charging £20 per team for the Lockdown League, which we expect to bring in around £2,500 per month.

UMS payments, from our Virtual Clubs and from other clubs submitting their results to us and paying UMS on them, are expected to bring in £11,000 in May and to rise thereafter as more clubs join the scheme.

Education

The problem

The number of bridge players playing in clubs is in decline. We need more bridge players and we need them to play in affiliated clubs. The role of education is to facilitate all of this - that is to provide appropriate training for teachers with an appropriate resource base that they can use. Teaching bridge will increase the number of bridge players. But that is not enough, we need to develop systems and procedures that will enable them to move seamlessly to become EBU members and progress to club-based bridge and beyond.

Hence we have two stands in our education strategy:

- a) to teach bridge and provide appropriate resources for that - both online and face-to-face;
- b) to move from playing social bridge to more competitive forms of bridge in affiliated clubs.

We are now in an unprecedented position. Essentially, *'the future has been pushed into the present'*. We have to be proactive. We need to respond to this and do so in a manner that is consistent with our overall goals and aspirations for the game.

EBED

EBED benefits from charitable status. This essentially means that it is VAT exempt and receives the majority of its funding from the EBU. EBED has responsibility for training directors and for teacher training. It is responsible for coordinating and developing resources for face-to-face teaching and online use.

EBEDs remit does not include responsibility for moving students into affiliated clubs. This is due to a) the requirement that had to be met for it to attain charitable status and; b) due to the particular funding model that was adopted.

Ongoing developments:

EBED is developing an online resources based on the Bridge for All books. However, this is in the early stage of development.

The EBED/EBTA teaching resources that currently exist are not freely available, although they are available for a modest membership fee.

The Board of the EBU is in an ongoing discussion with EBED about how it might do more. It has recently advertised EBTA membership benefits on the EBU website (£25).

No Fear Bridge have a model for teaching that is based on students rather than the teachers paying EBED/EBTA. Might this model be appropriate for us to adopt in the future?

Threat

Other providers and online virtual clubs have been faster out of the blocks and have online offerings already. They are teaching bridge but there is no link to the EBU and our clubs.

There are many more people playing online than were doing before the lockdown. There is a danger that they are lost forever to the online game or to non-affiliated clubs.

Opportunity

We need to use the crisis as a vehicle for encouraging bridge playing. There are many people looking at new hobbies and pastimes.

We are currently producing a short video which tells people how they can use Zoom to help teach bridge to their friends and family. The online game offers an opportunity, to recruit young and older people into the game.

We would like Counties and clubs to join us in trying to achieve this and would welcome your thoughts and ideas.

Finally

What have we missed?

Rob Lawy

How can Counties support clubs today?

The EBU and most Counties now offer on-line BBO games for their members but we know that the majority of our members have never played in an EBU or County event. Whilst Covid presents us with an opportunity to reach out to more of these players by offering gentle on-line games using simple systems, many of our club players need the security of familiar players to encourage them to try on-line bridge. The virtual club scheme is a lifeline for clubs and (literally) for many of their isolated elderly members and generates much needed UMS payments. Many Counties have already taken on the challenge of assisting clubs in various ways and today's meeting presents us with an opportunity to share ways in which to help clubs such as those below and your success stories.

1. Training and supporting club directors – to enable clubs to offer their own virtual club games. This is the most beneficial way Counties can support clubs today.
2. Publicising club games – a weekly timetable of virtual club games taking place in the County with contacts. Many are open to club members and their friends so that members of nearby clubs unable to offer virtual games can also play.
3. Financial support – where Counties have the funds to do so and clubs are struggling financially. Unfortunately the EBU can no longer support the club grant scheme.
4. BBO “training” for members for both clubs and Counties - using Zoom or similar to demonstrate how to play on-line and having links to BBO FAQ. Clubs to be encouraged to provide BBO “Buddy” support to help their members play on-line.
5. Mentoring good club players – Zoom tutorials and on-line play provide great mentoring opportunities and more good players have time on their hands in lockdown to encourage a new generation of tournament players.
6. Time to approach Unaffiliated clubs – most unaffiliated clubs don't have the critical mass or support to offer on-line club games. Virtual clubs are benefiting from new and returning members wanting to play in a local on-line game. Unaffiliated clubs can see the benefit of the EBU's virtual club scheme. This is a real opportunity. The EBU has one new affiliated club (the Chiltern Bridge Club) set up to run 3 on-line sessions a week, one for a large unaffiliated club, one for all local payers and 1 for a couple of smaller affiliated clubs that don't have the critical mass or human resource to run their own games.
7. Publicise the EBU Club Forum – this is currently underused but enables clubs to get further advice and support from each other and from the EBU's Club Liaison Officer.
8. On-line teaching/supervised play – again publicising the on-line teaching that is happening County wide is more important than ever as fewer teachers are continuing to teach on-line and the location of the teacher is not so important. New courses of lessons often start in September when are most unlikely to be returning to F2F bridge teaching.

Bev Purvis 16/05/2020