



**Notes from the EBU County Chair's Meeting
held via Zoom, at 13:00, on Wednesday 26th May 2021**

Present:

Ian Payn	Chair	Gillian Fawcett	Vice Chair
Jerry Cope	Treasurer	Gordon Rainsford	Chief Executive Officer
Adrian Darnell	Board Member	Cathryn Fox	Board Member
Anthony Golding	Board Member	Rob Lawy	Board Member
Ron Millet	Board Member	Kay Preddy	Board Member
Patrick Shields	Board Member	Gayle Webb	Board Member
Andy Margetts	EBED Chair	Lee Guy	EBED Vice-Chair
Giorgio Provenza	EBED CEO	Sam Kelly	Note Taker & Communications Officer

	Chair or designated substitute			Chair or designated substitute	
	Present	Apologies		Present	Apologies
Avon	Peter Shelley		Mersey/Cheshire	Julian Merrill	Christopher Raymond
Bedfordshire	Colin O'Hara		Mersey/Cheshire	Paul Roberts	
Bedfordshire	Pippa Green		Middlesex	Peter Hasenson	
Berks & Bucks	Mick Green		Middlesex	Lyn Fry	
Berks & Bucks		Mike Ribbins	Norfolk	Robert Smith	
Cambs & Hunts	Adam Bowden		North East	Nigel Durie	
Channel Islands	Norman Le Cocq	Andy Hall	Northamptonshire	Chris Wormleighton	
Cornwall	Liz Perry		Northamptonshire	Fred Davies	
Cumbria		Trevor Ward	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard	
Derbyshire	Jim Parker		Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot	
Devon	Geoff Clements		Somerset	Tony Russ	
Dorset	Mark Hooper		Staffs & Shrops		Pamela Booth-Jones
Essex		Paul Mollison	Suffolk	Jeff Orton	Malcolm Pryor
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgewick		Suffolk	Richard Evans	
Hants & IoW		Andy Hughes	Surrey	Tim Warren	
Herefordshire	Chris Chowney		Surrey	Sue Thorburn	
Herefordshire	Keith Stait		Sussex	Peter Clinch	
Hertfordshire	Paul Littlewood		Sussex	John (Treasurer)	
Isle of Man		John Large	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley	Darren Evetts
Kent	Paul Gibbons		Warwickshire	Myra Scott	
Kent	Norman Inniss		Westmorland		John Ellwood
Lancashire		Brian Irlam	Wiltshire	Lucy Cross	
Leicestershire		Dean Benton	Worcestershire	Barbara Griffiths	
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang		Yorkshire	David Guild	
Lincolnshire	Maria Vietri-Nelson		Yorkshire	Nick Woolven	
London	Chris Duckworth	Dominic Flint	Yorkshire	Lesley Millet	
Manchester	Irene Davies				
Manchester	Alan Mould				

Opening comments

Ian Payn (IP), Chair, opened the meeting by welcoming all those present and thanked everyone for coming. He stated he hoped this would be a good opportunity for the board to discuss proposed plans and strategy and to receive feedback from counties. IP confirmed the etiquette for feedback or questions via the chat function.

Financial Strategy

JC (Treasurer) noted when he spoke at the County Chairs meeting last year, the EBU was not in a good place financially. However, with a huge amount of hard work (particularly from GR and everyone involved in setting up competitions online), and difficult decisions and redundancies made over the last year, by the end of quarter three we had managed to stabilise, but still with a heavy loss. However, quarter four was amazing for income, particularly March, when people played a lot of online bridge. This means we may have a small surplus for the financial year end 2021. This is slightly skewed, as we had over £100k worth of government assistance, we had £25k worth of grants and a lot of furlough money, as well as some very welcome donations, including from counties, plus no international expenses of any kind. We also had a reduction in the fees owed to the World Bridge Federation and the European Bridge League. This all totalled approximately £200k, without which we would have had a heavy loss.

This means that for the current financial year we need to find another £200k worth of income or make reductions in expenditure of £200k to break even this year. JC cautioned that we would not receive a reduction in fees from the WBF or EBL this year. JC also noted that the April UMS figures were considerably down from March numbers, with current May figures on the same level as April.

JC laid out a plan to break even across the two years, to use the small surplus from 2021 to cover the deficit expected in 2022. This will reduce the shortfall.

JC reiterated that the EBU is in a much better position now than it was thought we would be and this is down to a lot of hard work by everybody right across the bridge family, so a massive thanks to all involved. He asked counties to comment on their financial positions or to ask any questions about his report.

Alan Mould (AM) (Manchester) asked if JC thought the loss from 2021-22 would be a one-off or if this would repeat in 2022-23 and going forward. JC said it's difficult to predict, membership numbers seem to be holding up, and online is more profitable than face to face but it depends how much and where people want to play. The key is what will happen in the next quarter four. It will be likely that price increases will come in 2022-23, and staff pay is one of a couple of areas that will need attention.

Norman Inniss (NI) (Kent) confirmed that Kent have just about broken even. The big success in Kent is the 9 High games that have been running online weekly. Kent have no ongoing costs which helped.

David Guild (DG) (Yorkshire) noted that a lot of people have not been playing online at all, so when these members start playing face to face, this will be additional income. He also stated that Peter Cox from Australian Bridge Federation gave a very good presentation for Bridge: A Mind Sport for All (BAMSA) that is available on YouTube with statistical information from returning to face to face bridge following lockdown.

Alan Mould (AM) (Manchester) stated Manchester county have almost no online presence, but this has been filled by clubs running online games. He noted that most Manchester clubs are planning to continue to run online games alongside face to face games.

Peter Clinch (PC) (Sussex) asked about pricing of Green Pointed events for counties compared to EBU, and what impact this might have on the EBU. GR stated that competitions pricing is being reviewed.

Many people included an update for their county in the chat function, IP confirmed these would be looked at following the meeting.

Chairs Survey Results

IP thanked those involved with the County Chair survey, GW, CF and KP.

KP talked through the results from the recent County Chairs survey. She thanked everyone for responding and noted the high response rate with 35/39 counties completing the survey.

KP highlighted some of the results of the survey. Full details of the presentation are attached below.

KP noted there are variations of club affiliation across counties, an average of 50% of clubs are affiliated to the EBU. Membership to population ratio also varies across counties, with some as low as 4 in 10k and some as high as 32 per 10k.

Nearly half of responders expect membership to remain the same over the next three years, with nearly half expecting membership to decrease. Only a small percentage expect membership to grow in their county. Nearly all responders expect online bridge to continue.

The results also showed how clubs performed during the pandemic, with about 50% of clubs now playing online in some form. The number of players has not decreased as much as the number of clubs. Results showed that it is anticipated that up to 20% of clubs will not re-open.

The survey asked counties to share their successful strategies for recruiting new learners, responses included posters, newspapers, word of mouth, social media and taster sessions. These responses help the EBU to develop strategies to share with counties.

The value of the EBU was looked at during the survey, with details about how the EBU has supported counties during the pandemic. Many responders highlighted the following achievements of the EBU: moving to playing online, preparing advice for the future and keeping members engaged and informed. KP highlighted some of the suggestions that were given as part of the survey, with a lot of focus from the responses on increasing membership and teaching.

KP concluded her presentation with planning for the future. The number of players has been decreasing and is likely to continue to do so. We need a drive for new players and teachers, this should be a collaborative effort from the EBU, Counties and Clubs working together.

Richard Evans (RE) (Suffolk) asked about the potential of using RealBridge to help in recruitment and teaching, with ideas for how to appeal to new learners and to link to teaching materials. KP stated that there are very early discussions with RealBridge currently. Kiat Huang (KH) also stated that the English Bridge School could be a nice integration to RealBridge if they were willing.

EBED Update (AM)

AM gave an update from EBED of changes since the last update at the AGM.

AM confirmed that EBED are looking to train more teachers. The training package has been tweaked to incentivise good teachers to get additional help to progress and develop their role, one option being mentoring. The aim is to produce better teachers, not just more teachers.

Online teacher training courses will continue throughout 2021, three have already taken place this year, dates for face to face teacher training will be announced shortly.

AM confirmed EBED did a series of seminar training sessions on RealBridge details how to use the platform to the best advantage for all EBTA teachers. He also talked about the current offering available through the English Bridge School (EBS). EBS also runs online supervised play sessions to support students whose teachers have not been running sessions during lockdown. EBS also run gentle duplicate sessions on RealBridge as an affiliated club, through which they have signed up over 500 new members to the EBU. EBED are about to trial a seminar on 3rd June at the end of the gentle duplicate sessions, aimed at the same audience.

EBED have been developing some materials for clubs to help them attract social bridge players to join duplicate bridge sessions.

The programme for TD training has been published for face to face training later in 2021; there will also be refresher sessions available.

The Schools Cup was able to take place this year, with over 20 tables. This was a higher turnout than previous years, for which thanks go to Giorgio. EBED are working on a new way of teaching bridge to school students, with an emphasis on learn whilst playing. A new volunteer Youth Officer has been announced.

EBED have had a difficult year financially, with a loss of £100k in the last financial year. The majority of people working at EBED are volunteers, with only three full time equivalents of staff.

AM introduced Lee Guy (LG) as successor to AM. LG gave a brief overview of his bridge playing history and his employment background.

Membership Initiatives

KP thanked her colleagues GW and CF for help in putting the details of the proposed marketing strategy together. KP highlight some details from the report. The full report can be read below.

The report focused on the primary ambition of the EBU, which is to increase the number of players who play the game of bridge in England. A country wide drive to get new players and teachers is required. This needs to be based on collaboration between the EBU, the counties and clubs. The responses from the county survey show that the majority of responders agree with this ambition. However, financial constraints must be considered.

The report showed that membership grew slightly from 2011 to 2014 and has since plateaued at around 54k members. However, although the number of total members is showing as stable, the number of regular players has been decreasing.

KP had looked at the potential for new players and concluded that there is great potential for new players, but the EBU is constrained by a number of factors, including finances, a bottleneck of teachers, and lack of volunteers. KP noted that online play has made bridge more accessible to new players. Other areas that may benefit from being more accessible are clubs and competitions. Some of these areas are best tackled by the clubs and counties who have more accurate local information. The EBU will approach the details from a national level with nationwide campaigns. Regional campaigns from counties and local campaigns from clubs will also be needed for success.

KP talked about the tools that the EBU currently provide. There are also further ideas in development, including a library of press articles; a library of shareable publicity leaflets, etc. The focus on these services will be making them collaborative, shareable and useable for all clubs and

counties. Communication will be key in implementing these new ideas and a communication sub-committee has been set up, with the first meetings already having taken place.

KP concluded on a positive note, saying that while it will take hard work, the plans are being implemented and she asked for any feedback. The key to success in this operation is collaboration between the national body, counties, clubs, members and teachers. There has to be buy-in, and each set of stakeholders needs to work with other sets to achieve the end – more players.

RM proposed regional development officers to help facilitate membership campaigns locally. The roles will be part time and paid, with costs covered by additional session receipts that they gain. RM notes that each county had been sent a monthly analysis of session data and membership activity in their areas, it is hoped this will encourage counties to target failing areas within their county. It is hoped this information will be provided every three months.

RM proposed a labour exchange for teachers, to help match clubs with teachers, this will involve collaboration with EBED. RM also encouraged counties to sign up students to the EBU as soon as possible in their lessons.

RM gave three suggestions for membership development: new varieties of bridge competitions to allow less skilled players to become involved in play; an organised effort to encourage non-active members to return to play; and developing online teaching, possibly following the example of the Yorkshire development method.

1hr37.04 (break) 1hr49.16

There followed a discussion about membership.

Ian Sedgwick (IS) (Gloucestershire) expressed interest in the Yorkshire method and implementing it in Gloucestershire. He asked about the costs and the tutorial role within the clubs. Lesley Millet (LM) (Yorkshire) confirmed that from a treasury perspective, the costs were minimal. IS asked for an information pack to be sent to clubs to help with implementation of membership recruitment. Cath Fox (CF) stated that a toolkit is being developed following the Yorkshire method, with the intention of sending it to clubs. All future initiatives should have a reusable and shareable toolkit.

Norman Inniss (NI) (Kent) expressed concern about returning to face to face. He suggested teacher training will be better suited remaining online, at least partially. IP agreed that a two-pronged approach will be needed.

Re-Opening (RL)

RL had circulated papers prior to the meeting. He said it was heartening to hear so many of the same messages repeated, as this shows the board are all on the same page.

RL described the background and rationale of the current work with competitions. The competitions sub-committee had met numerous times since its inception at the start of the year. The work by the sub-committee is expected to continue into the next year and beyond, with consultation of counties and clubs throughout.

RL noted that following the survival of lockdown a review of competition strategy was undertaken, with a plan for the next few years. He stated that central to the plan is the idea that the EBU should provide an appropriate environment for clubs, counties and members to thrive and advance their play. There is a crowded competitions programme, that was needing review even prior to covid.

RL shared some of the issues and questions for the EBU medium- and long-term plans. One issue is the carbon footprint, for example some meetings and competitions may continue online. Equity and

fairness is also an issue to be considered for competitions. Pricing is another issue that should be considered when making decision about online or face to face competitions. All elements need to be considered for a successful plan.

GR talked about the current EBU national competitions. The first live face to face event will be the Summer Meeting in Eastbourne. The venue is flexible with our booking and will only charge for space used. The date of the competition is also a few months after the proposed easing of lockdown and therefore is more likely to go ahead. GR stated that this does not mean that clubs or counties need to wait until August to hold their own face to face events.

Following the Summer Meeting, it is planned that future national events will return to face to face, with the exception of the Tollemache Qualifier. There will not be a Blackpool Year End Congress this year. Instead, the London Year End will include some online hybrid events.

The Corwen and Pachabo events will run online in June. Feedback will be requested from entrants to help determine if future events will also be held online.

GR highlighted the advice and information available to clubs on the EBU website. He confirmed this is advice only and is not a set of rules for clubs to follow.

GR asked for any questions from those present.

Alan Mould (AM) (Manchester) asked about knockout matches, how it should be decided if these are to be played online or face to face. GR advised that at present online play should be the default, unless agreed otherwise, but that this may change in future.

Paul Gibbons (PG) (Kent) talked about competitions for lower ranked players, for example the successful 9 high events run by Kent. RL confirmed that these competitions will be included as part of the competitions strategy.

Jeffrey Smith (JS) (Manchester) asked with the decline of the entrants in the Lockdown League, how long will this event continue. GR noted that the current decline in entrants was expected and there is no need yet to change the event format.

IP thanked everyone for attending and advised that all questions and comments will be taken into consideration.

The meeting finished at 15:38.