



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY CHAIR'S MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2022**

1. Attendance EBU representatives

Board Members		Board Members			
Ian Payn	Chair	Adrian Darnell	Patrick Shields	Sam Kelly	EBU Communications
Cath Fox	Vice Chairman	Ron Millet	Gayle Webb	Jonathan Lillycrop	EBU Club Liaison Officer
Gordon Rainsford	Chief Executive	Tony Russ		Tim Anderson	EBU Membership Development

County Attendance

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Bedfordshire	Colin O'Hara	Isle of Man	John Large	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard
Berks and Bucks	Michael Green	Kent	Norman Inniss	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot
Channel Islands	Hugh Bacon	Leicestershire	Dean Benton	Surrey	Tim Warren
Channel Islands	Norman Le Cocq	Lincolnshire		Sussex	Peter Clinch
Cumbria	Chris Ward	London		Warwickshire	Myra Scott
Devon	Doug Dunn	Manchester	Alan Mould	Wiltshire	Lucy Cross
Dorset	Mark Hooper	Merseyside & Cheshire	Paul Roberts	Worcestershire	Eddy Blackburn
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick	Middlesex	Lynn Fry	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby
Hertfordshire	Keith Strait	NEBA	Nigel Durie	Yorkshire	Lesley Millet
Hertfordshire	Paul Littlewood	Norfolk	Robert Smith	Yorkshire	Nick Woolven

Apologies

Board Members					
Rob Lawy					
County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Derbyshire	Alastair McCance	Lancashire	Brian Irlam	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley
Devon	Malcolm Pryor	Manchester	Irene Davies		

Absence – no apologies

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2 Welcome and Introduction

Tony Russ (TR) opened the meeting and welcomed all County Chairs or their representatives. TR noted that this meeting is a genuine effort from the Board to work on communication with counties. TR thanked Norman Inniss (NI) (Kent), Nick Woolven (NW) (Yorkshire) and Kathy Talbot (KT) (Oxfordshire) who have consulted widely with counties to create the agenda. TR passed the meeting over to NI who acted as Chair for the meeting.

NI asked members to add names and counties into their zoom profile and mute if not speaking to avoid unnecessary distractions.

3 Apologies

See above.

4 Return to F2F bridge: role for the counties; facilitation/support for clubs; attract players lost to the internet; mergers may be necessary

NI started by talking about the picture in Kent. He noted there is a big divide in the county, the clubs that are closer to London are more willing to return to face-to-face bridge. The further away from London there is more reticence to return to clubs rather than play online. NI speculated this was more indicative of the demographics as a whole rather than just the bridge playing population.

Robert Smith (RS) (Norfolk) noted that Norfolk is a very rural county with clubs spread far apart, three clubs have folded due to lack of support and others are considering merging. This is due to the aging bridge playing population, with a lot of members saying that they would prefer to play from home than drive a 30- or 40-mile round trip to the club. It is difficult to convince people otherwise. There will definitely be a drop-in club activity, those that have gone back f2f are struggling 60% of their previous membership. This affects club, county and EBU revenue. This is not an exciting picture.

Mike Willoughby (MW) (Worcestershire) said that it may be more a function of location rather than demographics, if people have further to travel, they will prefer to play online. He hoped to see semi-social events in clubs to bring people together, if this doesn't happen then retention of players will be harder for clubs.

Lyn Fry (LF) (Middlesex) said that while Middlesex is an urban county, a lot of clubs have folded, and people prefer to play online. We need to look at ways of working with online bridge as well as f2f.

Dean Benton (DB) (Leicestershire) proposed that counties need to work from the bottom and encourage teaching in their clubs to increase the overall number of players.

NI stated that online bridge may be an existential threat to bridge, it will be more difficult to attract new members if it becomes too much of a computer game. It needs to retain the social aspect with f2f play.

Alan Mould (AM) (Manchester) echoes previous comments but notes a split in Manchester with the better the standard of player the more likely they are to want to play f2f. This has caused a problem with counties holding events online, the better players will not want to play, but if held f2f there is often not enough players to cover expenses. This has led to cancelled events. The one success with f2f is beginners' classes, the numbers here are holding up well. It remains to be seen how these players will transfer to club sessions.

NI thanked people for their input and asked what could be done to improve the situation.

Paul Roberts (PR) (Merseyside & Cheshire) noted that the situation in Cheshire is not like that in Manchester.

Tim Warren (TW) (Surrey) agreed with AM that a lot of higher ranking players and beginners both prefer f2f but the middle tranche of players now prefer online.

Ian Sidgwick (IS) (Gloucestershire) said while there are differences between counties, we need to focus on the similarities. If we want to maximise the f2f, we need to make this as attractive as possible, making it sociable and having catering if possible. Also look at tailoring times of sessions to the majority of members' preferences, this may be afternoon session. We also need to train new people regardless of all the other factors.

NI asked if there are any practical ideas that people have to assist clubs. He noted that any sessions or competitions held f2f this year will be difficult and will likely lose money, but it is still early days, with restriction only just being eased, the situation may be vastly improved in 6 months' time.

Peter Clinch (PC) (Sussex) noted we need to think about why we want people to return to f2f and what is lost through playing online. The talk after each session is much easier f2f with post-mortem chats about hands and meeting others to partner with in future sessions. If these could be emphasised when holding f2f sessions. Clubs could start to promote organised sessions following the bridge play and include other tangibles from playing at the club, including refreshments.

NI suggested that we need to have strong selling points when running membership campaigns, these should include the sociable aspects such as meeting new people, making friends, have fun and learn new skills.

Eddy Blackburn (EB) (Worcestershire) stated most clubs that have returned to f2f tend to be struggling. The suggestion was made at a recent club AGM that clubs who are struggling should look to merge, possibly even with county organisation or involvement. EB cautioned however that the process of merging clubs is not easy. He noted previous experience of a club folding in the county and the members did not then move to play at another club in the same town. IG noted that this shows the motivation for playing is purely social. NI noted that in some areas the same people play at multiple clubs, which artificially inflates the number of clubs.

Doug Dunn (DD) (Devon) echoed the proposal of PC and having post-mortems following sessions which are more social. He noted Devon are looking to create an academy where many clubs can come together to increase the social aspect. They are looking to buy one building that different clubs can come to play. DD also asked about hybrid sessions and if this has been used successfully elsewhere. NI said that there are two types of hybrid sessions, one that is played in two sections and one played purely online with some people being in the same room physically but playing online. Some issues with hybrid sessions are that you need two sections which require more players, or that the set up of online play at a club is difficult.

Paul Littlewood (PL) (Hertfordshire) noted that most clubs are still playing online but Welling Garden City have been trying hard to get back to f2f but was only able to successfully have one morning session which is popular with less experienced players. They are now trying a new approach with a "play with the experts" session to encourage people to return and have a post mortem afterwards. PL stated that we must remember the benefits of playing online, for example the Tollemache recently was played online and the expenses saved, hotel costs, travel costs for both players and administrators.

NI asked if people have any further suggestions to contact him or NW or KT.

5 Green-pointed County weekends: crowded calendar pricing; similar events to entice people back? Role for online bridge going forward: Counties and EBU

NI invited Gordon Rainsford (GR) (EBU Chief Executive) to share his presentation. GR gave a short presentation detailing the background to changes that have been made to licenses for One Day Green Pointed events. The full details can be seen below in appendix B.

GR looked at the arrangements that were in place before the pandemic. Within this context the EBU has been the licensor to try to help with clashes between counties, and to set weekends to try to avoid this as well. This largely worked well for f2f congresses. When the pandemic started, for the first 6 months no congresses were held, they were postponed until later in the year. They then started holding events online. During this time the EBU took a very relaxed approach at this stage, to encourage bridge to be played. However, following this there were a number of negative side-

effects, one of which would be counties from different parts of the country holding events at the same times and this would impact smaller counties numbers for their events. There were also clashes with some national events. Some counties also started running weekly games, once clubs wanted to return to running events, to avoid counties having an unfair advantage, the issuing of masterpoints at county level was limited.

From 1st January, the changes were as follows:

- Limit on number of ODGP events to be run online – one day each annually
- Differential in charge for online events (from 1st April 2022)
- Return to five set weekends a year for ODGP events
- Reduction in master point awards for regular county games if run more frequently than once a month
- No more than half of club or county blue-pointed events may be online

For the limit on ODGP events, the reasons for this largely echo some of the reasons stated by counties earlier in the meeting. Online is here to stay but is only one way of playing bridge, we are looking for a balanced way for counties to be able to do both and we have to remember that many of our members have not played in organised online games. We need to cater to these members who prefer to play live and this is a way to encourage counties to do so.

There is also an impact of running events online for a reduced price, these undercut counties own live events as well as the EBU events. Having online events that are very cheap do not help overall.

These changes were brought in following decisions at the AGM. All changes are to help counties and clubs and have a balanced calendar for the benefit of members. GR then answered questions from counties.

KT asked about counties that have always run stronger weekly sessions. GR noted that counties should not be able to issue masterpoints as a higher rate too often as they will be giving clubs a disadvantage.

A number of counties expressed objection in the chat to being restricted to one online green point event per year.

EB expressed concern that the EBU was trying to force the game back to pre-pandemic conditions. GR disagreed saying that we are trying to find a balance between online and live events. County events run online have a much wider catchment area than previously.

Nigel Durie (ND) (NEBA) asked if county congresses considered separate from one day events. GR replied that if it is a county congress that has been licenced by combining two one day events then it is still two one day GP events. For most county congresses the central selling point is that they are live. If counties do want to run them online, the way to do this is to combine with another county. Some counties have always done this anyway.

Michael Green (MG) (Berks & Bucks) commented that most people participating in GP events, do so at their own county. Commented that Berks and Bucks are against the limitation of one GP day online.

GR asked if counties accept that if all 39 counties run two days of online GP events in a year that we would have too many clashes with the number of events.

PC commented that Sussex accept the concept of no more than one GP day online per year, but noted that what may have changed is the area of competition. To encourage face-to-face events the five weekends per year should be either online or face-to-face but not both on the same weekend. PC would be in favour of restricting the five weekends to face-to-face only, but being more liberal when counties can hold online GP day, but try to not have more than one online county event per available day. This should avoid price wars and may enable the EBU to balance price setting which is acceptable to everyone. GR stated that this is something that we can look at but noted that the current competitions calendar is very crowded and has been for quite some time.

PR asked if there was any evidence to support the EBU's claim that there is a problem. GR stated that we will try and provide more data, but commented on a number of counties that have had to cancel GP events due to clashes with larger counties. NI noted that currently there are teams playing in a Kent event that would not usually play in the event if held face-to-face. He noted that collaboration between counties will be key, for both face-to-face and online. IS asked if differential pricing was an option, for lower pricing for county members.

MW suggested having combined online events between counties. GR agreed with this suggestion and noted that while some counties are already doing this more counties could join together for larger events. More counties could combine, there are few limits on administrative pressures for online events.

GR commented that the EBU are not trying to raise money primarily for the EBU. We are trying to run live events for the entire membership and if there are a lot of cheap online county events this would mean that any live face-to-face events (both county and national) would not be viable.

Representative from Cumbria asked if the EBU could reconsider the new rules. GR noted that we have already agreed to give dispensation for events held in the first half of the year. GR will bring concerns to the Board but noted it unlikely to amend current decision.

GR confirmed that the change was first mentioned to counties last August (2021) and then mentioned and agreed upon at the AGM. The Board will listen to counties and see how the new rules play in practice to make any further changes. GR thanked the counties for their input.

6. Development of the game depends on finding new players: liaison with clubs; counties to help if clubs unable

NI noted that the EBU are in process of planning a marketing strategy to market the game nationally. He noted the issue for some counties is a lack of teachers to help people who want to learn bridge.

Smart Bridge is a new initiative by EBED aimed to help people learn bridge in 12 weeks and then have supervised play sessions.

Lesley Millet (LM) (Yorkshire) stated that Yorkshire are currently developing another learning project aimed at online learning in ten-week courses. Nick Woolven (NW) (Yorkshire) expanded to say the slides have been developed from the English Bridge School with regular presentations. The first project was very popular. Clubs were given information about people who attended the courses to help them throughout and after the online courses. The county has now commissioned a set of ten video presentations that will be available to the clubs in the county free of charge to help with teaching either in the club or online. NW noted that many teachers are volunteers and not accredited teachers.

The project is advertised on the county website, sent out to all clubs and relied on word of mouth to generate new members. Ron Millet (RM) (Yorkshire) noted that the crucial aspect of any teaching project is having club involvement and that new members are routed through local clubs. The county covered a majority of the expenses for the project including payment of the use of online platforms to play and teach, advertising for clubs was not covered.

NI asked how many of the people who attended the first project went on to continue playing bridge. NW stated that the retention rate is currently unknown, but they will look at creating this data. They are also hoping to hold some local 5-high events to encourage new players into competition.

KT asked if there was a conflict with clubs charging for teaching. LM confirmed that clubs given freedom to set their own charges.

IS asked why the Yorkshire model has not been rolled out across the country. NI noted that with Smart Bridge one pilot has had three pilots. IS asked why so many pilots were needed for the same concept. NI agreed with Tim Anderson (TA) (EBU Membership Campaign) that these projects should be centrally produced and offered to all counties, which is the aim of Smart Bridge.

MI agreed that membership campaigns should be led by the EBU and EBED but that they should be focused on coordinating resources for counties to use. TA stated that this is a matter that the EBU have given a lot of thought to. He noted that the EBU's role should be to direct any potential new members to clubs or counties. He confirmed there is a shortage of teachers but that online teaching is very scalable. TA encouraged counties to start membership project if they have the resources.

LM added that Yorkshire are developing a course with Jim Edwards of Bridge Play UK, the first ten lessons will be available. If counties are interested, email LM or NW for more information.

TA encouraged counties to contact him with feedback and advice.

7. *The EBU Strategy. County involvement in development of an overall plan (including actions, resources etc.) to drive counties and the EBU to improved sustainability*

Patrick Shields (PS) (EBU Board) talked through the current EBU strategy. He noted that covid had delayed the implementation of the current strategy. The strategy currently being developed has three strands in partnership with counties, these include: marketing the game; educating people about how to play; and competitions. PS asked the counties to express how they see the strategy will affect them, what help they would like from the EBU and how they will interact with the strategy going forward. PS stressed that the EBU have shared objectives with the counties for the promotion of the game and success is more likely when working together.

Tim Warren (TW) (Surrey) noted that the majority of points discussed in the previous agenda item covered this item. He stated that the current proposed marketing strategy from the EBU due to be rolled out fits perfectly. The main issue counties will have is finding people resources to implement any membership drive.

RM commented that the next stage of the EBU strategy will be heavily reliant on counties.

KT noted concerns from the average player that play is getting too expensive and the EBU should not simply increase prices. NI agreed that it is a failing business strategy to put up prices. TA noted that he would like to see more value for members with their EBU membership and to be more visible to members.

The prospect of unaffiliated clubs was mentioned, along with the current unaffiliated clubs offer being extended until the end of the year. NI encouraged counties to act on this. There were suggestions to contact pensions providers or SAGA as avenues of new members.

MW noted that if the number of clubs reduces then prices will need to increase. More members will mitigate this issue.

DD asked if the County Chairs should be considered EBU representative or if this is a set role. It was agreed that County Chairs should take up this role in the first place but that the EBU would be happy to talk to any County Officials. GR also noted that the EBU is an organization of the Counties made up of County Shareholders.

8. Date of the next meeting

TR asked for volunteers from counties to chair the next meeting to be sent to him via email. TR thanked everyone for attending and for all contributions. He also thanked NI, NW and KT for their hard work in setting it up, and all the EBU staff for their contributions and help with the meeting. IP reiterated TR's thanks on behalf of the EBU Board. IP asked counties to confirm with their committee members, clubs and members that the EBU was here for them and if they had any issues to contact EBU staff or Board members.

The date of the next meeting will be decided in the next week or so.

The meeting closed at 11.45am

Appendix A - Meeting Chat:

- 00:21:13 Lucy Cross Wiltshire: I echo many of the points made by Robert. There is a definite push for more face-to-face bridge during the daytime - but finding suitable venues is an issue. We have also lost a couple of clubs
- 00:23:52 Nigel Durie NEBA: I agree, we have 6 or 7 "centres where F2F is operating but at only about 50% of pre-pandemic. Many now prefer online to travelling in the evening. I think we have lost many players.
- 00:24:06 Paul Littlewood - Herts: Similar thoughts to Lyn in Herts
- 00:24:43 Myra Scott (Warks): Agree with Dean. Newer players want to go back to F2F much more quickly.
- 00:25:03 Lincolnshire: Totally agree - teaching opportunities has to increase for sustainability long term.
- 00:25:11 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Very limited enthusiasm for returning to F2F in m&C
- 00:25:23 Myra Scott (Warks): Reluctance to go back to evening Bridge but very mixed picture.
- 00:25:26 Colin O'Hara Beds: What we have found in Bedfordshire is a distinct division. Two of our clubs have gone back to face to face with attendances under 50% whilst two other clubs have increased attendances for online sessions
- 00:25:41 Chris Ward - Cumbria: I agree, Cumbria is a very rural county - 100 miles to get to another club. I see all our county events staying online
- 00:26:36 Kathy Talbot Oxon: An added challenge to the return to F2F is loss of premises for some clubs
- 00:27:04 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Saying that, we have had to cancel our last two events due to lack of support.
- 00:27:12 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: As Alan says - there are now two communities, F2F and online
- 00:28:02 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: And so a threat to critical mass
- 00:28:02 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Our County League is likely to continue online.
- 00:30:40 Lyn Fry (Middlesex): We are continuing all our leagues online as very few are prepared to travel to play F2F.
- 00:30:51 Lesley Millet Yorkshire: Our County League is being run two ways - an online league and a FTF league - well supported online and slowly beginning to be supported FTF. It will be interesting to see what happens in September/October when we return to the "normality" of FTF.
- 00:31:59 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Is any county considering financial help to clubs to help overcome problems with return to F2F?
- 00:32:17 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Ian has hit the nail on the head - the starting point is what different groups of people want. Once we know that, we have to cater for those wants
- 00:32:24 Nick Woolven YCBA: Yes we have supported clubs with restart grants.
- 00:33:05 Michael Green Berks&Bucks: I think the future is daytime not evenings
- 00:33:30 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Cumbria has reduced the UMS for clubs in the county to zero, in order to try and help.
- 00:34:30 Lesley Millet Yorkshire: Yorkshire have also not taken UMS since last May.

- 00:34:33 Myra Scott (Warks): We are refunding our UMS and offer other support to Clubs who are in need.
- 00:34:36 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Agree - Peter. The social side is crucial
- 00:35:30 Paul Littlewood - Herts: Welwyn Garden City is doing exactly what Peter is advocating...on a Thursday afternoon
- 00:37:30 Kathy Talbot Oxon: There's always a reason there are two clubs in close proximity
- 00:37:54 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Lucky to have clubs nearby - we are far and wide - round the outskirts of the county - cannot merge
- 00:38:23 Ron Millet EBU Director: Played F2F for the first time last night. A difference from Online is the slowness of the whole event...
- 00:38:35 Nigel Durie NEBA: I think our best players are willing to go back to F2F but unwilling to play in clubs that have gone down to 6/7 tables of very mixed players
- 00:38:39 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Perhaps we should look at making hybrid sessions more widely used - without cost
- 00:40:02 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Difficult to pay less F2F because of premises cost
- 00:40:14 Eddy Blackburn (Worcs): Few rural clubs have enough members for hybrid to work
- 00:41:18 Nigel Durie NEBA: We have 2 clubs playing hybrid at the same time but most clubs would have 2 very small sections
- 00:41:21 Alan Mould (Manchester): We tried to run a hybrid event and the F2F players said they would not play against the online players. So we tried to run separate online and F2F sections and did not get enough in either.....
- 00:41:34 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Cumbria doesn't have enough members to play hybrid.
- 00:42:21 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Seems to me that hybrid is just a way of merging two sections. So going nowhere really....
- 00:42:27 Kathy Talbot Oxon: We had some complaints to OBC that hybrid sessions weren't fair. We said we realised but it was a tough environment and we would continue for the near future
- 00:43:16 Myra Scott (Warks): We should also see some change now we are moving to the lighter evenings and, hopefully, better weather.
- 00:43:25 Lyn Fry (Middlesex): There are so many advantages for online. As Paul has said. Including, travel, finances, playing with a partner in another part of the country, elderly players who won't come out at night. I think we need to work to encourage both forms of the game.
- 00:43:47 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Agreed. There is space for both
- 00:48:55 Kathy Talbot Oxon: What about Counties who have always run stronger weekly sessions?
- 00:51:36 Kathy Talbot Oxon: People expect online games to be cheaper because there is no premises charge, no equipment and probably fewer TDs
- 00:52:40 Eddy Blackburn (Worcs): I mainly object to the restriction of one GP online day
- 00:52:47 Chris Ward - Cumbria: The pandemic has found people are still not willing to play F2F. So to be able to run a 2nd ODGP event - where can we find a venue in the lake district - and still not sure players will turn up. Hire costs only at £5K + bridge fees
- 00:53:53 Michael Green Berks&Bucks: limiting us to one single day for green is a disgrace. It could be at least two for pairs and teams
- 00:54:09 Chris Ward - Cumbria: I agree, very strongly

- 00:54:16 Nigel Durie NEBA: Agreed
- 00:54:44 Lyn Fry (Middlesex): I absolutely agree with Michael. We are so angry about this in Middlesex that we have turned our County teams event into a club event.
- 00:55:44 Patrick Shields - EBU Board: 2 online GP days per county means there is no weekend of the year without GP events, and this would kill live congresses and devalue GPs. Multiple counties on the same weekend online is wasteful.
- 00:56:25 Patrick Shields - EBU Board: But they don't come to the game for Master Points
- 00:56:43 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Surely issues between Clubs and Counties should not be interfered with by the EBU. If Clubs think their County are acting badly they can throw out the County Committee.
- 00:57:35 Lyn Fry (Middlesex): Middlesex also boqwed out of county online games once things opened up for the clubs
- 00:57:37 Eddy Blackburn (Worcs): It seems to me that the EBU are trying to force the game back to pre-pandemic conditions rather than facing the new reality.
- 00:58:02 Michael Green Berks&Bucks: agree with Eddy
- 00:58:23 Nigel Durie NEBA: At present I cannot envisage NEBA being able to run a F2F congress in November with the upfront cost and much reduced numbers. Are county congresses considered as separate from the one day events?
- 00:58:37 Chris Ward - Cumbria: I'm not saying we should have more than 2 GP events online, but limiting it to one online - then charging more? How does that encourage them to play?
- 00:59:29 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Many players feel that the cost of events is too high
- 00:59:30 IOM - John Large: should the EBU offer grants to support F2F congresses to help support the counties
- 01:00:07 Nigel Durie NEBA: Yes we should be encouraging players to play
- 01:00:55 Patrick Shields - EBU Board: for offering grants, many CBAs have more reserves than the EBU
- 01:01:24 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Cumbria joined with Norfolk to do this last year and are doing in march again
- 01:03:22 Nigel Durie NEBA: So to be clear; this weekend we are running a "closed" GP county pairs online and that is using up our allocation of online GP events for the year?
- 01:03:29 IOM - John Large: it could be restricted to the costs of the green points if a loss is incurred by running the event the costs could be shared and not a profit by the EBU and a loss suffered just by the County
- 01:03:33 Lyn Fry (Middlesex): Our online county events were mainly Middlesex people
- 01:03:52 Patrick Shields - EBU Board: County CHampionships are a different category
- 01:03:58 Chris Ward - Cumbria: However, Cumbria also have a Joint GP event with Westmorland. We cannot now run this online in September, as we have used our 'allocation' in March.
- 01:04:33 Nigel Durie NEBA: Thanks
- 01:06:02 Colin O'Hara Beds: Can we take a vote on how many counties are offended by the imposition of one online GP event per year?
- 01:07:22 Nigel Durie NEBA: Good suggestion
- 01:07:56 Kathy Talbot Oxon: I don't think we should be forcing people back F2F congresses. The danger is we will lose many players
- 01:08:42 Chris Ward - Cumbria: who will turn up, and who takes the risk? Do counties have funds to cover the risk?

- 01:11:47 Ron Millet EBU Director: To give context, as I recall before the Pandemic, a County was only allowed 2 GP events a year. So all that has happened is that only one of these may be online. Other aspects are a matter for discussion..
- 01:11:57 Lyn Fry (Middlesex): Can we have a show of hands about how many are seriously disadvantaged by this?
- 01:14:18 Chris Ward - Cumbria: I feel the ruling has been brought in too soon. We can't arrange F2F this year - so are being penalised. I didn't see any communication that this was being considered. Next year, I am looking at F2F again - but not this year.
- 01:14:42 Paul Littlewood - Herts: Agree with Chris
- 01:15:00 Kathy Talbot Oxon: I agree with Chris
- 01:15:16 Patrick Shields - EBU Board: When a CBA in the past ran a GP/weekend event there was usually some Unique Selling Point which made it attractive. Have we lost that online? Are all GP events identical cuts from the same cloth?
- 01:15:41 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Just in case I wasn't clear. If a number of counties want to run an event on a particular date, one big event makes far more sense than lots of small ones, surely?
- 01:15:58 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Good point Mike
- 01:16:12 Chris Ward - Cumbria: I agree Mike, and that's what Cumbria have been trying to do.
- 01:16:32 Chris Ward - Cumbria: But been told Cumbria can't in Se[ptember
- 01:17:17 Patrick Shields - EBU Board: On a combined event, the only aspect related to the organising counties is the advertising
- 01:17:18 Kathy Talbot Oxon: I think we need to just get people playing - however they can. Get the critical mass up and the rest will follow once confidence in F2F returns
- 01:19:21 Chris Ward - Cumbria: I like the idea of counties combining online when playing the same weekend - but at the same cost of F2F - not 50% more
- 01:20:30 Alan Mould (Manchester): In Manchester we have had more than half of our teachers disappear since the pandemic. We had 28 registered in 2019, 11 now....
- 01:21:13 Ian Glos CBA: Smart bridge sounds very good to me but is taking too long to get going
- 01:21:18 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Sounds a high risk job - teaching bridge in Manchester - Alan?
- 01:21:54 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Its always don to the same volunteers unfortunately
- 01:23:27 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Again, getting our heads round the possibilities of online, the Yorkshire model, combining centralised lectures with local teaching seems a model that is now possible and worth pursuing.
- 01:25:24 Eddy Blackburn (Worcs): how was it advertised?
- 01:25:24 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Totally agree, Nick 👍
- 01:27:23 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Excellent point, Ron
- 01:28:12 Tim Anderson (EBU IT and membership development): I would love to hear more about the transition from online course to supervised play in the sponsoring club
- 01:29:38 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: A problem that I see is that there are lots of different bodies doing similar things. Yorkshire, SmartBridge, No Fear Bridge. Would it be better to work together rather than compete?
- 01:31:17 Tim Anderson (EBU IT and membership development): Mike, I think diversity is good but would like the EBU or EBED to provide a central resource for people who want to learn

- 01:31:46 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Did you produce the 30 week course yourselves, and could you share it?
- 01:34:18 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: I agree to an extent Tim, and perhaps EBU or EBED should take Maggie Thatcher's vision of UK government as a guide. EBU/EBED as manager/coordinator rather than provider. EBS hasn't really worked (which was foreseeable) and EBED doesn't really have resource to hit timescales.
- 01:39:11 Lesley Millet Yorkshire: Contact for me is bridge@milletmail.net
- 01:39:17 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: z\?~D
- 01:39:17 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire:].#
- 01:40:01 Tim Anderson (EBU IT and membership development): tim@ebu.co.uk
- 01:40:03 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: I can't see any reason why SB should be better - are those who are producing it any more skilled than Yorkshire or NFB. It's just going to be different isn't it?
- 01:44:10 Norman Inniss Kent: What I have seen is that Smart Bridge is much more of an overview of the basics and not as detailed as the Yorks model
- 01:44:59 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Concept to implementation is always a big challenge - as Ron is now saying :-)
- 01:47:57 Tim Warren, Surrey: In saying "it's not a separate agenda item", I wasn't trying to be critical - if anything, the opposite, a comment that the discussion so far has been very important
- 01:50:58 Alan Mould (Manchester): Our Exec tried to contact U3A in Manchester with 0 success.
- 01:53:40 Patrick Shields - EBU Board: I see one role of a CBA is to represent the interests of their bridge players to the National Body. Few Counties recognise this.
- 01:54:58 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: The whole County Committee should be liaising with the EBU. The effectiveness of the person or people who form the channel of communication is important.
- 01:55:41 Nigel Durie NEBA: Thanks Tony
- 01:56:04 Mike Willoughby - Worcs: Well done all - very useful - and especially the 3 organisers
- 01:56:33 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Thanks all. When will the outcome of the GP discussion be issued?
- 01:57:13 Eddy Blackburn (Worcs): Yes, well done for organising this meeting
- 01:58:46 Chris Ward - Cumbria: date of next meeting?
- 02:07:53 Chris Ward - Cumbria: breaking up