



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY CHAIR'S MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM
ON THURSDAY 24TH MAY 2023**

1. Attendance EBU representatives

Board Members		Board Members			
Tony Russ	Patrick Shields	Gordon Rainsford	EBU Chief Executive	Sam Kelly	EBU Communications
Paul Gibbons	Abbey Smith	Lee Guy	EBED Chair	Jonathan Lillycrop	EBU Club Liaison Officer
Rob Lawy	Ian Sidgwick	Tim Anderson	EBU Membership Development		

County Attendance

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Bedfordshire	Colin O'Hara	Kent	Norman Inniss	Suffolk	Richard Evans
Berks and Bucks	Michael Green	Lancashire	Jeffrey Smith	Surrey	Tim Warren
Cornwall	Liz Perry	Lincolnshire	Mark Wardell	Sussex	Peter Clinch
Cumbria	Christine Ward	London	James Smith	Warwickshire	Myra Scott
Devon	Jacqui Munns	Manchester	Irene Davies	Wiltshire	Lucy Cross
Dorset	Mark Hooper	Merseyside/Cheshire	Christopher Raymond	Worcestershire	Eddy Blackburn
Essex	John McCoy	North East	Sue Davies	Yorkshire	Nick Woolven
Herefordshire	Chris Chowney	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard		
Hertfordshire	Paul Littlewood	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot		

Apologies

Board Members					
Adrian Darnell	Ian Payn				
County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Derbyshire	Alastair McCance	Herefordshire	Keith Strait		
Hants & IoW	Mike Kinsey	Middlesex	Lyn Fry		

Absence – no apologies

Avon	David S Jones	Lancashire	Brian Irlam	Warwickshire	Darren Evetts
Cambs & Hunts	Adam Bowden	Leicestershire	Anne Wright	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley
Channel Islands	Hugh Bacon	Norfolk	Robert Smith	Westmoreland	John Ellwood

Channel Islands	Norman Le Cocq	Northamptonshire	Chris Wormleighton	
Isle of Man	John Large	Staffs & Shrops	Pamela Booth-Jones	

2 Welcome and Introduction

Tony Russ (TR) opened the meeting and welcomed all County Chairs or their representatives, especially the new County Chairs.

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

3 Apologies

See above.

4 EBED Building a Stronger Partnership with EBU and Counties - Lee Guy (LG) (EBED)

LG gave an update on EBED's progress during the previous year. He started by noting that the CEO of EBED, Giorgio Provenza (GP) is stepping down from his role. LG thanked GP for his work at EBED over the past few years. His replacement will be Mark Humphris (MH) who is currently the EBED Bridge Education & Development Officer.

Last year, two points were raised which EBED have tried to respond to; the digitisation of EBED's content and SmartBridge. EBED have spent 8 months working to improve their online content, including the consolidation of English Bridge School and its Teacher Zone. Following an initial pilot for SmartBridge, significant changes have been made with the material, all lessons have now been complete and these will be delivered via the new digital platform. A couple of EBTA teachers are beta testing the product, with a view to going live very shortly.

EBED have trained over 100 teachers this year, but they still want to improve these numbers for next year. The current base of teacher trainers are aging and so more teacher trainers are needed as replacements. EBED have a group of 14 potential new teacher trainers. This will give more capacity to train more teachers. MH is looking to refresh the teacher training courses.

LG also confirmed that EBED and the EBU recently held a meeting, where an agreement was made to confirm responsibility for each group. LG thanked the EBU members present for their work with this. The agreements will need to be ratified by both the EBED and EBU Boards.

EBED are currently working on a new project "Pathway to the Table", the aim of this is to have a clear set of stages from starting to learn bridge, to club bridge and beyond.

LG noted EBED are also looking to push forward on Youth Bridge. He confirmed that EBED have received a rather sizable donation in a will that will be invested in youth bridge.

LG answered questions from the County Chairs.

Paul Littlewood (PL) asked if there will be any cost to access the EBED materials. LG confirmed all EBTA members will have free access to the content.

Michael Green (MG) asked who will be the replacement for MH. LG stated that this is not yet known, and it will be his first responsibility to hire his replacement.

TR confirmed that the meeting between EBED and the EBU was a great success.

James Smith (JS) asked if LG could confirm the amount of money that EBED will receive. LG stated he is unable to confirm the exact amount currently.

5 What can bridge learn from chess, especially Junior Chess? - Paul Littlewood (PL) (Hertfordshire Chair)

PL talked about the background of chess and how this started with junior chess in schools. He started by noting the differences between each game and that chess is easier to set up, only needing two people to play, rather than four.

PL stated that a large impetus in chess came from two major trusts that were set up by bequests. The purpose of these trusts is for the advancement of education among young people in England through the studying and practice of chess. They bring in grants of approximately £25k annually for the game of chess. Both trusts are independent from the English Chess Federation, although they have strong ties to the ECF. The ECF has a large focus on youth chess.

There are a number of organisations and projects in England designed to help young people play and compete in chess competitions. They are well supported in schools.

Chess has benefited from these initiatives and has grown exponentially online. The largest platform, chess.com, now has 130 million members worldwide. At one stage in February this year there were 450k people a day joining the biggest platform.

There are a lot of chess competitions throughout the world, a lot more than there are bridge competitions.

PL then answered questions. JS noted that at his school cards were banned, but chess was encouraged. Mark Goddard (MGo) suggested that chess is more suitable for children to learn than bridge. He did note that online chess has much better kibitzing opportunities than bridge has, which keeps it interesting. PL noted that some chess players also have Twitch channels, where players stream their games online.

Patrick Shields (PS) asked if the need for the availability of four players was a discouragement, and suggested we might need a more favourable attitude to playing online with robots.

Abbey Smith (AS) (EBU) did teach bridge in primary school. She talked about the differences in the style of learning between children and adults. Gordon Rainsford (GR) and Peter Clinch (PC) agreed with AS.

John McCoy (JmC) suggested talking to the Department of Education and asking for them to help with the promotion of bridge.

6. The Structure of Competitions in the future - Patrick Shields (EBU Board)

PS talked about some of the work that the EBU Board have been doing during the past couple of years, under the guise of a Competitions Working Group, which has in support a wider Advisory Group. He also asked the County Chairs to submit ideas that they have to improve the current competitions.

Competitions are run to give people more opportunities to play bridge. There is a delicate balance to be struck between online and face-to-face competitions; competitions are one of the major sources of income for the EBU – and so the finances are another aspect to balance.

He talked about previous changes and asked for feedback to potential changes. The National Pairs had a different format this year. PS thanked those counties that ran regional heats for the National Pairs. This event had much bigger entries than previous years. Tim Warren felt the new format worked really well. Kathy Talbot (KT) felt it worked well and Oxford will use a similar format for their county events. Jaqui Munns (JM) felt it worked well, but that perhaps the qualifying events could be extended. Norman Inniss (NI) asked why there is a need to encourage better players to enter.

PS talked about the new format for the Crockfords Cup this year. Crockfords Cup entries have declined over the last few years. The proposal is to try and revitalise this event. The new format will guarantee teams at least three matches before moving to the knockout stages. He asked for feedback from counties. TW stated he is impressed with the changes to the format of the competition.

PS talked about the NGS restricted events; these are usually played ad-hoc, but the Competitions Working Group would like to structure this into a new calendar. He thanked Kent CBA for their contributions to the 9-High events. Paul Littlewood asked if there was a reason behind choosing 9-high for events. PS confirmed 9-high events allow about 60% of people to enter. 6-high events are less popular due to a smaller number of people.

Myra Scott (MS) noted that players of this level prefer frequent events and a calendar would be encouraging for them to join a few events. This would make a good starting point to encourage people to enter high level events.

GR stated that Jack High events were not as popular and the 9-high events were the most popular on the limited set of the NGS events trailed, but this is more anecdotal than scientific.

PS talked about Masters Pairs. The numbers for this event have been dropping in recent years. He noted the CWG are looking to make this event more enticing to people. This is a long two-session event for people that have not played in such events previously. He asked the counties if there is a way of making this event attractive to run and play. He asked for ideas to be sent to him.

AS noted at her club the main factor for entering events is distance/travel. A lot of people are ready to get back to face-to-face if there is not too much travel involved. She stated the idea of fewer boards is good. MG suggested fewer than 36-boards, for lower ranked players. GR said that the intention for the competition is to make it a step up from a club game.

PL asked counties if the lower ranked players prefer to play face-to-face rather than online. He noted in his experience this was the case. Others echoed this sentiment. AS confirmed that one of the main reasons people learn to play, is to meet new people and socialize. Tim Warren suggested we should embrace both styles of play for almost everything; in Surrey many of the top players will not play online. Mark Wardell (MW) said players prefer to play face-to-face if there are a lot of boards to play.

PS concluded that we need to continue to innovate the competitions and asked for ideas to be sent to the board.

7. *What is the role of a shareholder? - Jacqui Munns (Devon Chair) - item led by Paul Gibbons (EBU Board & Kent)*

PG gave a short presentation. He included the historical context of the organization of the counties and shareholders. The counties created the EBU as a company with shareholders. The shareholders own the EBU. Each county has a number of shareholders. The shareholders make decisions, for example electing the EBU Board. The shareholders also elect the standing committees. Counties have different ways of appointing their shareholders, there are no set rules for how the shareholders should be chosen.

Previously there were three shareholder meetings a year, the AGM and two additional shareholder meetings at which the Board reported to the shareholders. The two additional meetings evolved into the County Chairs meeting. Now the shareholders only have one meeting a year, which is the AGM. At this meeting they elect the Board and standing committees. The shareholders also receive the statutory reports from the EBU. The shareholders also vote on resolutions.

The shareholders have oversight of the standing committees, Laws & Ethics and Selection. The Board do not have direct oversight of those committees.

He noted that there might be scope for change, but that it has worked well so far and should not be changed if changes are not needed.

TR and JM thanked PG for the presentation. PG stated that at the time of previous iterations of this question in 2011 no rules were drawn up for shareholder behaviours

PL noted that as a new Chair, he assumed that the shareholders should represent the views of the county. PG noted the shareholders are electing the Board and they are responsible for the EBU as a whole, and so sometimes may need to vote for the interest of the EBU as a whole even if this goes against their county's interests; it is thought that these times are rare.

PC confirmed that his county has discussions among county officials before voting on an issue, but that shareholders are not expected to vote for the county as a single block.

NI stated his views that shareholders should be on county committees and represent their views.

KT wanted to clarify the differences in the interests of the counties and the EBU and suggested that we should be working to the goals. TW gave an example of permission for Online One-Day Green Pointed events as where the interests of the counties and the EBU may differ.

JM asked if there were any Terms of Reference for shareholders. Would it be a good idea to incorporate these into the constitution? NI agreed with JM and asked if it could be on the agenda for future meetings. TW doesn't feel currently there is a problem that needs to be discussed or addressed. JS agreed with TW, noting that the function of the shareholders is to keep the Board honest. KT noted some competition between the EBU and counties for example with online games. The role of counties has diminished due to online national events. TW agrees that there is a conflict, but he disagrees that the conflict is being handled badly.

PG shared details of answers to this question from 2011 and 2012, see appendix B for full details. He noted that the conclusions now are the same as in previous years. He asked for the Chairs to let him know if they had any additional ideas.

8. AOB

TR asked for ideas for future county chairs meetings.

TR thanked everyone for their contributions, noting that there is lots to think about.

The meeting closed at 11.40am.

Appendix A - Meeting Chat:

00:16:02 Tony Russ EBU Board: Michael Letts

00:42:35 Kathy Talbot Oxford: It might be advantageous for EBED to consult with the Chess trusts to see the most advantageous way of using the money in promotion.

00:54:27 Peter Clinch - Sussex: Reacted to "It might be advantag..." with 👍

01:11:44 Chris Ward - Cumbria: On BBO, this is fine - Cumbria / EBU ran a Jack High on RealBridge - but there is a problem with paying and ensuring NGS is within range after entering.

01:14:58 Kathy Talbot Oxford: Abbey: this is something the county would help with

01:15:42 Abbey Smith: Replying to "Abbey: this is somet..."

perfect - we can have a chat about it

01:16:27 Chris Ward - Cumbria: Cumbria can't attract anyone to play in county events. We even made entry free (subsidised) and still no entries. Thanks all, sorry I need to leave soon.

01:17:32 Jeffrey Smith Lancashire: We have issues where online people will do BBO but not RealBridge?

01:18:17 Gordon Rainsford EBU: Replying to "We have issues where..."

We can always have heats on both of them.

01:18:39 Norman Inniss Kent: We found the same in Kent. Almost nobody wanted to play on RB. Bizarre

01:19:23 Paul Littlewood - Herts: Why do the top players not want to play online?

01:19:43 Abbey Smith: Replying to "We have issues where..."

People at my club generally dislike RealBridge because it's neither one thing or the other - BBO allows them to have as much noise in their house, play in PJs etc and face to face allows the social side.

01:20:24 Paul Littlewood - Herts: Replying to "We have issues where..."

Mixture in Herts but most have embraced RealBridge.

01:20:28 Jeffrey Smith Lancashire: And my regular p cant technically use RB - internet not strong enough., But BBO is fine for her

01:22:13 Jeffrey Smith Lancashire: On a positive note, I am VERY impressed with the recent Competition reorganisation. Well done Patrick & team!

01:23:19 Kathy Talbot Oxford: Paul: a lot of it is possible cheating.

01:25:47 Ian Sidgwick Glos. EBU board: Is it good to have the shareholder role separate from the county chair role or would it be simpler to combine?

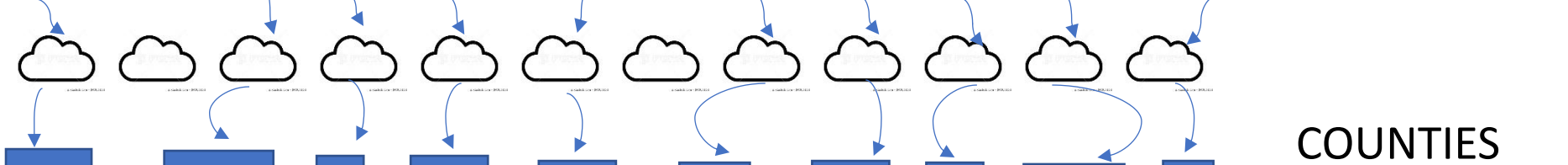
01:27:25 Kathy Talbot Oxford: Separate I think Ian.

01:28:14 Norman Inniss Kent: We had a situation whereby the shareholders were not on the current Committee and thus were not necessarily voting in line with the Committee's wishes. We have brought the shares back onto the Committee and asked the shareholders to vote in line with the decisions of the Committee.

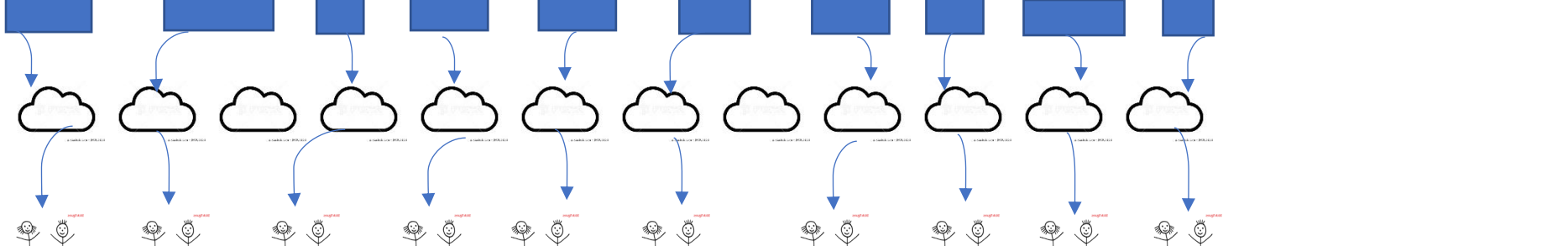
County Chairman's Conference – 24th May 2023

- 01:29:09 Paul Littlewood - Herts: Kathy.....but surely RealBridge has eliminated most cheating?
- 01:29:12 Norman Inniss Kent: We took the view that the shares were issued to the County and therefore the votes should be used on behalf of the County
- 01:29:50 Paul Littlewood - Herts: Same in Herts, Norman
- 01:31:30 Mark Wardell (Lincolnshire): Do all counties have a shareholder?
- 01:32:35 Eddy Blackburn, Worcs: Worcs shareholders are always WCBA committee members.
- 01:36:32 Gordon Rainsford EBU: All counties have at least one shareholder. Larger counties have more.
- 01:36:49 Myra Scott (Warks): In Warks, shareholders are committee members. We are 'expected' to take the views of the committee into account but make our own minds up re voting at the AGM. We also felt that is important the at least one of the shareholders also attends meetings like this which is why I represent the Chairman at these meetings.
- 01:39:45 Jeffrey Smith Lancashire: Its useful if a shar holder has a Terms of Reference from its county.
- 01:40:40 Tim Warren, Surrey: In Surrey, our shareholders are cttee members. We tend to agree a line on AGM issues in advance, but it tends to be reactive rather than proactive
- 01:40:47 Chris Chowney - Herefordshire (sub): In Herefordshire, the sec has been 1st shareholder and the treasurer 2nd (when we had 2)
- 01:43:11 Kathy Talbot Oxford: We elect our shareholders.
- 01:46:16 Jeffrey Smith Lancashire: We have a TOR which I would be happy to share (Lancs)
- 01:46:56 Jeffrey Smith Lancashire: The shareholder's responsibility is to guide the development of the EBU in the best interests of the County and should be instructed as such where possible. Where the EBU is considering or making a significant change (such as, in recent years, the introduction of universal membership, and considering charitable status), the shareholder should aim to become knowledgeable on the subject.
- 01:57:08 Eddy Blackburn, Worcs: At Worcs we are also slimming down and re-evaluating our role

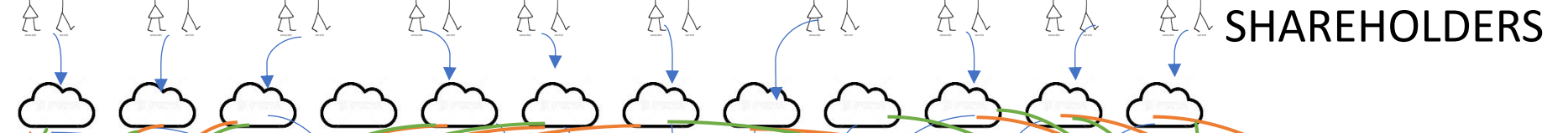
EBU MEMBERS



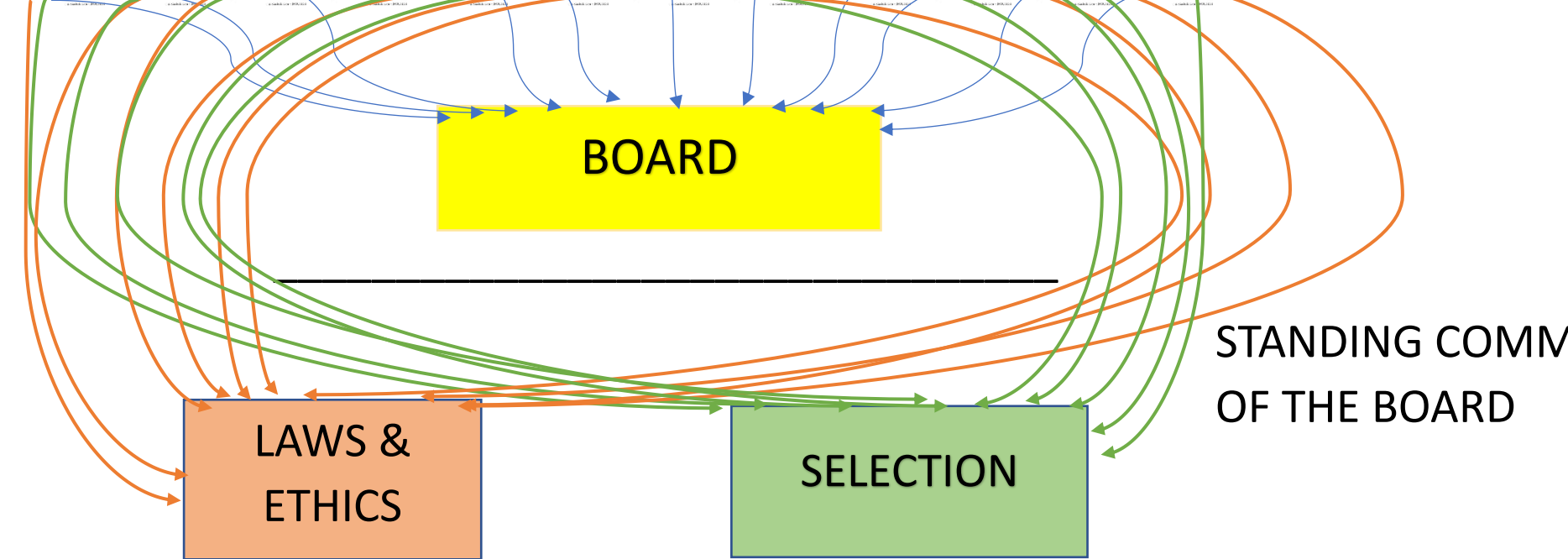
COUNTIES



SHAREHOLDERS



BOARD



STANDING COMMITTEES
OF THE BOARD

LAWS &
ETHICS

SELECTION