



**Minutes of the Shareholders Meeting of the English Bridge Union Limited  
held at the Imperial Hotel, London,  
on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

**Present:**

Jeremy Dhondy	Chairman	Anthony Golding	Board Member
Jerry Cope	Treasurer	Rob Lawy	Board Member
Ian Payn	Vice Chairman	Ron Millet	Board Member
Gordon Rainsford	Company Secretary	Graham Smith	Board Member
Heather Dhondy	Board Member & Laws & Ethics Committee Chairman	Peter Stockdale	Minute Taker & Communications Officer
Bev Godfrey	Board Member	Bev Purvis	Club Liaison Officer
		Kay Carter	Reception
		Caroline Small	EBED Trustee

Apologies from: Gillian Fawcett (Board Member & Chair of the Selection Committee),

	Shareholders		Proxy	Shareholders		Proxy
	Present	Apologies		Present	Apologies	
Avon	-		London	Chris Duckworth	James Smith	Chris Duckworth
Bedfordshire	-		Manchester	Jeff Morris		
Berks & Bucks		Dick Davey Sue Brown	Mersey/Cheshire	Christopher Raymond	Julian Merrill	Christopher Raymond
Cambs & Hunts		Peter Grice	Middlesex		Peter Hasenson Harish Patel	
Channel Isles	Pat Panter		Norfolk		John Dennis	
Cornwall		Michael Booth	North East		Mary Page	
Cumbria		Trevor Ward	Gordon Rainsford Northants	Nicky Bainbridge		
Derbyshire		Jim Parker	Nicky Bainbridge Nottinghamshire		Clare Batten Keith Rodgers	Nicky Bainbridge Nicky Bainbridge
Devon	Mike Hamon	Terence Treeby	Oxfordshire	Sandra Nicholson Alan Wilson	Sandra Claridge	Alan Wilson
Dorset		James FitzHarris				
Essex		Margaret Curtis Linda Fleet Dennis Valtisiaris	Somerset	Tony Russ		
Gloucs	Jim Simons		Staffs & Shrops	Paul Hackett	Pamela Booth-Jones	
Hants & IoW	Keith Bennett Richard Ray		Suffolk	Malcolm Carey	Malcolm Pryor	
Herts			Surrey	Jeffrey Allerton Richard Millard	Shirley Pritchard	
Hereford		Chris Chowney	Sussex	Peter Bates	Dick Wheeler Joy Mayall	Peter Bates Peter Bates
Hertfordshire	Gary Conrad Roger Livesey Robert Teesdale		Warwickshire	Colin Lang	Leslie Reece Stephanie Galvin	Myra Scott Colin Lang
Isle of Man	-		Westmorland		Michael Rothwell	
Kent	Paul Gibbons Phil Jones	Malcolm Lewis	Paul Gibbons Wiltshire	Phil Green	Sue Phillips	Phil Green
Lancashire	Barry Brelsford	Jacqueline Wright	Jeff Smith Worcestershire	David Thomas	Paul Hammond	
Leicestershire	David Pollard	Dean Benton	Yorkshire	Lesley Millet Nick Woolven	Janet Latham Julia Staniforth	David Guild Nick Woolven
Lincolnshire	-					

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

### **1. Apologies for absence**

See Page 1 for apologies

## **2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017**

### **2.1 Accuracy**

There were no matters of accuracy and the minutes were formally accepted.

### **2.2 Matters arising**

- Gordon Rainsford (GR) was asked for a summary of the work which had been done in relation to the forthcoming introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation. He outlined the information which had been made available to assist clubs and counties, and reported that the feedback from clubs had been positive. A representative from Surrey echoed this, thanking GR, on behalf of the counties, for his work.

GR added that the production of contracts between the EBU and clubs had been delayed due to inaction on the part of the Information Commissioner's Office, but these were now being developed and would be circulated in the near future. Whilst it may not be possible to have all of these signed before the deadline, GR was content that the fact that they were 'in progress' would be acceptable.

- It was confirmed that the changes to the Articles of Association which were noted at the AGM as not having been registered at Companies House, were now registered.

### **3. Treasurer's report**

Jerry Cope (JC) had circulated his report prior to the meeting. He highlighted that he was happy with the financial plan which had been produced for the forthcoming four years as it addressed the unacceptable negative forecast made a year ago. Areas in which savings would be made include the withdrawal of financial support for the international teams playing in the World Olympiad, ceasing to send multiple copies of English Bridge to households with more than one member, increasing sales through the Bridge Warehouse, and controlling staff and administrative costs. He was, however, waiting for the final figures for 2017/18 before formalising the plan. He advised that he believed the opportunities and risks in the plan to be reasonably balanced, however he explained that he had assumed revenue from Universal Membership would remain relatively stable, so that prediction gave him a small cause for concern. He noted, however, that the membership project would hopefully ensure UM figures would increase, and the budget include spending to assist in the success of that project. He was asked to clarify how the support for this project was shown in the budget – he explained that it was covered by 'board initiatives', and £20k was budgeted for 2018/19, some of which may be used to employ additional staff.

The 2017/18 accounts were being finalised, and it was expected that they would be ahead of budget. This had seemed unlikely earlier in the year, so JC was pleased by the turnaround in the figures. The Portland Club agreeing to no longer take a royalty payment on sales of books of the Laws of Bridge had made a difference of around £10K to the final figures – a significant benefit, for which JD expressed his thanks to the Portland Club.

A representative from Hampshire asked what impact the unexpected electrical works in the Aylesbury offices would have on the budgets. GR reported that discussions with the electricians

were ongoing, and whilst it would be an expensive undertaking there was little choice but to complete the work and it was likely to be less costly than first feared. JC explained that some of the costs were included in the 2017/18 accounts, and the remainder had already been included in the 2018/19 budget and it was not expected that the cost would exceed the budgeted figure.

A representative from Yorkshire asked for an update on the fundraising for the junior teams participating in the World Youth Teams Championships in China. Ian Payn (IP) reported that it was going well, and had already exceeded expectations. To date £35k had been raised, with a primary target of £60k. He said he was extremely grateful for the efforts of those in the clubs and counties who had organised collections in their area, and for the generosity of individuals. He had been touched by the number of people keen to support the juniors, and had a long list of people to whom he still had to write to express his thanks. JC reminded everyone that although it was going well to this point, any shortfall would put a pressure on budgets, so he hoped continued fundraising could be encouraged.

A representative from Oxfordshire asked how future increases in Universal Membership fees had been calculated. JC explained that he had assumed that UM fees would increase in line with inflation, and had used what he considered to be reliable predictions of what the inflation figure would be for the period in question. He added that he had projected that costs, including staff salaries, would rise at slightly above inflation, and therefore if UM were to rise only in line with inflation then it would be necessary to find ways to ensure a balanced budget.

JC reminded everyone that the reserves could be used to cover significant unexpected costs.

#### **4. County Working Group update**

Graham Smith (GS) reported that following the Chairmen's Meeting in July, a task team had been established to identify key actions to ensure the success of the County Working Groups (CWGs). Central to this would be a breaking down of perceived barriers between the counties and EBU staff/officials, and the CWGs having motivated members to drive them forward from within. GS gave his thanks to Nicky Bainbridge, Clare Batten, Lesley Millet (LM) and Ron Millet for their work on the task team.

GS reported that the CWGs continued to be very effective in the Midlands and the North. Efforts were being made to start the groups going in the other regions. Some counties in the South-West were motivated, however the distances involved were proving an obstacle to involvement from all counties in the region. He hoped, however, that the group would soon begin communicating to share ideas on best practice, ensure compatible calendars for their events, and share resources where possible.

A representative from Worcester asked how the Board was engaging with the groups. GS replied that the ultimate goal was to have a National Working Group (NWG), in to which each regional CWG would contribute, and the NWG would then give feedback directly to the Board. He would be attending those meetings on behalf of the Board when that was established. The intention was also to have a Board member attend each meeting of the regional groups. JD explained that at each meeting of the Board the members who had attended a CWG were given chance to report back – whether to raise matters which need to be addressed, or to recognise successful initiatives. LM added that a member of staff from Aylesbury – either GR or Club Liaison Officer, Bev Purvis – had attended the meetings of the Northern and Midlands CWGs, and this had helped to break down barriers, and provide a means by which information could flow between the CWGs and Aylesbury. GS agreed that this has been a key, positive step. He reminded all those present that 'the EBU' was every member, club and county, with the staff in Aylesbury acting as 'membership support' to the EBU in this widest sense, rather than being a separate entity.

A representative from Northamptonshire asked whether the minutes from each CWG should be presented at meetings of the Shareholders? JD replied that as they were not formal standing committees so do so would not be consistent – the minutes of sub-committees such as the Editorial Board, for example, not presently being presented to the Shareholders – however it would be considered. JC added, however, that the minutes of the NWG would likely be presented to the Shareholders, so there would be a conduit for information through that channel. Some concern was expressed that this may not fully represent each CWG – though JD reminded the Shareholders that minutes of each CWG meeting were available online, so anyone interested in the meetings of other CWGs could find the information if they wished.

A representative from Worcestershire commented that all counties were welcome to attend the Midlands CWG meetings. It was also the Midlands CWG's intention to invite all County Chairmen to their meeting which would be held prior to the AGM, where they would then discuss any relevant issues.

## **5. EBED report**

At a previous meeting the Shareholders stated that they wished to know more about what projects were being undertaken by English Bridge Education & Development (EBED). JD therefore asked Dr Caroline Small (CS), the Trustee responsible for the research which was being carried out, to address the meeting.

CS explained that whilst there was a wealth of anecdotal evidence relating to the benefits of playing bridge, little scientific research had been undertaken. EBED was working in two areas to address this.

One area of research was being carried out in conjunction with Stirling University. A survey of bridge players had been undertaken in 2017, and comparison with control data sets had shown that playing bridge had a positive effect on wellbeing. CS would be working with Prof Sam Punch (SP) of Stirling University as joint-supervisors of a PhD student who would do further research in to the 'social benefits' of playing bridge.

The second area of research is looking at whether playing bridge improved the health of the participant's brain. This would be done through fMRI scans at Imperial College. CS explained what it was hoped these scans would reveal, and cited examples of other studies from which some comparisons with bridge players could be drawn. The cost of the fMRI scans, and the limited budget available, meant that this was merely a pilot study, with known limitations, but it would indicate whether a larger study would be worthwhile.

CS added that she and SP were talking to researchers in other countries, and were liaising with other National Bridge Organisations, making this a multi-national effort to generate robust evidence which could be presented to key organisations. She explained that she hoped that bridge may ultimately be used as an 'intervention' to help improve mental health – it being a cheap alternative to other options. A representative from Surrey commented that playing bridge had been an important part of his battle with ill health, and thanked the bridge community for its support.

It was noted that whilst the evidence would be valuable, it would be important to frame it appropriately, and use it in the right context, so that other important 'selling points' of bridge were not overshadowed.

JD thanked CS for her presentation. He added that a letter had been sent – via a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Bridge – asking for a meeting with the newly established Minister for Loneliness. It was hoped that she would be willing to discuss the role that bridge could play in combatting isolation in some groups. No response had yet been received, however the Minister would likely not have had the letter for long, so it was hoped one would be forthcoming.

## **6. Membership Project Update**

Ron Millet (RM) started his report by noting a number of key facts: that whilst membership numbers and UM returns were stable, the number of members not playing any sessions was rising; the average age of the membership was increasing; the size of some clubs' membership was at a critically low level; some clubs were being run by only one or two people; only 1/3 of people learning to play go on to play in clubs; whilst people were being brought to the game, they were only coming at the rate that others were leaving, meaning work was being done simply to 'stand still'. He believed, therefore, that action needed to be taken to safeguard the future of the game.

He reported that the membership campaign in Yorkshire had been well received. It had shown that a coordinated and, most importantly, motivated effort to generate new players can be successful – one club had increased its membership from 60 to 90 in six months.

In light of the evidence that such campaigns can be successful, a Membership Development Committee had been established with a view to assisting the growth in membership in other areas. The committee had met for the first time that morning. The intention, RM explained, was to draw on Yorkshire's experiences, and work with other counties to provide assistance to clubs in those areas – and that assistance would be offered, but with no obligation to be involved. It was key, RM explained, that all parties worked together. The work would be started in only a few areas at first, whilst knowledge continued to be collected on what methods were most effective. RM would be writing to County Chairmen in the near future to invite them to participate in this next stage. It would then be rolled out more widely.

A representative from Gloucestershire asked RM whether the campaign to date had revealed a 'best method'. RM replied that most situations had been different, and Yorkshire – with its mixture of large urban areas, and rural communities – had shown that different methods were required in different situations. He added that there was an intention to produce a 'resource centre', through the EBU website, providing 'how-to-guides', templates, etc, which could then be customised to suit the situation in question. The possibility of employing someone to undertake development of these materials was being considered, and provision for this had been included in the budget.

It was noted that in some areas there was a lack of the necessary teachers to take advantage of any interest that may be generated. Rob Lawy, who attends meetings of EBED's Education Advisory Group on behalf of the EBU Board, responded that EBED were aware of this, and reported that EBED were running an event for 'teacher educators' – those who would be teaching the teachers. It was hoped this would be a key step in helping to generate both more, and better, teachers.

It was also acknowledged that an improvement in the conversion rate from students to club players was needed. A few areas for improvement were recognised: a removal of the 'fear factor', whether through a more welcoming atmosphere, and enforcement of Best Behaviour at Bridge, or TDs who are more accommodating; more assisted play and gentle duplicates, to aid the transition; more effort made to move players on from such sessions and in to club duplicates – encouraging players not to 'stay in their comfort zone'.

## **7. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the EBU**

### **25<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

No questions were raised.

### **24<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

No questions were raised.

### **21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 (draft)**

A representative from Surrey asked whether the new Board members were Directors, adding that one had not yet been registered at Companies House. JD replied that they were Directors, having

been appointed as such by the Board. Kay Carter believed that the registration had been submitted to Companies House, but would check with them to ensure it had not been lost or overlooked.

**Update:** *The registration had been misplaced by Companies House. It has since been resubmitted and actioned by Companies House.*

#### **8. Minutes of the meeting of the EBU Laws & Ethics Committee**

**17<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

No questions were raised.

#### **9. Minutes of the meeting of the EBU Selection Committee**

**8<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

No questions were raised.

**27<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

A representative from Surrey noted that 'interested parties' excuse themselves from discussions as appropriate, and it is usually noted in the minutes that they have done so. This was, however, often noted only in general terms, and he asked that in such instances the members of the committee who excuse themselves be specifically listed by name, so it is clearer who was involved in the discussion. JD agreed that this would be a good course of action to take, and would ask the secretary of the committee to do so in future. IP explained that at the beginning of the meeting all present were asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest. JD added that a 'conflicts of interest' policy was available online, and had been seen by all committee members. There was agreement that it was unrealistic to try to compile a committee which contained nobody with a 'conflict of interest' – the nature of the role required involvement in elite competitions, thereby meaning the member would likely have some personal connections to other elite players. JD added that committees compiled with this requirement in the past had proven to be unsuitable.

#### **10. Any other business**

- JD reported that from 1<sup>st</sup> July GR's title would be changed to Chief Executive. This would reflect his increased responsibilities within the organisation. The necessary changes to the Bye-Laws would be proposed at the AGM. There would be no change to GR's status in relation to his attendance at meetings – the Chief Executive is not a Director of the company.
- JD advised that Counties could soon make nominations for members to receive a Dimmie Fleming. Nominations should be made before 22<sup>nd</sup> August.
- The document *Raising our Game: Strategic Aims 2018-2023* was made available to the Shareholders.
- Copies of the new welcome pack, which is now distributed to all new members, were made available to each county. GR explained that the pack had been developed in response to feedback from the County Working Groups, and had been well received by members and clubs. It was explained that whilst copies could be made available in limited numbers for promotional purposes – for example to counties which were in the final stages of encouraging a club to affiliate – they would not be distributed liberally so that they remained a benefit of membership and an incentive to affiliate.
- The relatively low attendance at the meeting was noted – 29 out of 99 shareholders attended, and 22 of the 39 counties were represented. JD explained that the meeting was not a constitutional requirement, so the Shareholders could consider whether they wished to continue to have the meeting in its current form, or whether an alternative would be

preferred. He added that to stop the meeting could leave an ‘information gap’ which would need to be filled by another means.

Some Shareholders expressed concern that a single meeting in the year would leave a long gap during which no formal votes on proposals could take place, and they preferred more frequent meetings to ensure business was dealt with in a timely manner. Other Shareholders were content to forego a second formal meeting each year, but wished to retain a second opportunity to discuss matters, preferring a gathering akin to the biennial Chairmen’s Meeting.

It was noted that whilst there had been little of significance to discuss at this meeting, that was not always the case, and this meeting may not be indicative of the importance of future meetings. It was, however, suggested that it may be possible to cancel future meetings if it was apparent that there was little of substance on the agenda. Some matters could then be handled by email, or efforts made to identify a way by which video-conferencing could be used. This latter suggestion was not well received, though it was recognised that the technology in this area was improving, and the possible financial savings would mean it was something which should not be rejected without further consideration.

There was an informal show of hands to indicate those who preferred that the Shareholders meeting at the midpoint in the year continue in its present form – around 2/3 of the Shareholders preferred this option, with 1/3 preferring an undefined alternative.

Closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked the Shareholders for their attendance, and confirmed the date of the Annual General Meeting.

**Date of the Annual General Meeting is Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November  
at the Imperial Hotel, London**