



YOU AND THE EBU



Since June 2007 we have received over 1000 e-mails and letters prompted by our extensive consultation on the future of the EBU and thus duplicate bridge in England. It became obvious to us that many of the duplicate bridge players in England are not aware of what we do and how we interact with them – the responsibility for that rests firmly on our shoulders. We want to share our private responses to their questions with all our members and we take this opportunity to put the EBU in context and explain its purpose. Apologies to readers of Barry's Blogs who may recognise some of the content here!

Why and when was the EBU formed?

Various counties and groups of counties set up the English Bridge Union in 1936 to look after duplicate and other competition contract bridge in England, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. At the end of 1946, the EBU finally achieved complete control of Duplicate Bridge in England. The governing body was its Council, made up of representatives from the counties, the number of votes proportional to the number of members in each county. A different body, the English Bridge Union Limited, was formed in 1940; the Board of this company was also the Executive Committee of the English Bridge Union. The two were merged into one limited company in 2005.

From the beginning the EBU, together with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Unions, was part of the British Bridge League which was the national bridge organisation for Great Britain. In 2000 the countries split up and each became their own National Bridge Organisation, and the British Bridge League was dissolved.

So how do you manage yourselves?

The EBU has a constitution and bye-laws which provide the framework for its governance. These are lengthy documents that can be accessed on our website.

In 2005 the constitution and bye-laws were amended and the Council members became the Shareholders. These Shareholders represent their respective counties – thirty-nine in total – just as the Council members did. They vote in a Board of Directors and then a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer every year to manage the EBU. The Board reports to the Shareholders three times a year. The Shareholders also vote in members of three sub-committees on a rolling year basis, i.e. each members is voted in for a three-year period but not all members are voted in at the same time. You can read the minutes of the Board and Shareholders meetings on our website.

Do the Shareholders receive any financial benefit?

No. They are called 'shareholders' because their county is allocated a number of 'shares'

appropriate to the number of members it has, which translates into votes – not financial income. Any financial surplus made by the organisation is retained within the business for investment into the development of bridge in England.

What do the three standing committees do?

It is the job of all three standing committees to make recommendations to the Board addressing the policy, strategy and smooth running of the activities for which they have responsibility including the costs involved.

The Tournament Committee is responsible for all national competitions and congresses.

The Laws and Ethics Committee is responsible for regulation which includes England's own playing rules as set down in the *Orange Book* and also the implementation of the Laws of Duplicate Bridge as set down by the World Bridge Federation of which the EBU is a member.

The Selection Committee is responsible for choosing players to represent England in open, women, seniors and youth international competitions.

What about everyday management?

There is a paid team of staff at EBU headquarters in Aylesbury, who work out of an office that the EBU purchased when property prices were relatively low, more than twenty years ago. Many of the staff are bridge players who love working in the bridge environment.

How is the EBU funded?

Through membership subscriptions, Master Point fees, tournament entry fees, training course fees, book and equipment sales, advertising sales for *English Bridge* and some sponsorship. Our income and expenditure accounts can be accessed on our website; go to www.ebu.co.uk and click on **Financial Statements (31/3/07)** in the **Hot Links** panel on the right-hand side.

How much are the Board of Directors and the other committee members paid?

Nothing. We are all volunteers. There are no honoraria for any of the officers of the Board. This ceased at the end of the financial year 2005-2006. Each member of the Board also has the legal responsibilities and liabilities attached to being a company director.

Why don't I have a vote?

You do! But it is at county level. Our model is based on the parliamentary model that operates in the UK. You have a vote to elect the management committee of your county and these nominees become your representatives at national level. The county will appoint Shareholders from among its committee to vote on your behalf. You can make representations to the county to ensure that your Shareholders put forward the consensus view of the county membership at the EBU Shareholders meetings.

Why does duplicate bridge in England need the EBU?

Most games or sports have a governing body. The EBU is such an organisation and is responsible, through its constitution, for the development and the infrastructure of duplicate bridge in England. This means that we look after education, including training teachers and via them students, ensuring that tournament directors are trained and available to run club sessions and competitions, and we are also responsible for ensuring that the framework of regulation for playing the game is followed including the good behaviour of everybody involved.

Will you be changing the playing regulations again in the near future?

The current Board is committed to the simplification of regulation, and will avoid unnecessary changes that may complicate matters for our members as has occurred in the past. We want all our members to enjoy the game.

We recognise the need for modernisation and reform across many of our operations and we are currently investigating separating the conduct aspects from the technical aspects of the Laws and Ethics committee.

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What about the new Laws?

This is an area which is out of our control. The World Bridge Federation, of which we are a member, is responsible for the Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge. These Laws must be adhered to by everybody who plays duplicate bridge, unlike our own regulations published in the *Orange Book*, which clubs can ignore if they so wish.

These Laws will become active in England on 1 August 2008. The EBU will be running courses for its tournament directors. Please contact your county for information on how it proposes to promote the changes in your area. Anyone taking part in club tournament director training will be made aware of the new arrangements.

Why did you need to address the membership arrangements of the EBU?

We took this route because membership of the EBU was falling rapidly and projections showed a 'tipping point' at which running our operations would not be viable and duplicate bridge in England would lose its national body. Doing nothing was not an option if we were to fulfil our role of developing bridge in England. We are constantly asked by our members about developing the game in schools, universities, amongst the middle-aged and older people. We cannot do this without a strong and increasing membership base. The Board believes that the clubs are the core of the membership, so we set out to ascertain precisely what club members required and how we could help club bridge to develop and thrive. We wanted to ensure that our existing members were being provided with the services they require before trying to attract new members.

We have now formulated our proposals for the future after:

- A detailed club research project which took place between January and October 2006;
- Research into best practice of the most successful national bridge organisations in Europe, which took place between February and June 2007;
- An extensive consultation with all our counties between July and September 2007; and
- A wide-ranging club survey to all affiliated clubs in the Union between November 2007 and February 2008.

These proposals are based on universal membership in our affiliated clubs. We wanted to create a system that was simple and as fair as possible, hence members of

our affiliated clubs only pay when they play. If approved, the Pay to Play process will provide a stable basis from which to move on and develop bridge at all levels - from the very young to the elderly. It will also provide each member of each affiliated club with the benefits of membership of the EBU.

So, if Pay to Play is approved, you will have achieved universal membership?

Yes, that is our aim.

What is all this about a contract between clubs and the EBU? Is it going to be a 'master-servant' relationship?

The club-EBU contract will be the same as any contract between a service supplier and its client. The EBU agrees to provide services and the affiliated club will agree to pay for them. Clubs will remain entirely sovereign in every respect: they will be able to determine how their games are regulated - within the Laws of Contract Bridge, of course; they will continue to be able to make all the decisions on how they run themselves as they do at present without any interference from the Union. However, we will stand ready to help clubs much more than we have ever done in the past and to work with people at all levels to develop the game.

Are you making any attempt to address the way you run your operations at Aylesbury?

Yes, we are. This new stability will also allow us to address the long-term restructuring of the EBU. We need to bring our management and operations into the 21st century, which in turn will provide opportunities for streamlining. We have already started work on this in some key areas that will be affected by the Pay to Play process if it is accepted on 4 June. We want to deliver services that meet the needs of all our members in an effective, economical, accessible and transparent way.

How will you be more representative of the majority of members of the EBU?

We are the first to admit that the EBU has not been as representative as it could have been of the majority of its members in the past. This history has caused much distrust about our current plans. Those of us who are responsible for the current running of the organisation are committed to a debate on representation of the membership at national level addressing all that this involves, including how the expenditure of a large annual meeting of members and an Electoral Reform Society governed postal/electronic vote might be funded.

We are committed to setting up a sub-

committee of the Board that represents clubs and deals with all the issues that affect our grass-roots, including regulation and competition.

We also want to create a framework of competitions that will be accessible to many more players and that will run alongside and within clubs to create a vibrant tournament environment for all our members.

How will you be accountable?

We want to demonstrate to our membership how strongly we feel about our responsibilities. So, as well as being accountable to the membership through the Shareholders, we have made a series of commitments to our members which are detailed in our document on the future of the EBU. The progress made on these commitments will be reported on each year at our Shareholders meeting in June and in the August issue of *English Bridge*. This will help our members and Shareholders when they come to make their voting decisions at the AGM.

How can I have my say?

Firstly, please read our document 'Proposals for the Future of the EBU', which is now available on our website, and has been sent to every club, county and Shareholder. If you don't have access to a copy, please contact the EBU at Aylesbury.

Once you have read the document, please make your views known to your county management committee. Some counties will be holding meetings, others will not. However, if you have real difficulty contacting your county representative, just contact us and we will put you in touch.

If you have any questions that are not answered here, please contact me by letter via Aylesbury or e-mail me at strategy@ebu.co.uk.

What happens next?

The vote will be taken on whether to accept Pay to Play on 4 June 2008. An announcement of the outcome of that meeting will be made on our website immediately it is known and in the August issue of *English Bridge*.

And finally...

The proposals are the result of an extensive consultation and we would like to take this opportunity to thank every person that has taken part in this process, who has attended meetings, written and called to discuss our proposals with us. Thank you!

Sally Bugden
Vice-Chairman,
EBU