

AEO report for KCBA Committee Meeting 10<sup>th</sup> December 2022

## **SmartBridge**

Following the last Committee meeting I can now update you on the current position with the SmartBridge trial.

Unfortunately, I was advised by Farnborough/Bromley on 24<sup>th</sup> October that they had only received one further sign up for the course in the previous eight weeks making a total of four participants. However, in view of the feedback they had received indicating that people in their area preferred face to face lessons and that a commitment of 2 sessions a week for the online lesson and then the supervised play session was too much, they had agreed between both clubs that they were unable to continue with the trial.

We agreed that I should approach Thanet, and Paul Gibbons kindly agreed that he would take on their four participants and run the supervised play session online on Real Bridge on the other clubs behalf. Farnborough/Bromley contacted the four students and one replied and withdrew from the trial, because he did not want to learn to play bridge solely online, and the others did not even reply so there are no participants for the trial from these clubs now.

Maidstone BC withdrew from the trial on 27<sup>th</sup> October as they have had very few enquiries at all regarding SB and had not signed up anyone for the trial and their feedback was that the need to commit to two session a week, one of which was during the day, was a problem as was the fact that there are no textbooks for the course. They feel that the current general economic situation has had an effect together with the prospect of students having to travel out in adverse weather conditions and finally there was now insufficient commitment from their club members to run the trial.

Thanet have not had many enquires for SB either and have had none since our last committee meeting and they currently have no one signed up for the trial.

Deal Club have 10 students ready to start on 9<sup>th</sup> January, with EBED running the lessons online on Monday afternoons from 2pm and participants then attending supervised play sessions at the Club on Wednesday mornings to be run with the help of club members who have volunteered. Recruitment of players for the trial has slowed considerably recently and despite continuing the Club's extensive marketing on local social media sites together with members contacting friends regarding the course there have been no further enquiries at all in the last two months.

As you know, Giorgio Provenza postponed the trial until 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 and it is planned that it will run for 12 weeks from that date. He felt that this should give all Clubs the time to find the 12-15 participants which EBED had said was the optimum number needed for the trial. I contacted him at the end of October and held a meeting with Norman and Giorgio when I advised him that two of the clubs had withdrawn from the trial and he was going to approach some other Counties who had initially expressed an interest in taking part to see whether they could get some participants.

Despite asking Giorgio to keep me informed of progress, I have heard nothing further and when I emailed him last week for an update I received an automated message saying he is on annual leave until 12<sup>th</sup> December.

However, I am delighted to tell you that taking part in the SmartBridge trial has achieved many positives for Kent County as all the Clubs involved have increased their marketing for new members which has resulted in Farnborough, Bromley North and Maidstone all recruiting some new students for their own local teachers from people who preferred F2F teaching.

Maidstone have a new teacher who attended the Sevenoaks TTC, Catherine Grant and she has started teaching already. I believe this is as a direct result of SB.

Thanet also now have two brand-new teachers who have attended TT courses and I understand that Jacky Holland has now started teaching a new class with help from Ken Walker and Carol Brocklehurst has also started a new class of Beginners in the Thanet area.

Deal has potentially 10 students ready to start either with SB or, if the trial does not go ahead, I shall teach them personally.

So, whilst it will be disappointing if EBED are unable to run this course and test whether SB will work, at least our four Kent Clubs who took part in the trial have all benefitted from the work they have undertaken.

I shall report again on this at the next Committee meeting.

### **Sevenoaks Teacher Training Course**

Chris Lohan ran this course in late September and I understand it was very successful. There was a full complement of twelve teachers who attended the course. Unfortunately, two of our potential teachers had to drop out at the last minute so their places were taken from outside the County however, we still have 11 new Bridge teachers in Kent as Jacky Holland from Thanet went to Solihull for her training.

The success of this course was greatly helped by Kent Committee, as by using an active approach in promoting the TTC to our own Clubs, we reinforced the message that all Clubs must continue to recruit new players if we are to safeguard the future of Bridge in our County, and beyond.

Pat Welsh

AEO

9<sup>th</sup> December 2022