

Report to KCBA Working Group of meeting with Giorgio Provenza, Tony Russ and Pat Welsh to discuss SmartBridge Trial 2 held on Zoom on 19th May 2022

Kent County are being asked to help with the second trial of SmartBridge (SB) which it is now envisaged will be starting in September 2022.

Giorgio would like between 50 and 60 participants on the trial and therefore I believe we would be asking 3 or 4 Clubs to take part in this with 12-16 participants from each Club.

The Clubs who take part will need to market SB themselves to potential students in their own area and I would suggest they do this using the Marketing materials recently made available on the Bridge Warehouse.

Those same Clubs will also need to have members to volunteer to help with the trial. Full training will be given to all Club members who take part before the trial starts.

The volunteers will need to attend each of the 12 lessons with the students from their own Clubs. The lessons will last for about 90 minutes and during each lesson the students from each Club will be put into a Breakout room with the volunteer from that Club who will facilitate the discussion on that week's topic answering a quiz and then they will all be taken back to the main Zoom session where a spokesperson student from each Club will put forward their solution. This will encourage a rapport between the student members of each Club with their own volunteer/mentor.

After the teaching session, the volunteer will then run a Supervised play session with 8 boards where the students will practise that week's topic with prepared hands with bidding and play strategies together with learning outcomes all of which will be provided in advance by EBED to the volunteers. I would anticipate that this session will take approx. 90 minutes to run. This can be done either online or F2F whichever is best for the Club, volunteer and students. This can be done straight after the teaching session or on another day entirely.

The students will have access to a short video of around 6 or 7 minutes before each lesson which will tell them about the topic of the week and it will have a small number of PowerPoint slides showing the main points. This is then reinforced in the lesson which is run by an EBED teacher online and the Breakout room discussions will be facilitated by the Club volunteers.

At the end of the trial the Clubs will have students who have an affinity to their Club with rapport built up by the volunteer members and it will then be up to the Club to manage them going forward with assistance from our own Working Group.

As a County, we shall need to give support to the Clubs who take part in the trial and I believe we shall have to work together to ensure that the students who have gone through the trial are then not lost to social or kitchen table Bridge and that a number of them are ultimately converted into Club members.

This could be done by each Club's teacher becoming involved in giving further lessons to improve the Bridge they have learned during the trial.

Alternatively, the Clubs could decide to offer supervised play sessions for all of the students online on a rolling basis providing a friendly session with help available when needed perhaps every week with each Club running this once a month to cut down the workload for the Club members?

Otherwise, each Club may decide to offer a staged programme with supervised play leading to Gentle Duplicate sessions and eventually bring these players into the main room of the Club once they are ready.

SmartBridge offers a fast track method of introducing players to the game in a fun environment but, at the end of the day, it only provides 12 lessons. So, there will be a need for us, as a County, to encourage our Clubs to enter this trial with an eye to the future.

We shall be asking Club volunteers to make a big investment in time for 12 weeks and we shall need to convince them that this will benefit them in the future.

Each Club will run their own trial and they will be responsible for finding the students willing to take part for the 12 weeks. EBED are offering this second course at a discounted cost of £60 rather than the £100 fee which they anticipate will be charged once the programme is fully up and running. This sum will be invoiced to each Club for every participant they enter. The sum will cover all the lessons provided, all the material for the supervised play and all the information the volunteers will require each week to facilitate the breakout rooms and supervise the play sessions. There would be no objection from EBED if the Clubs decided they wanted to charge each person for the supervised play sessions. The clubs will collect the fees from the students and send off the £60 per person due to EBED and any other sums charged will be retained by the Clubs.

Benefits

Students will benefit from this programme because they will learn a lot of Bridge in 12 weeks and they should, at the end of the trial, be able to play Bridge with some supervision available to help them if they need it. Hopefully a lot of them will decide they want to continue after the course finishes.

Clubs will benefit by building up a rapport with their students which should enable them to get new members into the Club, initially with supervised play, then GD and finally as full Club members. If this SB trial works the Clubs who have taken part will be well placed to benefit further if the programme is successful as they will have ironed out any issues already and they will be able to encourage more people to learn to play using SB in the future.

Clubs may also benefit as it is possible that some of the volunteers may actually decide they wish to become EBTA teachers to build on the work they have done during the trial.

Teachers attached to those Clubs will benefit because it is anticipated that there will be a number of the students who should want to learn more. They can be brought into existing classes possibly at Beginners continuation or maybe even Improver level rather than Beginners. This is helpful for teachers as the students will have passed through the absolute Beginner stage, which in the Bridge For All system, is the most intensive and time consuming part of the course. It is also much easier to integrate new students into existing classes at any time of the year at this level whereas teachers often only start a brand new Beginners course every one or two years.

Kent County will benefit because we shall have a closer working relationship with the 3 or 4 Clubs who are taking part in this trial. There will be more players joining our Clubs and if this trial is successful then EBED will be rolling out the SmartBridge programme nationally but we shall have an advantage in the future because of our input throughout the trial.

Kent's Involvement

I have suggested to Giorgio that, if we agree to take part in this SB trial, that we shall want to have full consultation with EBED and he has agreed that he would want KCBA to be fully involved in all aspects of this second trial.

We shall need a Working Group to take this forward as it will be necessary to come up with a full plan to implement this trial. I believe we shall need to drive this forward showing the Clubs that we, as a County, are fully committed to helping our Clubs who take part in this initiative.

I am willing to strongly encourage the new Committee of Ace Bridge Club in Deal to enter this trial which would get one Club on board for the County to get us started.

Summary and recommendation

SmartBridge is forward thinking and is an innovative way of teaching Bridge to newcomers. EBED have learned a lot from the first pilot and I believe they are correct to want to trial this in a County next as this will provide better data using a more compact study within just 3 or 4 Clubs.

I believe that it fits well with our own County's current initiative of promoting teaching and recruitment within Kent. I can see potential benefits for players, Clubs, teachers and County and, although it will mean a lot of work for everyone involved, I believe that it is worthy of our support and I recommend to the Committee that we take on this challenge.

Pat Welsh

20th May 2022