



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION

1 September 2016 - 31 August 2017

The English Bridge Union is the governing body for duplicate bridge in England, representing communities of bridge players at club, county and national level. It is funded by members for members and provides the infrastructure and development of the game in England. Monies are re-invested into our national game.

This annual report provides an insight in to the work that we do to support our clubs, counties and members and will be of interest to those individuals and organisations that, in turn, provide us with support to develop the game.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers that make up our national team - the Directors of the Board and all the members of its committees and the dedicated team of staff under our recently retired General Manager, Barry Capal, at Aylesbury and the new General Manager, Gordon Rainsford. A special thanks is due to Barry for over a decade of leadership and hard work at Aylesbury. We've made some changes to the governance of the EBU with the standing Tournament committee replaced by a smaller Panel and the Laws & Ethics committee having a new prosecution panel made up of volunteers to help with that small number of disciplinary cases where formal action is required.

In June 2017 the Advocate General in the European Court said he was minded to accept our submission relating to VAT on competition entry fees. This is not binding on the judges who are expected to rule definitively in the latter part of this year. We continue to be grateful to David Ewart, our honorary Counsel, for his great assistance in continuing to representing us on a pro bono basis. We have concluded our legal involvement in Sport England's refusal to recognise us as a sport. We were not successful.

The Board has been reviewing our overall membership figures along with a changing and slowly aging demographic. They decided to take action to tackle the challenge this poses for the EBU along with most traditional sporting and leisure activities.

In partnership with the Yorkshire Contract Bridge Association a pilot Membership Campaign is underway to establish the most effective techniques for encouraging the take up or return to playing Bridge. This is beginning to show results with clubs responding positively to the campaign. Once we have learned from the successes as well as the failures of this consideration will be given to extending the scheme to other parts of the country. The European Bridge League awarded us a grant which has helped with the cost of this pilot.

The statutory annual report and accounts will be able to be viewed on our website www.ebu.co.uk shortly after the EBU's Annual General Meeting on 22nd November 2017.

The Board

The Board is made up of eight directors elected by the shareholders, who are the representatives of our counties, and up to two appointed by the Board, renewable annually. The directors receive no remuneration for the work they undertake. They have legal and financial responsibilities as set out in the Companies Act 2006.

Each director takes responsibility for one or more aspects of the EBU's business. This responsibility includes budgetary control, delivering strategic objectives and regular reporting on the work of the department and committee associated with it. For the year 2016-17 the responsibilities were as follows:

Chairman: Jeremy Dhondy

Vice-Chairman: Ian Payn

Treasurer: Jerry Cope

Board director responsible for:

Tournaments: Ian Payn

Facilitating the strategic plan: Jerry Cope

Staff development: Jerry Cope

Education: Rob Lawy

County Working Group: Darren Evetts & from May Graham Smith

Legal matters: Anthony Golding

Magazine & Editorial Board: Jeremy Dhondy

Tournament Directors Development: Heather Dhondy

Bridge Great Britain: Heather Dhondy

European and World duplicate bridge affairs: Jeremy Dhondy

Awards: Ron Millet

All Party Parliamentary Group: Ron Millet

VAT Case: Ian Payn

Bridge Warehouse: Graham Smith

Sponsorship & Fundraising: Darren Evetts

English Bridge Education and Development

Our associated charity English Bridge Education and Development (EBED) receives funds from the English Bridge Union to help it operate. It runs all the education services that the EBU used to run including the English Bridge Teaching Association (EBTA). Fast Track Bridge, a new course to teach people to play in a shorter time has been completed and launched. Early signs are encouraging. The Junior Training weekend returned, after an absence of a year and two regional events for young players in Sussex and Gloucestershire have also run, organised by local volunteers. The Teachers' Convention re-appeared after a number of years' absence and was sold out.

Finance

2016/7 saw an out-turn better than budget but nonetheless a loss of some £25k, as Competitions income and margin continued to decline, whilst tight control of other expenditure areas kept the loss down. The Board and Shareholders have agreed that over a four year cycle, reflecting the International calendar, we should aim for a small profit, excluding any exceptional investments, which we should fund from reserves, which remain adequate for this purpose. This is an appropriate and prudent strategy for a non-profit-making members organisation, where the long-term sustainability of the EBU is the key financial objective.

Unfortunately current projections suggest continuing deficits totalling £130k over 4 years which is incompatible with this financial strategy. Hence we are looking at careful cost-efficiencies, whilst continuing to provide a high quality service to members. Particular areas that will need to contribute to the cost reduction target are staffing, support to a few International events, magazine and diary distribution, and some administrative costs. At the same time we will continue to try to boost, or in the case of Competitions stabilise, income in real terms.

The 2017/8 financial year has started reasonably, ahead of budget, albeit still loss-making, and we expect that activities being put in place will continue this trend of improving underlying performance.'

Clubs and Club Services

Ten new and established clubs affiliated during the period September 2016 to August 2017 but the total number of affiliated clubs reduced slightly from 615 to 613. Twelve clubs closed or disaffiliated in the period mainly due to falling numbers/ill-health of the main club organiser. The newly affiliating clubs were mainly starter clubs arising from teaching groups and small clubs hoping to raise their profile and grow as a result of affiliation. Poulton was the only large club that re-affiliated during the period – their committee wanted the club to be affiliated to the national body.

The Club Liaison Officer (CLO), Bev Purvis, has visited many affiliated clubs across the country and has concentrated both on successful clubs (to get examples of best practice) and those with falling membership (to offer assistance in boosting numbers). It has proved difficult to arrange meetings with non-affiliated clubs but the CLO has visited two such clubs in the year and engaged with more by telephone. Another visit to a non-affiliated club is planned for October.

The CLO has found that non-affiliated clubs tend to equate “affiliated” with being “unfriendly” – it is telling that two of the newly affiliated clubs include “friendly” in their name. The CLO has worked on ways of engaging with social bridge players as a way of boosting club membership and is working on a new section of the Club Management Handbook for Café Bridge. One issue that has been raised quite a lot is that of NGS exemption for host players and mentors. The concerns raised by clubs whose success has been much helped by their teaching programme were instrumental in granting a reprieve of the system allowing some NGS exemptions in clearly-defined situations.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Bridge (APPG)

The group continues to be chaired by Bob Blackman MP, with Baroness Henig acting as the primary point of contact for the EBU and the coordinator of the majority of the group's events. The group holds two meetings each year for which the EBU provides secretarial support; both the EBU and EBED are represented at the meetings.

The group has been interested in, and supportive of, the efforts to have Bridge recognised as a sport by Sport England, and also in the case with HMRC, to allow the EBU to be exempt from charging VAT. In support of this they have spoken privately with some of the relevant people within government. However they have found it difficult to discuss the topic in a more formal context although Bob Blackman MP continues to raise the issue in the House of Commons. Members of the APPG for Chess have taken a similar approach and are slowly gaining the ear of key policy makers.

Both Tim Farron, the leader of the Liberal Democrats at the time, and Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence, have voiced their support for no VAT to be charged on Bridge entry fees. Michael Fallon made this point when speaking during one of the two visits in the last twelve months made by groups of young players to the House of Lords. As MP for Sevenoaks he attended the event when a team of school students from west Kent, some of whom live in his constituency, played a match against a team of Bridge playing Lords. The visit was arranged in part by Anton and Jessica Mauve who were the recipients of the 2017 Tom Bradley Award. The second visit was by a group of children who had learned through, and play with, the Bridge4Schools programme in Berks, Bucks & Oxon. This was organised by Joan Bennett.

Visits have been made to schools by their lordships to promote Bridge including one by Lord Skelmersdale who visited an event in Cheltenham late last year. We hope that these kinds of support will continue so that interest in Bridge continues to develop.

International Performances

England's representation in international duplicate bridge competitions is an important part of the EBU's activities as a national bridge organisation albeit, like all expenditure, we need to keep a close eye on overall costs. Successes at international level help to raise public awareness of English bridge and to attract new players to the game. Our participation in international events provides us with an international profile in the bridge world and it also brings more influence within the European Bridge League (EBL) and the World Bridge Federation (WBF).

The Selection Committee, made up of seven elected and two ex officio members and chaired by Gillian Fawcett, is responsible for selecting the teams to represent us internationally. It has been a good year for England at international level, with two bronze medals at the Junior Europeans and wins in four of the five Home Internationals:

- Open

The England Open team reached the quarter final of the World Bridge Games (previously the Olympiad). Unfortunately, the England Open team failed to retain the Camrose Home Internationals title, coming 2nd to Ireland.

- Women

This was a very successful year for the Women's team. They reached the quarter finals of the World Bridge Games last September, and a good performance in the Home International saw them retake the Lady Milne trophy.

- Seniors

The senior team retained the Senior Camrose (Teltscher Trophy) title.

- Juniors

The Junior team won the Junior Camrose for the fifth time in a row, and our U21 team won the Peggy Bayer Trophy. Excellent performances in the Junior European Championships saw the U26 women's team and the U21 team win bronze medals, and all four teams (U26, U26 women, U21 and U16) qualified for the World Championships in China in 2018. England was the only country to achieve this feat.

- Mixed

For the first time, a mixed team category was introduced to the World Bridge Games. The England team qualified for the Knockout stages but unfortunately did not progress further.

Junior squads

The Selection Committee is also responsible for the junior squads which provide training for young players. Through the hard work of squad leaders that have included Alan Shillitoe, Michael Byrne, Sarah O'Connor, Mike Bell and Sally Brock, supported by a number of top players who provide coaching and mentoring, the junior squad system continues to bring young players into the game and to prepare successive generations of players for national and international competition. We are in the process of appointing new squad leaders for the U26 and U16 squads, and are confident that they will continue to produce international standard young players and we thank the two retiring squad leaders for their efforts.

The squad system has this year produced one of the most successful ever overall performances at the Junior European Championships. All four squads are now well established, and are starting their preparation for the World Championships in China next year.

Regulation

The Laws and Ethics Committee (L&E), made up of seven elected individual members of the EBU under the chairmanship of Tim Rees, is responsible for the regulation of the game in England.

Updated regulations were published in 2013, including a White Book (primarily information and guidance for Tournament Directors) and a Blue Book (primarily information for players). Both publications are available electronically, free, from the website and are updated annually. Only minor amendments have been made each August. The main change this year was to the regulation regarding strong artificial openings, as that regulation had been causing problems to members.

A new set of Laws came into force in August 2017. The changes are of a relatively minor nature, with the main change being a new Law 23 on Comparable Calls, which affects rulings following insufficient bids and calls out of turn. The EBU has provided training to TDs on the effects of the changes to the Laws.

The L&E hears cases of both a technical and disciplinary nature. There have been few technical cases, with no appeals to the National Authority in the past year. The level of appeals at tournaments has also reduced, and there have been no instances of appeals without merit during the year. Appeals from tournaments are reviewed by the L&E so that they can offer advice and ensure the consistency of decisions. An annual booklet of the major decisions is published and is available electronically from the EBU website. The booklet for 2015 is currently being worked on. Appeals are reviewed and comments published in the minutes of the L&E meetings.

Disciplinary cases continue with relatively low frequency. Most of the issues considered by the L&E are concerned with complaints of bad behaviour by players and/or committee members. The L&E encourages these issues to be dealt with at a local level. The L&E provides advice on model disciplinary regulations for clubs, counties and jointly run events. The L&E has also produced a set of model regulations for League Competitions.

One change to the disciplinary process during the last year is the setting up of a separate Prosecution Panel to investigate and prosecute cases, leaving the L&E to focus more on the technical aspects of the game.

There is a panel of referees appointed by the L&E who hear appeals at tournaments and act as telephone referees in knock out events, on a voluntary basis. They are also called upon from time to time to give rulings from club and county events.

Tournaments and Competitions

Having introduced a number of changes to the competitions calendar in the last few years, things have remained more constant this year, though overall numbers do continue to decline, not only in England but in many other countries too. Such changes as do take place are largely driven by the availability of venues, since hotels are increasingly reluctant to contract ahead for events, with the effect that we often have to move venues against our wishes. Our overseas congresses continue to be very popular and successful, and are still run primarily by Peter Jordan in his retirement.

One unforeseen change approaching is that the Winter Garden in Eastbourne, to where we had fairly successfully re-located the Summer Meeting in 2016, is going to be closed for about eighteen months, so this year we announced a one-off Festival of Bridge for 2018,

with the main weekend events being held in London and some midweek events at various locations around the country. We expect to return to a transformed venue in Eastbourne in 2019.

We have also announced another change for 2018 when we introduce a Seniors Championship Pairs to our popular Scarborough Congress, along with a seniors prize for the existing multiple teams event. We hope this will redress the southern bias of seniors' events to some extent.

In September this year we entered into an arrangement with Funbridge, a French company, for them to run "robot" games on our behalf each Saturday and Sunday, issuing modest amounts of master points. At this early stage they appear to be popular and successful, with the games in the first month each averaging more than 80 players. A monthly ladder is also planned based on these results.

Tournament Directors Development Group

This subcommittee of the Board deals with the development and management of the EBU's active tournament directors. It is chaired by Board Director, Heather Dhondy. During the period Mike Amos decided to retire from the TD panel. Mike has been one of the most senior of our directors for many years, providing the tournament world with high quality TD work and we were sorry to see him go. We wish him well in the future. We welcomed new members Christine Duckworth and Robin Barker to the group to replace Pat Davies and Gordon Rainsford who decided to step down. We are grateful to them both for their hard work over the years. Congratulations go to Jonathan Lillycrop for his promotion to Senior Congress Director.

The County Working Group

A bit like the curate's egg, the County Working Groups (CWG) has been good in parts. The good parts being the two most active CWG's in the North and Midlands.

Leading up to the Chairman's Meeting on 5th July 2017, the EBU sent out a survey to all counties for their views on issues and challenges facing clubs and counties. On the day itself, informal discussion groups debated these issues in more depth and then prioritised them.

At the end of the meeting, a Task Team consisting predominantly of the Midlands and North County Working Groups (RCWG) was empowered to address the challenges and to submit recommendations to the EBU Board for action. For continuity, the CWG Task Team was to be headed by EBU Board member, Graham Smith, who had also devised and facilitated the Chairman's Meeting.

Essentially, five major themes emerged:

- ❑ 'Them and Us' mentality
- ❑ Management and Control
- ❑ Recruitment and Development Priorities for Clubs/Counties
- ❑ Benefits of Affiliation- Clubs
- ❑ Benefits of EBU-Members

At the time of this report, the CWG Task Team has met and drafted a report with recommendations and they will be discussing their recommendations with both the Northern and Midlands CWG for their input.

A final report addressing all five major themes is scheduled for submission to the EBU Board before the end of the 2017 calendar year. With a combination of practical experience and a new perspective, we aim to broaden and deepen the success of the CWG initiative across all of the English counties.

English Bridge

The Editorial Board for English Bridge is a subcommittee of the Board chaired by EBU Board Chairman Jeremy Dhondy. We undertook a survey to find out the opinions of readers. One result was a strong desire for the printed magazine to continue. As a result of the survey the magazine has undergone some minor changes. The recent move of County News online marks the fact that more readers consult their own county websites for news and also look online at the EBU site.

Library and Archive

The EBU Library has been updated during the year. We are grateful for donations, one of which was from Bradford Bridge Club with some copies of books from the libraries of Harold Franklin, an ex-Chief Tournament director and also Eric Milnes, a former editor of Bridge Magazine. We also received magazines and press cuttings from the estate of the late Patrick Jourdain. The archive of past results and other aspects of the EBU's history presented electronically has been further developed in the last year. One of our members, Richard Fleet, has written a book on the early years of the History of Bridge in England and it is available both from the EBU Warehouse and also as a pdf file on the website.

EBU Headquarters at Aylesbury

We have a full time staff equivalent of around sixteen, serving over 54000 members through the provision of tournaments, regulation, international support, club and membership support services including the Bridge Warehouse providing bridge books and supplies, and communications including Club Management Focus to affiliated clubs, and Events Focus to 'tournament players'. All of these services are supported by technology including our new membership software.

We also provide assistance to the charity English Bridge Education and Development, with whom we share offices and some administrative systems. EBED has a new Chief Executive in the person of Donna Wright, as well as three other staff.

Some further highlights

? New Laws

The WBF issued their regular ten-yearly update of the Laws of Duplicate Bridge, which involved us in quite a lot of preparation for their introduction here in England, both in terms of arranging printing and planning training for our EBU panel TDs so that they could further disseminate the information via regional courses, some of which were organised by EBED, to club and county directors across the country.

Their introduction has been relatively smooth, being introduced at the Summer Meeting, timed to coincide with our annual update of the White Book and Blue Book, and their publication has provided the Bridge Warehouse with some welcome additional income.

? Media coverage

The main focus of press attention this year has concerned the preliminary ruling in our European Court VAT case, when a non-binding recommendation was issued that Bridge should be considered a sport for VAT purposes. If confirmed this will have important consequences for the EBU.

A press release was sent to the national media's 'press desks', as well as directly to journalists who had covered various aspects of our case in the past. Aspects of this release were used by the majority of the national media, though some smaller outlets used a release from the Associated Press written by one of their correspondents before we had received the court documents. The coverage was mostly neutral to positive.

Peter Stockdale gave an additional interview to the Daily Telegraph, who used some of the information, produced something for the weekend edition of "The i", and spoke to eight local radio stations – all of which were generally positive. There were additional pieces on BBC radio stations, including Radio 4s 'Law in Action', and The World at One.

The response from the membership has been overwhelmingly positive. Our media monitoring service estimates the value of the coverage in the printed media to be £7.3m – though we may choose to take that with a pinch of salt. They monitored printed coverage in 364 outlets in the UK, and in just over 300 worldwide. This does not include online reporting.

? IT and Data matters

The replacement for our membership database software took very much longer to introduce than expected and there were a number of unforeseen problems.

However most of those were behind the scenes, affecting our staff more than our members, and are now all close to being resolved.

Planning is also underway for a replacement to the existing online shop, which we hope will help efficiency and improve the shopping experience for our members.

Planning is under way for the introduction of the new General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018, and as well as tightening up our own procedures, we aim to provide clubs and counties with support and information to help them deal with it themselves.

🔗 Staff

Barry Capal retired in July after more than 11 years as General Manager. His place has been taken by Gordon Rainsford, whose former roles as Competitions Manager and Chief Tournament Director have been taken by Robin Barker, working from home 2.5 days a week as Deputy Chief Tournament Director, with some additional re-allocation of responsibilities within the competitions department.

Peter Jordan retired as Competitions Administrator, which he had been for more than 10 years, although he will still be involved in the running of our overseas congresses and Really Easy weekends. His place has been taken by Nick Doe, who had earlier worked at the EBU from 1998 to 2006.

Julia Thomas, our Competitions Assistant, left us when she moved from the area at the start of 2017 and her place has been taken by Leszek Lubaszewski.

John Pain, who had been Laws & Ethics Secretary retired in mid-September 2016.

Megan Kirk's one year apprenticeship ended in October 2016.

General Meetings and Shareholdings

The EBU is a company limited by shares. Our shareholders do not get any financial remuneration, their shareholdings and voting rights are based on the number of members their county has. There are two shareholder meetings a year, one of which is an annual general meeting. This report will be presented to the shareholders for discussion at the Annual General Meeting on 22nd November 2017.

For full details of our constitution and structure please see the EBU's Articles and Bye Laws available on the EBU's website www.ebu.co.uk.

Jeremy Dhondy

Chairman

For and on behalf of the Board of the English Bridge Union

Staff members and national volunteers 1 September 2016 – 31 August 2017

Details of the directors, committee members and staff can be found at <http://www.ebu.co.uk/biographies/ebu>. We are also grateful for the assistance of:

Honorary Counsel

David Ewart QC

Pro Bono Advisor

Stephen Barnfield

Disciplinary Panel (this group hears and decides on cases that are prosecuted by the Laws & Ethics Committee)

Norman Inniss, Joy Mayall, Kath Nelson, William Nicolle, Alan Oddie, Jackie Pye, Paul Roberts, Ed Scerri, Paddy Seligman, Geoff Smith, Jeff Smith, John Williams.

Prosecution Panel (this new group will conduct prosecutions on behalf of the EBU)

David Bakhshi, Heather Bakhshi, Simon Cocheme, Dick Davey, Ron Davis, Tony Forrester, Mike Huggins, Jane Jensen, Fiona Littlewood, Clive Owen, Martin Pool (Chairman), Shirley Pritchard, Bryan Willis

Awards Panel (this group scrutinises applications from counties for the Dimmie Fleming Award and makes recommendations to the EBU Board)

Margaret Curtis, Philip Mason, Jeff Morris