**NCBA County 2015 Surveys**

**Executive Summary**

**1. Introduction**

1.1 2 Surveys were commissioned in 2015 to glean comments from the wider Bridge Community in Nottinghamshire. This action was taken following a fall in attendance at the County Wednesday evenings and anecdotal feedback that, to many, NCBA was either unknown or its purpose, namely that it seeks to promote Bridge for *all* across the County, not fully appreciated.

1.2 A reasonable response, for this type of survey, suggests definite action by NCBA would be welcomed amongst Nottinghamshire players. Primarily, but not exclusively, this would be to promote Bridge more widely and invest, mainly in the less experienced player, in order to raise the overall quality and enjoyment of the game. Subsequent feedback suggests that on the whole, people welcomed their opinions being sought. Although there was one very critical response.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The existence, purpose and rationale of NCBA to be reviewed and publicised on NCBA website and in Club Newsletters/websites in an attempt to be more communicative and all-embracing. This is a moveable feast but could be as simple as a short paragraph or two refreshed at least twice a year with the programme of events and AGM news. NCBA Chair to undertake.

2.2 The Report Contents to be debated, recommendations adopted by NCBA Committee and forwarded to Club Secretaries and EBU for reference along with a request for support where necessary. Surveys to be repeated on a rolling basis. NCBA Secretary to undertake.

2.3 NCBA to set up a ‘Promotions and Communications’ sub-group to look at ways of promoting Bridge across Nottinghamshire for all levels. Contact to be explored with non-affiliated clubs, the Press and organisations such as the University, schools, youth organisations and U3A etc. Events and articles to be publicised in various media.

2.4 The NCBA website to be developed as an information hub for Nottinghamshire Bridge. A ‘Website’ sub-group to be convened to explore scope and recommendations for the ‘hub’ concept: the hub to include links to individual Club websites, be the key place for newcomers to seek training and improvement sessions as well as find local clubs. NCBA could hold a bank of Teaching materials, details of Clubs with assets to share (e.g. dealing machines) or deliver/support local initiatives, as well as Tops Tips, training or mini ‘E-competitions’ or even a chat room for discussion about certain hands.

2.5 NCBA to continue their efforts to reach out to clubs and individuals through the aforementioned and also by holding a programme of events through out the year. These events could be co-ordinated by an ‘Events’ sub-group. The programme to include, inter alia, the following on a timescale as agreed by NCBA Executive Committee, starting in 2016 to demonstrate to the Bridge Community that we have listened to their views and will act accordingly:

* 1. A short 6 week feeder group programme to support beginners translating into club players. NCBA has the independence and critical mass to bring this together once or twice a year, from reviewing the timing of various teaching sessions.
  2. An annual competition aimed at those below a certain NGS rating to celebrate early achievements. A new trophy to be provided by NCBA/EBU.
  3. A Simultaneous competition across clubs once a year sponsored by NCBA and a prize for the winner’s *Club* in addition to the actual winners. This could be a financial sum.
  4. A top Bridge celebrity to be invited as a Speaker at the NCBA AGM or other exciting attraction to boost numbers.
  5. Experienced players to volunteer as mentoring coaches for individuals or to offer coaching sessions for the more experienced player. Volunteers have already come forward; this needs collating and delivering.
  6. County night to continue to build on the Butler imps initiative with direct invites to Clubs (and review of the accommodation given the growing interest!)
  7. NCBA to host a larger scale event in *Nottingham* for Club Players along Congress lines with financial and administrative support from EBU.
  8. Other activities as identified and resources permit.

2.6 Volunteers have put their names forward already, but the proposals should be prioritised and managed by NCBA to effectively utilise resources and target activities for the best return. Each sub-group to be chaired therefore by a NCBA Committee member and the groups comprised of a mix of committee and non-committee members to get a full wider perspective included. All committee members could be included on a sub-group.

2.7 Some of these initiatives may require funding over and above NCBA finances even though table fees are on an increase. An approach to be made to EBU, for funding and support.

2.8 NCBA to promote and support an increase in qualified, including County, TD’s.

**3. Methodology**

3.1 Two surveys were issued in 2015 across Nottinghamshire; the first to EBU Club Secretaries and the second simultaneously to EBU Club members. This was the first time such a comprehensive review has been attempted by NCBA.

3.2 The primary purpose was to obtain a snapshot of the health of Bridge in the County, in terms of membership, training and quality. The secondary, though key, purpose was to open up communication and engagement with clubs and individuals. From this we would be able glean ideas as to what NCBA could do to promote Bridge in Nottinghamshire, and facilitate a growing sense of community.

3.3 It was also felt that the survey would promote NCBA by making people more aware of it’s existence and rationale following anecdotal evidence to the contrary and the erroneous assumption in some parts that NCBA existed only for players who competed in the County Leagues.

3.4 Two surveys, designed by committee members C Batten and TT Smith, were issued electronically in August. A survey exploring individual perceptions about Bridge in Nottinghamshire was emailed to 339 members directly. The email addresses were obtained from EBU. It is uncertain how accurate this address list was. Data protection issues meant that some clubs could not share their own, more accurate, email address lists. A club survey was emailed to the 10 affiliated clubs secretaries. Club secretaries were also asked to promote the individual return and make paper copies available to individual members. Whilst

3.5 Two clubs failed to submit a club return - these were Mansfield and The Sunday Tigers. The number of individual replies was 44 and there were also 4 emails received with general comments but not answering the survey. This equates to a return of 80% for the Clubs. The percentage return for individual’s is impossible to calculate but is significantly lower as expected.

**4. Conclusions**

**4.1 Membership**

4.1 a. Bridge players in Nottinghamshire fall mainly in the age bracket 60-75 years old. Whilst this data is a subjective evaluation, the age profile is so skewed that an adjustment would have to be significant to alter the conclusions that Bridge is an ageing pastime. This is nothing new but the extent is quite marked.

4.1 b. A well-known issue facing EBU and Clubs across the country is that if Bridge is not promoted or people supported in their first steps, to replace those lost through age related issues, membership will decline to untenable levels. The entry level of club bridge players in the main tends to be on retirement age when people find they have more time to learn the game or resume their hobby. Youngsters are not a key source of membership and there is little facilitation in that direction across the County.

4.1 c. Two clubs (Phoenix and East Bridgford) were not worried about their numbers. Most clubs monitored numbers carefully and two clubs have put strategies in place to actively increase membership. These were Nottingham and Woodborough. For example, Woodborough has increased it’s membership by significantly through a 12 month programme of advertising, teaching and support. This is evidence that a targeted approach does make an impact on numbers.

**4.2 . Gender**

4.2 a There is a reasonable gender mix although 3 clubs are noted as falling outside a normal distribution in terms of the gender split. More work would be needed to analyse why this is but the figures are not extreme and is probably a function of a snapshot in time. The trend is reversed in different clubs with a conclusion that there is no significant gender disparity across Nottinghamshire to cause concern.

4.2 b Anecdotally older newcomers appear to be predominately female, but there is a high fall out rate, sometimes up to a third, and statistically the highest grade players in the County tend to be male. Some work to address this discrepancy could be undertaken.

**4.3. Bridge Clubs in Nottinghamshire**

4.3 a. There are only 10 affiliated Clubs in Nottinghamshire included in this survey- non-affiliated clubs were not contacted due to the difficult of making contact. Whilst a full review has not been undertaken to measure the number and size of non-EBU Bridge clubs, it is known that there are many across the County with some EBU clubs having a non-affiliated ‘sister’ club or session.

4.3 b Several of the non-affiliated clubs play in the afternoon. For example Woodborough has a non-EBU Monday afternoon session, which is very popular regularly attracting 8 tables. Southwell also has 2 non EBU clubs which play Thursday, Saturday evenings and also on a Tuesday morning. There are several other similar examples. These clubs could be contacted as and included in NCBA programmes/communications as it is clearly an active branch of Nottinghamshire Bridge, and the non-evening timing may be a key attraction.

4.3 c. EBU Clubs mainly run in the evenings. There are no morning sessions on offer. Two clubs run afternoon sessions. Phoenix offer a training session on a Friday afternoon getting 5 tables and Keyworth play Monday afternoon with an average of 7 tables. The weekends are the least common club sessions.

**4.4 Directors**

4.4 a Five clubs are using non-qualified directors. They were East Bridgford, Keyworth, West Bridgford, Retford and Newark. Four of these clubs said that they would like more directors. East Bridgford noted that, although using non-qualified directors, they did not see this as an issue. This could be of concern given that the commentary fed back by some respondents did touch on rules, manners and etiquette.

4.4 b The total number of qualified directors in Nottinghamshire is 34 and the number of Tournament County Directors is only 1. It is unclear how many of these are actively directing in clubs and if non-qualified people are directing instead.

**4.5. Leagues**

4.5 a. All the clubs reported have teams in the leagues. Newark said that the teams of four could be demoralising for their players as there are too many teams with county players in this league. West Bridgford also reported the teams of four as not being as popular. Two clubs would like the teams of four to revert to 2 divisions to allow for more friendly and social games to be played in the lower division. One clubs has asked that the fixture lists be put on the website earlier. They also suggested that contact details and venues be put on the site. One club also suggested that where a club has more than one team the players for each team be listed.

4.5 b Apart from East and West Bridgford all the clubs entered the SIMs competitions.

**4.6 Communications**

4.6 a Four clubs expressed interest in receiving a newsletters from NCBA. Another two said that they would be happy with more regular contact and updates on the website.

4.6.b Most of the clubs had access to a dealing machine; those that wanted to use bridge mates had bought them. Keyworth expressed an interest in having access to a dealing machine from another Club. There is evidence that Clubs share facilities like this currently on an ad hoc basis. Woodborough, Keyworth and possibly Retford would join a working party to look into cross club sharing and communications more further.

4.6 c Only Phoenix and Keyworth felt that NCBA should just concentrate on affiliated clubs. Just two clubs, East Bridgford and Retford, were willing to give us contact details directly rather than going through EBU. This limits communications if the EBU contact details are not up to date.

4.6 d We are informed that provided we use the emails addresses to inform about Bridge issues, this is not breaching the Data Protection Act. Some clarity over this would be useful if we were to continue wider communications.

**4.7 Extra curricula club activities to promote the club**

4.7 a Clubs who are involved in running promotions report varying degrees of success but all felt it did increase their numbers and was worth doing. It is noted that some clubs such as Newark who did not express confidence in numbers and have a low membership had not undertaken promotional activities. This could be a function of the fact that Clubs are run by volunteers; this will be fluid over time.

4.7 b There needs to be significant input by enthusiastic and able volunteers to put on promotions and training programmes including charity drives if this is done in-house by clubs individually. It is likely there is a high degree of re-inventing the wheel in this respect and there is scope for cross club support and sharing of ideas and materials.

**4.8. What would Clubs like NCBA to do to support them?**

4.8 a The clubs were asked what the NCBA could do for them. Only three Clubs responded with specifics.

4.8 b **Woodborough** would like someone to teach more advanced team players to raise the standard of the top end. **West Bridgford** would like the county to advertise bridge and put on the county website information about lessons and also supporting players who have been to lessons by putting on sessions to plug the gap. **Keyworth** would like financial support but it was unclear if there was a need and what for. Caution should be exercised in granting specific clubs financial aid as the benefit rests solely with one club and not Bridge players collectively across Nottinghamshire.

**5. Survey Data**

5.1 The returns have been analysed and the results summarised and tabulated. The Club results exclude those 2 clubs that failed to make a return. The individual survey was more commentary in nature so the results section focuses mainly on the comments made.

**Club Survey Data**

5.2 Age Profile

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Age Profile: Club Secretary’s subjective view of ages not based on data held by clubs** | **0-25 years** | **26-40 years** | **41-59 years** | **60-75 years** | **76+ years** |
| Newark |  |  |  | **70%** | 30% |
| Nottingham | 1% | 2% | 12% | **70%** | 15% |
| Retford |  |  | 25% | **65%** | 10% |
| Woodborough |  | <1% | 20% | **60%** | 20% |
| West Bridgeford |  |  | 10% | **70%** | 20% |
| East Bridgeford |  |  | 25% | **65%** | 10% |
| Phoenix |  |  | 2% | **78%** | 20% |
| Keyworth |  | 5% | 10% | **65%** | 20% |

5.3 Gender

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Club Gender Balance** | **M** | **F** |
| Newark | 50% | 50% |
| Nottingham | 46% | 54% |
| Retford | 56% | 44% |
| Woodborough | 43% | 57% |
| West Bridgford | 65% | 35% |
| East Bridgford | 62% | 38% |
| Phoenix | 36% | 64% |
| Keyworth | 40% | 60% |

5.4 Club Membership Numbers

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Club Membership** | **Membership (number on club books)** |
| Nottingham | 179 |
| Keyworth | 105 |
| Phoenix | 101 |
| Retford | 85 |
| Woodborough | 67 |
| East Bridgford | 58 |
| West Bridgford | 50 |
| Newark | 37 |
| **Total** | **682** |

5.5 Club Sessions

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Club evening sessions**  **Average number of tables** | **Mon** | **Tues** | **Wed** | **Thurs** | **Fri** | **Sat** | **Sun** |
| Keyworth |  | 6 |  | 6 |  |  |  |
| Phoenix | 11 |  | 9 |  |  |  |  |
| East Bridgeford |  |  | 8 |  |  |  |  |
| West Bridgeford | 8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Woodborough |  |  |  | 9 |  |  |  |
| Retford |  | ? |  | ? |  |  |  |
| Newark | 5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Nottingham | 6 | 12 |  |  | 13 | 4 |  |

5.6 Club promotional activities

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Club** | **Promotions** | **Training** | **Classes** | **Speakers** | **Social drives** | **Other** |
| Keyworth | No | yes | yes | No | Party at Xmas and summer | Adverts in libraries and local papers |
| Phoenix |  | yes | yes | no | yes |  |
| East Bridgford | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| West Bridgford | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Woodborough | Open evening | yes | yes | no | yes | Advertising Newsletters |
| Retford | Press reports | yes | yes | No | Open evenings |  |
| Newark | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Nottingham | yes | yes | yes | no | yes |  |

**Individual Survey Results**

5.7 Most people who answered the survey had been playing bridge for a long time. The average time was 27 years but some people had played for 50 years and one person for only 2. Four people mentioned they had learnt at university. The majority of players therefore have been playing a significant amount of time and this suggests that newcomers may be insufficient to cover the old age tail off at some point in the near future.

5.8 All the affiliated clubs were represented in the Individual survey, but the return was low. This could be for a variety of reasons such as not appreciating who NCBA are, what the relevance of the survey would be for them, the fact that it was an electronic survey by email, or that the responses were already dealt with via the Club Secretaries. The former may explain why there was a significant response from `Nottingham Club given that the venue for NCBA is at the Nottingham Club and posters etc make people aware of NCBA’s existence.

5.9 Breakdown of which clubs the individual responses came from

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Club** | **Number times mentioned in survey** |
| Nottingham | 19 |
| Phoenix | 5 |
| Woodborough | 4 |
| West Bridgford | 4 |
| Newark | 5 |
| Retford | 4 |
| Keyworth | 5 |
| East Bridgford | 7 |
| Sunday Tigers | 2 |
| Mansfield | 1 |

5.10 A number of other clubs were mentioned in the individual responses. This shows that many people play concurrently in EBU and un- affiliated clubs in Nottingham. In addition, 2 respondents also played in Derbyshire clubs. The un-affiliated clubs mentioned were Wollaton by 4 people, Nottingham Mechanics by 1, Bassingham by 1, Castle Park by 2, The Park by 2, Papplewick by 1, Cropwell Bishop by 1 and Burton Joyce by 1. One person said they played 20 times a month but on average people in the survey were playing 10 times a month and not always at the same club. This is appears to be a healthy active community in the non-affiliated area. It is not clear as yet why some people prefer to play at non EBU clubs. This could merit further research if the non-affiliated clubs were to be included in future communications and thus embraced as part of the community.

5.11 People were asked whether they preferred to play bridge in the evening or daytime. 80 %( 34 people) preferred the evening; 18% would play either day or evening; 1 person preferred daytime bridge.

5.12 People were asked if they would be prepared to travel for bridge events and 72 % said they would, although its is noted that the return was a low number and those responding may well be the more committed player who would well travel further. Others said they had issues travelling a long way. People from Retford said this was a problem for them but others said they were prepared to do this occasionally on a weekend as they were still working in the week.

5.13 When people were asked what they enjoyed, “the friendliness” of players and competitive bridge was mentioned, along with refreshments. Things that were seen as putting people off were grumpiness of players, lack of flexibility in applying rules, lack of host systems, lack of understanding of rules, people not having convention cards, people using obscure bidding systems, and good players trying to flout the rules. However slow play was the most common issue mentioned. This is not limited to the less experienced players.

5.14 The survey posed some possible activities to promote Bridge more widely. It should be noted that not all the respondents answered all the questions, so this impacts on the percentages quoted, as does the small return figures.

**a Charity events:** 63% said they would be interested, depending on distance.

**b Communications:** 42% liked a newsletter. Many were happy with emails/ website.

**c Butler Imps competitions:** 47% thought this was a good idea.

**d Volunteering:** about half the respondents said they would be happy to volunteer.

**e. Speakers:** This was popular with 65% but viability around location mentioned

**f. Coaching:** This was popular at 67%. Some people asked how this would work.

**g. Beginners Sessions:** Not everyone thought this question was relevant to them so it was not answered by all, but even so 47% thought than NCBA should run these. It was suggested that we have an annual or bi-annual county event aimed at beginners. Many said that they felt they would have liked these when they first started to learn to play.

**h. Lessons:** 42% felt NCBA should provide lessons, bearing in mind existing classes.

**i. Schools/Universities:** 60% agreed NCBA to promote bridge in this way.

**j. Find a partner scheme:** 28% said good idea; 37% said it was not for NCBA to do.

**k. Promoting bridge:**  21% said NCBA should invest money in this; 49% liked media.

**l. Mentoring:** 49% wanted to be mentored/or NCBA to offer it if methods clarified.

**m. Bring your child/grandchild to bridge:** 33% thought this was a good idea.

**n. Inter Club competitions and simultaneous competitions:** 53% were interested

5.15 Other ideas and comments mentioned are listed as follows:

* The county should co-ordinate teaching across the County and plug the gaps where necessary.
* The county should publicise lessons on their website.
* Getting the balance right between experienced players and encouraging novice players to play can be tricky.
* It should be the aim of all clubs to try and raise the standard of bridge in their club.
* There should be a subgroup of the committee looking into ways of publicising the game.
* The county should list ways people can get hold of teaching materials. Try and encourage bodies such as U3A and other associations to give lessons.
* The county is unlikely to be able to sustain all these initiatives so must prioritise.
* The county should be able to email people directly without having to rely on information being passed down through county secretaries.
* Commentaries on the hands at county games would help people to improve.
* No fear low rules sessions for beginners as the over regimented atmosphere of a main club can put people off.

[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. Data Analysis by C Batten November 2015

   Report Author TT Smith January 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)