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New Normal News February 2021

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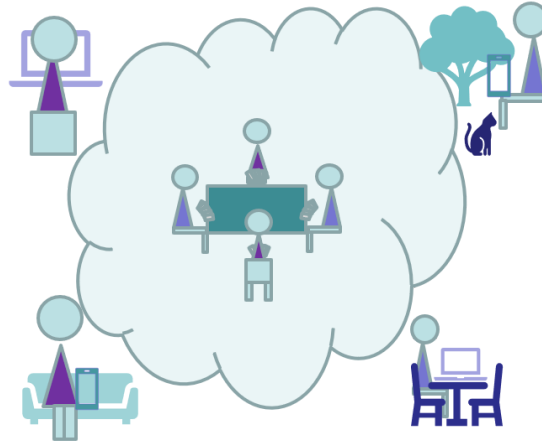
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15 February 2021 at 07:59

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New Normal News

February 2021



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Segmentation

Zoom Conferences (Including Link for Next Meeting)

While the audience for this newsletter is still fast growing, the numbers coming to the Zoom conferences are falling. It may be time to drop them. Please give your views on Wednesday.

How Many Clubs?

I got my estimate of 1,000 bridge clubs in England by counting bridge club BridgeWebs sites listed in England. This week, I repeated the exercise and found 1,080. 577 were EBU affiliated.

The vast majority of English, and many other, bridge organisation web sites are hosted by Bridgewebs. There are 35 EBU counties with BridgeWebs sites and 5 using other service providers, some clubs with sites on Pianola, and some that use non-bridge specialist web services.

There are references to clubs without web sites. One correspondent thinks there are five unaffiliated clubs for each affiliated! In my town, there have always been more non affiliated clubs, U3A and other private groups than affiliated clubs.

There are probably around 2,000 groups that met regularly to play bridge at more than one table until last spring.

How Many Players?

The EBU has 55,000 player members. Since individual subscriptions were replaced by Universal Membership, this number includes the inactive but not removed from the list. The EBU relies on family or clubs to inform them of members passing on.

The WBF defines an NBO member as someone who has played in the last twelve months. The EBU return to the WBF is more like 35,000.

Of this 35,000 active members, probably between 1,000 and 2,000 take part in elite bridge, that is competitions at county, regional, national or international level. EBU and EBU County officials tend to come from this group.

It is very likely that the number of people playing and enjoying bridge in groups is at least ten times that number. Mr Bridge's opinion was around half a million. Some see bridge as an arena to pit intellectual skills against other experts in a way that tests the borders of what is permitted under the laws of bridge and even the laws of acceptable behavior. Others meet in a village hall once a week for tea and

biscuits, to share gossip, to enjoy the company and never quite remember many of the basic points of the game.

So there are lots of players with no interest in elite bridge, and many of them will not play online or would prefer to play face to face. There's a group that will return to face to face.

The New Normal

Online bridge has expanded fast in response to lock down. All those software developers and service providers that have created and expanded new worlds for us deserve our thanks. The rapid development of the latest virtual venue, RealBridge, draws existing clubs, new clubs, the EBU, EBU counties and teachers. Better ways of managing online table money are now on offer.

Some players have returned to bridge as other options disappeared or perhaps they already were less able to attend face to face events. Many players are playing more than they used to. However, many others are reluctant to play online and wait eagerly for face to face to resume.

Online teachers are bringing new players to the game who have never played face to face. It is great to hear that teachers in Devon have agreed a way to work with local affiliated and unaffiliated clubs to promote learning and playing together.

The amazing pace of vaccination is making the return of face to face sometime this year a real possibility. Of course it's still not at all clear how and when.

While some players and some types of competition may remain online, the need for social contact, to share the enjoyment face to face is certain to bring other players and types of competition to the tables. There is even talk of hybrid events with some players at a real venue and others in a virtual space in the same competition.

The following announcement has been made by the European Bridge League..

The EBL, together with our Portuguese hosts, fully intends to arrange the European National Teams and Women/Seniors Pairs Championships as scheduled from June 12-22 in Funchal/Madeira.

Appropriate measures to mitigate exposure to the virus will be implemented on site, and applied to all participants.

The EBU and Lock Down

EBU Constitution

The EBU is governed by the Board of Directors of English Bridge Ltd.

The shares in this not for profit company are held by shareholders appointed by EBU Affiliated Counties. Shares are issued to the Counties in proportion to the number of Playing Members affiliated to the county. Elections to the board and to sub committees, changes to the constitution, the directors report and accounts are put to the shareholders. An annual general meeting is held, and either a chairman's meeting or a shareholders meeting are held annually. Otherwise, the board is autonomous.

Playing members are eligible for certain EBU competitions, they are part of the master point and national grade scheme. They are occasionally subject to EBU discipline processes. They have no direct role in EBU governance.

Bridge clubs choose whether or not to be affiliated to the EBU. If affiliated, they must also be affiliated to an EBU County. Affiliated clubs agree to terms of affiliation to the EBU. They are obliged to register all their members as EBU playing members, collecting, maintaining and passing on player information to the EBU. They can enter certain EBU competitions. They are subject to an annual affiliation fee. They also collect and transmit a fee for each player playing in each competition to the EBU. A small, varying, part of this fee is passed on to the club's EBU County. They have no direct role in EBU governance.

Finances

The EBU has been the provider of elite bridge events in the past. Many more EBU players played more often in affiliated club and county events.

Two sources of EBU revenue were entry fees to tournaments and sales in the shop.

Neither contribute significant financial surpluses. The portion of income for club and county events, in the form of UM, was the major financial contributor to the EBU. The EBU relied on Universal Membership to pay its overheads. The UM income was probably around £600,000. The table money in Affiliated events perhaps £6m.

Lock Down

The first lock down in March took us all by surprise. All face to face clubs had to close and all face to face competition, and income, ceased. Larger clubs had commitments to premises and staff. Smaller clubs, the majority, lost their income, but often didn't have major financial commitments to meet. UM payments to the EBU ceased. Clubs with major financial commitments and the EBU faced severe financial pressure.

EBU Move to Online

Before March, online bridge was well established on Bridge Base Online and Bridge Club Live, but a minority interest. The EBU achieved a remarkable change by organising its own competitions on BBO. Over the months, it has become the biggest single provider of bridge. It is perhaps providing half of the seats at Affiliated online competition. It keeps the net revenue after BBO and staff expenses are deducted. This revenue has improved the EBU's financial position.

It's still running at a loss, but a smaller loss, and the spectre of insolvency has been postponed.

The EBU also acted as the route to BBO for clubs to become competition providers on BBO and provided paid for training, or paid for services for clubs to provide events for their members.

Many clubs worked hard to get their members online, many for the first time. Clubs came later to providing online bridge. Many of their members were playing in EBU affiliated competitions, now nine a day, or informally, virtually free, social bridge on both BBO and Bridge Club Live.

Future of elite bridge

Before the pandemic days large numbers of elite players traveled from all over the country to expensive and often crowded, hotel function rooms to play in County and EBU events. This situation poses a high level of transmission risk. Travel can be inconvenience and expensive. It is hard to make this kind of event pay.

It is likely to be last kind of bridge event to be unlocked. It is quite possible that it will never recover from the current situation.

However, clubs managing smaller events were able to operate from July to October 2020 in a covid secure manner. Those clubs and many others that could not open in summer 2020, and bridge holiday providers and many bridge teachers, may well be able to resume face to face activity earlier. These providers, especially those with financial commitments, are keen to understand how to provide legal and safe face to face bridge as soon as possible.

The EBU won't help

The EBU is short of resources, cannot see elite bridge resuming, and now relies on income that might switch back to clubs as clubs become more successful online and resume face to face operations.

There is an expectation of leadership back to face to face from the EBU. The EBU has said little to the whole community on this topic. Larger clubs have shared their experience in the direct meetings with EBU. These have not been constructive.

It hasn't got the resources to help because it's too busy running line competitions and dealing with online cheating. They are now pushing "direct membership" of the EBU, as opposed to referring enquiries to clubs. This will support direct EBU revenue.

Many of you will have seen the EBU announcement of social games on RealBridge lounge. Several clubs have expressed dismay at the EBU going after direct revenue from yet another segment of bridge players. Indeed these are particularly likely to be former face to face club players. Clubs struggling to raise revenue to support empty premises reacted badly to this threat. Strangest of all, apparently, the newly elected club representative EBU board member is behind this move.

If the English Bridge Union was a union of clubs, it would be behaving

differently. It's not. None of this is intended to be criticism, the EBU is behaving rationally.

The EBU is not going to help us.

I think we have to think about it as a monopoly supplier of certain aspects of bridge, but also a major competitor, and not "in charge", not "above" but somewhere to the side of the bridge world. We clubs, holiday providers and teachers will lead the way.

Time to organise?

Perhaps it is a good time to formally form up? Now that we have a club representing member of the EBU board, we may get the best from it by organising our interaction.

There are many bridge providers or organisers in these Isles:

Teachers; Social Groups; have common issues: Non Affiliated clubs; Affiliated Clubs; and EBU Counties.

I would suggest that all these individuals or organisations have an interest. We can form an unincorporated association by agreeing a constitution and rules. These are necessary to protect all parties.

Task - Draw up draft Constitution and Rules for an unincorporated association of United Kingdom and Irish bridge providers.
DONE

I took on this task, and to do a quick and hopefully quality job I laid a little money to draw up a draft using a law firm template. The draft is available at the following link.

Please send comments or suggestions.

I am hoping that five founder members will come forward to get this going.

Draft Association Rules

[Click here to comment on the draft by email](#)

What would an Association of Bridge Providers do?

We need to promote bridge in clubs right now. We need to be ready

for the resumption of face to face. We need to get the money flowing again. We need a restart plan. We need to bring back our pre lock down players to face to face. We need to welcome players who have learned online.

The Association would set its own agenda but early priorities would be:

- * Understanding and working with the government and local authorities to organise face to face safely and in compliance with regulations and guidance.

- * Creating, sharing and operating a marketing plan for face to face bridge.

- * Creating and operating training and support network for directors, teachers and club organisers.

Working with Government

Since the beginning of the pandemic the Government has issued or updated anything from one to twenty-five documents each day. You can sign up to be on a mailing list that receives lists of the notices each day. The signup option is near to the bottom of the page at: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Several bridge clubs opened between July and November where the general regulations and local tier definitions permitted. Each club worked out their own approach to safety and compliance with general guidance and regulations.

Attempts have been made to agree an approach to providing face to face bridge with MPs, local Health Authorities, Sport England and DCMS. However, none found a way forward to specifically sanctioned reopening.

29 sports and leisure organisations have agreed plans for their reopening with Dept of Culture Media and Sport, However lack of positive support from the EBU and the nebulous official status of bridge seems to be in the way of this process.

Task - Monitor the changes to regulations as they change and report. Understand how to work with local Health and Safety. Pursue agreement of a return plan with DCMS

To be tackled when association is formed.

Promoting Bridge now and as Face to Face becomes available

We need a marketing plan:

- 1) that identifies who we want to reach. (Lapsed/New players?)
- 2) where those people get their messages. Social Media? Press? PR?

- 3) Designs our message(s).
- 4) Looks at the timing, cost and other resources needed ... to get those messages, through those channels, to those audiences and knows how we prompt them to react, and how we will process those reactions.

We can all do this as individual organisations, but we may be more effective with a common plan, some shared resources.

Task - Draft a Full Marketing plan for a return to the club game

To be tackled when association is formed.

Build/Renew Skills

During the pandemic we may have lost directing/organising skills. We should be developing online training and seeking volunteers to give it, and trainees to receive it ready to support clubs still playing online and wanting to return to face to face. Between us we should aim to offer training at little or no cost.

Similarly we should look to boost teaching online, especially for beginners. There are many excellent teachers online, but we need more. Although some teachers are an integral part of clubs. There are independent teachers and there are clubs without teachers. We should find ways of building relationships between teachers and clubs to support each other.

Any marketing campaign should aim to ensure potential players find their way to competent, good value, teachers.

Task - Draft a plan for renewing and developing directing and teaching ready for restart

To be tackled when association is formed.

Segmentation

The world of bridge is huge and highly varied. Any conversation about it frequently needs to focus on a particular element to be useful. Estimates vary widely, but perhaps 200,000 people used to play some form of bridge regularly.

Here's a suggestion on a way to segment playing of the game in order to discuss it more effectively. There are many overlaps and inconsistencies of course and many players will find themselves in more than one group.

Elite Bridge

Elite bridge in England is organised by the EBU. The total individual membership of the EBU is around 55,000, although more like 36,000

have taken part in affiliated events recently.

At the elite level, there are competitions between nations at World and European level. National competitions are competed amongst the quirkily constituted EBU counties, the major clubs, and teams and pairs organised individually.

Perhaps around a thousand players take part. The management of the EBU of the counties and of some of the larger clubs are generally drawn from the same population.

Affiliated Club Bridge

There are around 1,000 duplicate bridge clubs in England. Around half of them are affiliated to the EBU. The biggest of these have buildings, employ managers and are large businesses.

EBU affiliated clubs are in turn each affiliated to one of the forty EBU "counties".

The majority of clubs are smaller and typically meet on a weekly basis in community facilities, are run by volunteers and use a members club constitution. There are some substantial duplicate clubs who choose not to be EBU affiliated.

The majority of the EBU's active membership belong to one or more clubs, possibly a mixture of affiliated and unaffiliated. There are probably around 35,000 members of affiliated clubs.

Social

Players of social bridge are often highly competent but seek environments more aimed at enjoyment than competition. Huge amounts of bridge is played in private homes, on cruises during holidays and in non affiliated clubs. There are many groups who play bridge together, but it may be rubber or chicago.

Novice

Bridge teachers are everywhere. They range from fully professional to occasional volunteer. There are some large teaching businesses, teachers attached to clubs, teachers attached to groups in other sports clubs, and self starting individuals.

New Normal Zoom Conferences

The meetings are informal gatherings. They are intended to bring together a wide range of perspectives. They should allow constructive debate.

The proceedings are not secret and will be recorded and published widely.

Zoom conferences took place on:
16th September

21st October
18th November
16th December 2020
20th January 2021.

A link for the **February 17th 2pm Zoom** conference is below:

Nicky Bainbridge is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: New Normal February 2021
Time: Feb 17, 2021 02:00 PM London

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82997134660>

Meeting ID: 829 9713 4660

Zoom link for the next New Normal Bridge Zoom Conference

New Normal Newsletter

This is issued once a month generally on the third weekend. It is written and distributed on an entirely non profit basis, takes no advertising or commission.

Previous New Normal newsletters and a subscription form are available on the Bridge for Pleasure web site.

There is also information on playing Covid-secure bridge.

A freely available bridge teaching scheme with lesson plans, notes, deals, homework quizzes and answers is there for all.

Bridge for Pleasure - Information Web Site

Click to suggest a topic (contributions welcome)

Please forward the letter to anyone in the bridge world who might be interested. Anyone can subscribe using the link below,

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