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Bridge in the New Normal is alive and well

It's different and still evolving, but thousands of heroic volunteers have kept it going. Here are my personal, particular mentions of 2021....

Bernard Magee

Bernard has provided free seminars on Mondays that have been very popular, provided interest and stimulus to many players affected by Covid. He established a major subscription service with more seminars, supervised play and opportunities to compete. He has restarted face to face bridge breaks with popular Christmas and New Year breaks.

Sam Punch

and the University of Stirling BAMSA project hosted and managed the International Online Bridge Conference in June. This gave insights into many aspects of bridge, with input from players, organisers and academics across the globe. A chance to learn, to share and to be reminded in the midst of isolation that the bridge community is huge and impressive.

Jane Makenzie

took over the chair at Kenilworth Bridge Club and found herself in the New Normal. Kenilworth was among a handful of clubs that opened for face to face early. They found the most Covid secure and regulation compliant way of reopening for face to face bridge. To my knowledge, uniquely, she engaged positively and successfully with local health and safety officials.

The RealBridge team

launched an amazing platform for teaching and organising bridge. A massive free training programme, continual and well advertised development of the platform, a simple method of creating an account

and managing the costs and the sessions attracted bridge organisations, clubs and teachers from all over the globe.

How are clubs doing?

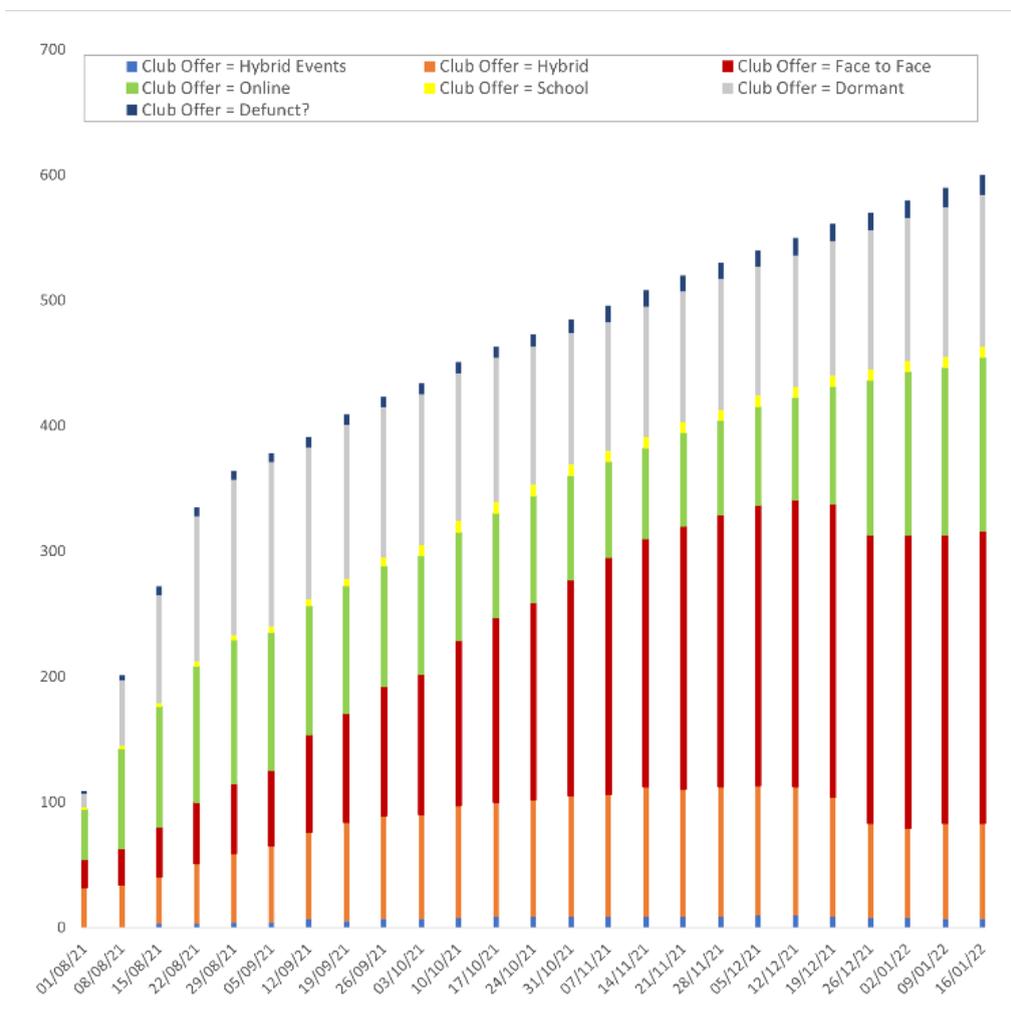
Clubs and Face to Face

Face to Face Sessions On Offer	641
Clubs Offering Face to Face	321

Club Statistics Update Mid January 2022

A few clubs have found the winter and the pandemic uncertainty cause to close face to face. Many are former hybrid clubs going to online only. Face to face only clubs seem more resolved to keep going but one or two have become dormant.

This chart represents the trends in a weekly snapshot of the offer from the clubs in the current sample, now 600, being monitored weekly.



There's much more information at the page below, typically updated once a week.

BFP Club Statistics Page

Competition

We all love the game, play it, teach it, organise it and promote it. Face to face bridge was impossible for a time, and still operates under limiting factors for an audience whose confidence in being with people is damaged.

Online has grown rapidly, adapted to new volumes of demand and changes in the style of competition and the needs of organisers. Both forms of the game are here to stay.

However, the harsh truth is that bridge suffered a set back in the pandemic. Perhaps, the clubs, the counties, the EBU and the online platforms themselves are competing for the same players.

What we all need is to bring new players to the game.

Stronger players

There are perhaps three thousand elite bridge players in England. These players are traditionally catered for national events organised by the EBU and events organised by the counties. The volunteers supporting the EBU and the counties mostly come from this group. This market segment represents about 10% of the usually active EBU membership (about 35,000). In usual times, out of the quoted 55,000 membership a substantial proportion have not played in the last twelve months. In these days the EBU has disclosed that only about 27,000 have played in EBU affiliated events.

This group, and their competitions, have taken well to online platforms, saving a great deal of travel. However, the ongoing concerns about online cheating also apply in this world. The EBU AGM at the end of November spent more than one hour, out of the three hours of its meeting on the disciplinary processes.

The EBU has chosen to alter the charging and the scope of online county competitions.

There are indications that stronger club players are more attracted to these events, and to day to day online competition supplied by the EBU.

Club Players

Even in these times clubs provide over 1,000 sessions every week for the remaining majority of duplicate bridge players. Some clubs are run by proprietors, and there are a growing number of professionals available to clubs to run online, or help run face to face sessions. The majority of these sessions however are run by dedicated, determined, hard working and brave volunteers.

The EBU itself is under financial pressure, with an office block and a substantial staff to support. At the November AGM, the Universal Membership levy on each player in each session at an affiliated club was raised to 42p. A county levy is added to that.

Clubs are under financial pressure from smaller fields and higher costs.

At the AGM a possible alternative, raising the EBU levy on county events was discussed. In a forum of many county players, this was not supported. Cost savings were not mentioned. Government support of £110K was cited as keeping the EBU going last year. There is unlikely to be anything like this level of support this year. The impossibility of bridge without the EBU was proposed. This leaves a fundamental question. Are the clubs being asked to provide a fair part of EBU income? If clubs disaffiliate or close due to financial pressure, this will increase the pressure on the EBU.

The principle of different rates for online and face to sessions has been established. The EBU could materially assist club face to face activity by reducing the UM for club face to face events by 50%.

If you think that is a good idea, please let me know, but more importantly let your affiliated county shareholder know, and any EBU board directors, particularly Gayle Webb as club representative director.

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:

2020	16th September 18th November	21st October 16th December
2021	20th January 17th March 19th May	17th February 21st April 16th June

21st July
22nd September
17th November

18th August
20th October

A link for the next Zoom conference is below:

Nicky Bainbridge is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: New Normal Zoom Meeting

Time: Jan 19, 2022 02:00 PM London

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87501620937?pwd=N2J2Nkc2TDVuUTFZS1BaMXhhYVVuUT09>

Meeting ID: 875 0162 0937

Passcode: 004597

SAVE THE DATE
NEXT MEETING
Wednesday 16th February 2pm

Zoom link for the next New Normal Bridge Zoom Conference

New Normal Newsletter

This is issued once a month generally on the weekend before the third Wednesday. 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

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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