

Bridge News October 2024 - Grassroots Bridge

1 message

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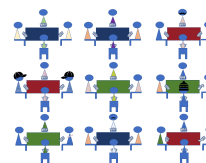
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Grass Roots Bridge



OCTOBER 2024



www.bridgeforpleasure.co.uk

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How are clubs doing?

For clubs

For teachers

Festivals and Futures - An open discussion

Thanks to everyone who gives feedback about the newsletter!

The audience for this newsletter is growing. If you would like to receive it, you can subscribe at:

[Click here to subscribe to this newsletter](#)

What we do

NEWS

This newsletter was created during the pandemic to provide information and support for duplicate bridge clubs.

It appeared monthly for four years. Back editions are available at <http://www.bridgeforpleasure.co.uk>, a BridgeWebs hosted site.

DISCUSSION

For almost four years we held monthly Zoom meetings to discuss anything of interest to clubs. Recordings are available <http://www.bridgeforpleasure.co.uk>.

CLUB DATA

Information about duplicate bridge clubs is collected and collated to provide a picture of life, and some idea of trends, in club life. Analysis, updated once a fortnight, at <http://www.bridgeforpleasure.co.uk>. A taster is included in each newsletter.

TEACHING SCHEME

Also on the website are materials for a teaching scheme, available entirely free of charge to anyone.

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

Minded to Stand Again

Why? I stood for the EBU board last year and was not elected.

However, I know that many who voted for the status quo expected that things would change.

There has been some work done, a little progress, but not the

change that bridge needs.

The EBU has continued to support the national teams, and to provide competitions for the top 10% of active EBU players, probably 3% of all duplicate bridge players. However, there has been very little for bridge clubs and bridge teachers.

“Bridge It’s a Big Deal” has shown that the volunteer community that keeps bridge going in clubs and counties is amazing. It’s raised a huge amount for charity. It will have brought bridge back to the attention of lapsed bridge players. However, it remains to be seen how effective it has been in bringing bridge to people who didn’t already know about it.

The board has been occupied with the meltdown of EBED.

The EBU has very little resource to embrace and manage change. The directors are volunteers. Some have other roles calling on their time. Others may be elderly and hampered by poor health. The culture is biased to more of the same. New board directors are sought and appointed to fit in with the current culture.

The articles say the goal is to “control” bridge. They cannot, bridge does not belong to them.

They need to recognise, inform, train, encourage the enablers of grass roots bridge. I think this is a moral obligation. However, pragmatically, it is this community that provides the income that keeps them in their office block.

The culture needs changing.

Here’s the evidence.

Return of the NGS ghouls

The National Grade system is great. Some players derive pleasure from detailed monitoring of their progress, or fall back, as reflected by the system. It has a role in handicapping for certain competitions.

However, right from the early days it has been suspected of a flaw when calculating the effect on players' NGS where there is a wide difference in current NG in a partnership. This is still widely believed.

The EBU has long denied there is any such flaw. They cite an anonymous statistician.

However, many stronger players believe there is such a flaw and

refuse to host or mentor weaker players.

This does not help clubs to encourage improvers into club sessions. This has become a serious problem.

The EBU does not get an independent view from an external statistician. Despite denying the flaw, the EBU creates the possibility for a pair to opt out of NGS input in certain sessions. To protect the validity of the NGS there are appropriate limitations.

The availability of the opt out is presented to every scorer each time they load a result.

The limitations were published initially and have been available on the EBU web site. This is not sufficient to inform the general, ever changing, scoring community of the required conditions for opt out.

In 2015 I was prosecuted by the EBU for applying the opt out wrongly. I never denied it. I went to a full hearing and convinced the panel that I didn't know about the limitations. They accepted this, convicted as they should, but limited their penalty to a reprimand. They wrote a letter to my county (I was chair at the time), saying that they did not consider I had cheated.

This was traumatic, but I am a tough person and carried on.

This came to the attention of the EBU because I had simply told people at a meeting what I was doing. One of them chose to inform the EBU.

Nearly ten years on there has been another case.

Again, a much-respected figure, known and recognised for their contribution to keeping bridge going has been prosecuted for the same thing.

"They said if xxx pleaded guilty, it would remain confidential. xxx would receive a six months suspension instead of 18 months!!!! 18 months straight off the bat for a technical infringement. We are furious over the way xxx's been made an example of. The 'reminder' that we were unaware of, was published afterwards. xxx respect is now in ruins.

They won't listen to anything now - xxx missed their chance to appeal. (We were just going on a cruise, and the hearing was while we were away). xxx said he couldn't attend - no offer to change the date - just said 'well if you change your mind!' It wasn't a case of not wishing to attend or change of mind. xxx had no access to the internet, xxx was at sea. They completely ignored this and made no effort to reschedule the hearing. As if our whole world centres round bridge! What planet are they on?

We are currently exploring the possibility of seeking legal advice and if we have a case to pursue due to the unnecessary upset it has all

caused. As you say, no warning / or yellow card."

This looks like bullying to me. In my opinion, the EBU is partially to blame for its poor communication of the restrictions. It's not right that players are penalised heavily even though clearly not cheating and not aware.

Given that the action is not cheating, why is there no "yellow card" warning rather than heavy immediate discipline for voluntary bridge enablers in the grass roots. This is showing contempt for that community.

It appears that, this time, the infringement was detected through analysis of submissions to the EBU. So, beware if you are using the opt out, they may be watching. You may get no warning. You may be prosecuted.

Information Shrinkage

The old EBU county directory, on the website, gave details of:
affiliated clubs; teachers and tournament directors.

Tournament directors vanished from the directory some time ago.
If you need to find a director, you must look elsewhere.

I counted teachers listed in the old directory and found it was approximately half the number that belong to EBTA. About half the teachers listed in the old county directory have signed up for the new teachers' directory.

So, when the old directory is withdrawn the number of listed teachers available to a learner searching will be about a quarter of the number of teacher members of EBTA.

The good news is that teachers do not have to be EBTA members to be listed in the new EBU teachers, directory, and about ten percent are not.

Despite the urgent need for a comprehensive teacher directory, the growth of the new directory has been slow. The new EBED regime promised to "merge" the two lists. This hasn't happened.

As a constant researcher I found the old directory list of affiliated clubs for each county very useful. I can go back to the county websites for this information, and many counties now list non-affiliated clubs.

BridgeWebs remains the most comprehensive way for players to find clubs.

What has been delivered?

The festival idea and co-ordination.

Team selection for internationals and competitions for elite players
See the front page of the September edition of English Bridge to
see who is important.

An appeals booklet. I would say of no use to clubs who will not
read it.

An update to the Announcing and Alerting regulations. Also these
days of little interest to clubs. If you can find the “summary” of
changes on the EBU website I would suggest it could be more
helpful!

Five goals for the EBU in 2024

These were set after the November 2023 EBU AGM to address
the low public profile of bridge and
the aging and declining numbers of players.

OCTOBER Update

See notes above



1 EBU Member Numbers - Reverse the Decline

Let's see this deficit get smaller in 2024

It is now **ELEVEN** months since it emerged, that in the year to Nov
2023 there was a 3.000 net loss in membership.

Overall player membership of the EBU is down from 55,000 to 50,000
in four years.

However, fewer players are playing more often, This means UM
income to the EBU has stabilised, possibly leading to less focus on
player numbers within the EBU organisation.

BUT

The average age player members is estimated at 74, If they have an

average of ten years playing life left, and they are not replaced there will be none in ten years. No UMS. No EBU.

SEPTEMBER Update

Membership numbers will be provided to shareholders at the November AGM. It will be possible to do a direct comparison between last years numbers and this years numbers.

Frequent players - UM2 (players playing more than 12 times in the year) may be steady. The EBU has told us that regular players are playing more. This keeps up the UM income, but is very worrying for the future of the game.

Occasional players - UM1 (players playing 1-12 times in the year) will tell us if these players are returning(?) to bridge. We might see a rise attributable to BIABD here.

Members of Affiliated clubs not playing in Affiliated Events - UM0 saw a major fall recently, probably because clubs updated their EBU account membership list to reflect players not expected to return after the pandemic. However this category also contains club members taking only lessons or playing only in supervised/mentored/coached play. The decline should be much reduced now, and any increase should reflect new players to the game.

The EBU has the data to analyse the movement of known members between these groups which could be informative.

Aylesbury is unsighted as to numbers of learners in lessons and coaching. Perhaps some thought to its relationship with teachers would enable analysis. Recruitment of new players needs to be the top priority for all of us who want the game to be healthy in ten or twenty years time, even if we are not there to see it.

We urge the board to have a strategy to collect better data and use it to manage an increase in new players at grass roots level.



2 The Annual General Meeting - more open, more democratic

Let's have a better format in 2024.

The AGM reverted to Face to face in a London hotel. Representatives from counties some distance from London faced more expense and travelling time. Many resorted to proxies. The meeting was only open to shareholders and their proxies, no public, no press, no playing

members, no representatives of clubs, teachers or other bridge organisers. It was not recorded, so the record of the proceedings is limited to formal minutes and informal notes and discussions.

The chair undertook to look at a hybrid online and face to face form with electronic real time voting. This would allow a far greater audience, more participation, and a recording easily made widely available.

A London hotel has been booked for the 2024 AGM. It is has been noted that there is no need for a Hybrid online/F2F meeting. No change to the "rule" that only shareholders or their proxies may attend.

NO PROGRESS

In fact documented decision not to change.

SEPTEMBER Update

The board have announced that there will be a hybrid format in November, with Zoom included. This is great. We look forward to hearing a bit more detail.

.....

3 Updates from Aylesbury - radically improve, energise and push

Any member able to request this newsletter by opting for it in their member account.

That way more people can be informed about bridge organisation.

The monthly update from Aylesbury is largely used as a vehicle for marketing EBU run events. However, it can contain information important to club and county organisers, and of interest to teachers and players.

At present, the EBU sends to its own distribution list of club and county officials. It is difficult to keep this list up to date.

It would be so good if the EBU could adopt a policy of actively informing and educating about bridge, especially organising bridge. You have to persist in searching the web site for so many things, or directly request access from individuals. It would be so much more powerful if any member can subscribe or unsubscribe from a complete and dynamic list of interests e.g. events, teaching, directing etc.

There's no progress here. This would be an issue that I would want to tackle urgently. I know from years of running this newsletter just how

poorly members, players, club organisers etc are informed. I am sure this constricts the flow of volunteers to help.

July - We are going to have to do this ourselves. See above.

SEPTEMBER Update

There has been a shift in the content of "Updates from Aylesbury". There's been less focus on promotion of EBU events. There has been information about upcoming proposed changes to EBU governance documents and even a programme for consultation.

However, to read this monthly communication, you have to either be a registered county or club official, or know that it is available and seek out the area on the EBU website where you can request to receive it.

This is true of much EBU/EBED information, for example, master point scheme news, changes to regulations, youth bridge. Most of it is quite difficult to find, there is much room for improvement in the menu structure. Communication needs to be increased in quality, currency and accessibility. All players need to be able to easily access what they need to know and select regular updates on topics that interest them.



4 EBU Teachers Directory - Landing point for learners

There were about 200 entries in February. With wide publicity, let's double this number in 2024.

This directory is used by the EBU to pass on enquiries for lessons. Any teacher can be on the directory. It's not limited to EBEDTA members, or to those who use particular materials, systems or methods. It has real potential to boost numbers learning the game. Teachers put themselves into the directory.

Regrettably the count on 2nd March was still 200 entries. There were an additional six entries in the directory as of 10th May.

This is an area the EBU should be using all channels to promote. This directory has the potential to be the "landing page" for all people looking to learn bridge. This is key to recruiting new bridge players.

The EBU could promote it in:

All EBU members email

All Club/County organisers email (Updates from Aylesbury)

By agreement with EBED to EBTA members

JULY UPDATE We were told this directory is going to be merged with EBEDTA. Hopefully no restrictions on who can be listed will be introduced. More hopefully some effort will be made to further grow

the number of entries. THEN some effort at national PR to attract potential learners to it would be lovely.

AUGUST UPDATE No visible progress here despite the closeness of the September/October course starts. Any chance of a plan for January?

SEPTEMBER Update

Entries in the directory have risen to 246. There is still no sign of the merger with the membership of the "teachers' club" EBEDTA, with over 500 entries? Could this be sorted for the January student intake??

.....

5 Freeze UM - Reduce Affiliated Costs to Clubs

Freeze UM in 2025/26 to reduce financial pressure on clubs.

UM is a cost of doing business for affiliated clubs. The level of EBU plus County UM has reached about 50p per player per qualifying session.

Table money is generally £2, £2.50 or £3. The median is £2.50. That means the EBU UM is 20%. Clubs have venues, and various other expenses to meet.

There is no official response to this idea. Informally, the comment is that the EBU don't see how they can afford it.

During enquiries we made before the 2023 AGM, it emerged that the Aylesbury building has been valued at £1.1M. There is over a million pounds of shareholders money invested in a building that is clearly too big.

The EBU Board lost it's treasurer and has supported a director with no financial experience to stand in until November. (The board has appointed another of its directors with no financial experience as EBED treasurer). There is no sign of active management of the finances to make possible a UMS freeze.

JULY UPDATE Hopefully the EBU is intending to reduce the financial burden on clubs by freezing rather than the usual rather automatic increase.

AUGUST Update

There was a consultation earlier this about changing the structure of UMS. Read about it here - a post on EBU Forum by David Guild <https://forums.ebu.co.uk/discussion/1554/change-to-ums-fees-structure>

I think there was an announcement that the idea was dropped. Please could the EBU consider a consistent process, as widely publicised as

possible, for consultations of this nature. It will improve the quality and the acceptance of the outcome.

SEPTEMBER Update

The board will be putting together the budgets for 2025/26. There are three main income streams: Bridge Warehouse sales; Tournament Fees and UM (P2P). The margins on the first two are small. UM contributes the surplus that cover Aylesbury overheads. It is very easy for the board to simply keep raising UM in line with these costs. However, this will not help hard pressed clubs to survive - or to remain affiliated.

OCTOBER Update

We understand the board may seek to raise UM to fund replacement of tout of date IT. We think this should have been budgeted for already. We also think it will be CRUCIAL to procure new IT capable of much better stakeholder support and education.

We urge the board to control their costs and hold UM at 2024/25 levels.



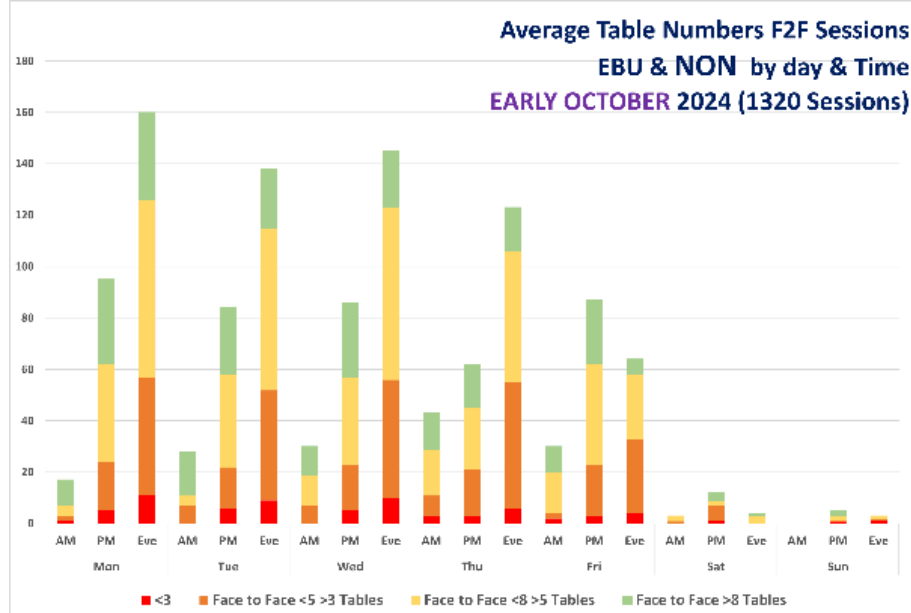
How are clubs doing?

Dedicated Premises

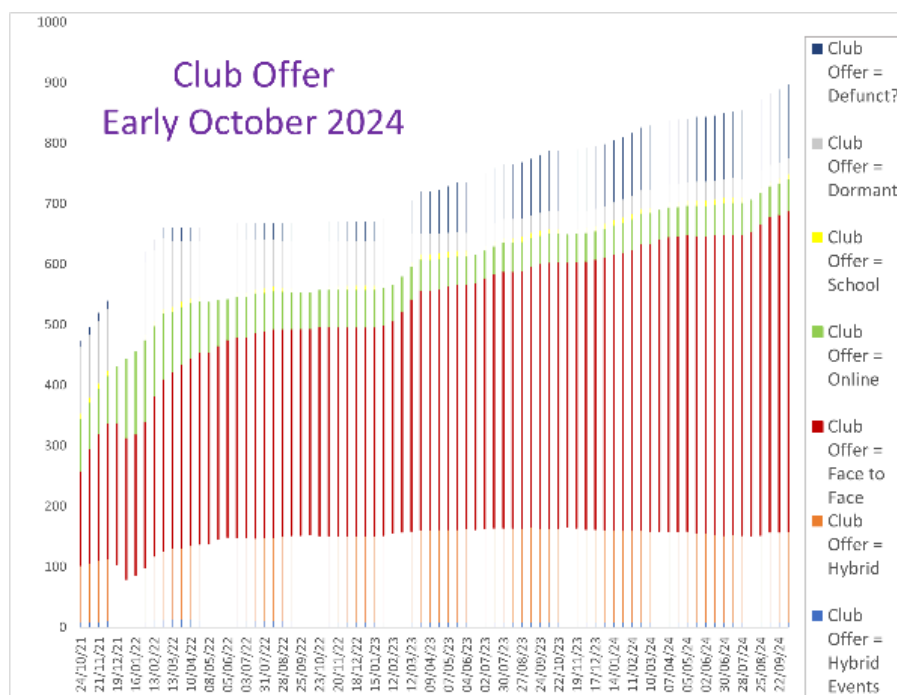
62 dedicated club premises have been identified. An average of 6 session a week is played in these premises. Many are fully booked throughout the week, but quite a lot are holding one or two sessions a week.

We would like to support the future of these premises with a movement to get teachers teaching in them, and supervised or gentle sessions going in them.

F2F Average Tables	
EARLY OCT	
All Clubs F2F	6.68
EBU Clubs F2F	6.83
Non Affiliated Clubs F2F	6.43
Dedicated Premises	7.27
Shared Community	6.54
Multi Sport Club Section	6.18



Here's how face to face and online sessions are distributed across the week.

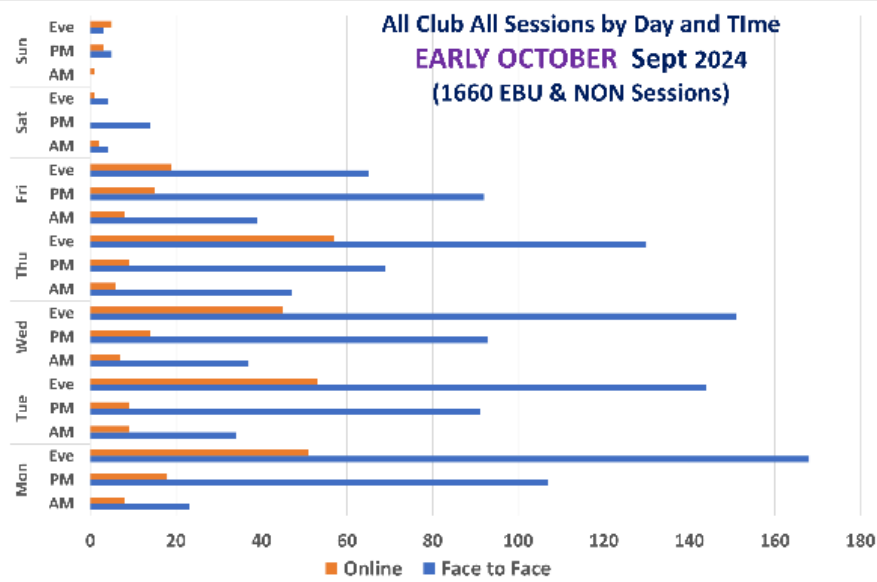


The thin blue band at the bottom represents clubs that offer both face to face and online and combine at least one session into a hybrid result.

Above it, the orange section represents clubs that offer both face to face and online sessions.

Of over 700 (roughly half EBU Affiliated) active clubs the majority are offering only face to face. That's the steadily growing red section.

The green belt above that shows clubs that are only offering online sessions. Most of these are quite small and are unable to persuade their members back into the bridge room.



There's more information here, typically updated once a fortnight.

BFP Club Statistics Page

For Clubs

Items for Your Newsletter

Bridge Club Newsletters can help to keep members informed, interested and helping to run the club.

There are some brilliant examples about.

It can be tricky to find interesting content on a regular basis.

Here's some ideas you are welcome to copy into your club newsletter.

No charge, no obligation, a credit for "Bridge for Pleasure" would be nice, but not mandatory.

If you edit an item, then no credit please, it's your work now ♥

BFP Club Newsletter Item Library

For Teachers

A movement for ten students (or players)

Here's a movement for them.

There's two tables sharing boards so..

the pair sitting out can watch the play as they won't be playing the boards.

Bridge for Pleasure Teaching Scheme

There is a completely free teaching scheme, hundreds of Plans, Notes, Quizzes, Deals, Commentaries etc at this address:

<http://www.bridgewebs.com/bridgeforpleasure>

Let's provide chances all over the country to observe teachers in action; practice teaching and discuss teaching with experienced, qualified teachers. Please contact me if you can provide the same opportunity.

Heart of England Bridge Club (Rugby):

heartofenglandbridge@gmail.com

New contributors

If you would like to contribute an item, please send it. Please make it no more than 200 words. Please make it positive, and supporting the goal of keeping grass roots bridge alive. That will keep elite bridge going.

[Click here to view previous newsletters](#)

Your Feedback

You can provide likes, dislikes and comments on the content of the Bridge For Pleasure website by registering on it.

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To quote the wonderful "Sorry Partner", BE NICE, or we'll call the director.

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