

# GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

## Minutes for the GCBA committee meeting held online on Thursday 4th March 2021

In attendance were Patrick Shields (President), Andrew Bull (Secretary), Mike Wignall (Treasurer), Richard Butland, Jan Kinane, Nigel Mortimer, Ian Sidgwick, Roger Williams and Judy Sanis (CBC rep).

### Finance and Programme

1. Mike expects to have a draft report on the year's finances ready by the next meeting.
2. The EBU will shortly be asking the clubs for their affiliation fees (£27 per year), and we discussed whether the GCBA should offer to help out clubs if this would cause them financial difficulty; we agreed we would try to be helpful in such cases. The planned refunds of the GCBA UMS fees will take place once the Treasurer has obtained details of the relevant bank accounts from the clubs concerned.

### Online Bridge

3. Herefordshire CBA are cautiously in favour of holding the Ross-on-Wye Green Point event online, being unsure that many people will want to take part in an online congress in July. It was noted that this might be less of an issue than they fear as people from outside the region would be more likely than usual to take part. If it does go ahead, the Cheltenham Congress would need to pay Herefordshire £150 for the use of their Green Point allocation, so the committee for that will need to be informed. We agreed we would proceed with this event.
4. Peter Waggett has agreed to be the County rep on the Cheltenham Congress committee.
5. It was agreed appropriate to ignore any heats for the County Pairs which took place prior to lockdown (as there had been no charge for these events). The GCBA heat of the County Pairs has been rearranged to April 10th, and will be run on BBO, as will the final. The Garden Cities qualifier will run on Real Bridge.
6. It has been agreed (following discussion with Alan Wearmouth) that we should wait until face-to-face bridge resumes before holding an event for the Stanley Salver.
7. Patrick reported that he has recently been using an innovation on Real Bridge whereby the plays to the opening trick are delayed for a few seconds to avoid revealing information by fast play. This was agreed to be a sensible move, and not disruptive, so we will stick to doing this.

### Planning for the re-introduction of face-to-face Bridge

8. It was re-iterated that we should expect there to be a greater proportion of bridge played online in the future, and that the GCBA role may change as a result. This re-balancing may be especially the case for national (and international) events, and to some extent for regional and county-wide events. One option may be to have events run largely online, with a face-to-face final round. The idea of having sessions with both online and face-to-face participants was also raised.
9. The gap between the current GCBA sessions (average NGS 57) and most club sessions (NGS 50-52) was raised again. We debated (inconclusively) whether we should be targeting some events at to fill the gap. [Roger downloaded the figures for the county after the meeting, and noted that there are 84 players in the county with grades in the intervening range of 52-57].
10. Nigel reported that at Tudor Bridge Club they expect to re-start face-to-face bridge with smaller numbers to allow a degree of social distancing, and will prioritise the availability of this for people who have been unable to play online. In due course, larger premises may be needed.

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11. It was agreed that we should confirm with CBC that (if possible) we will want to resume the GCBA Monday night events on their premises when they re-open.

### **Representative Events Committee**

12. It was noted that the Midland Counties League has moved largely to Real Bridge.

### **Bridge Teaching**

13. Patrick reported an experiment being tried in Yorkshire for teaching new players, using a university style where a large number of people (about 300) attend an initial seminar, and then they have assisted play sessions at their clubs. This is then repeated weekly, following the EBED Red Book (by arrangement with EBED the early lessons are free). It seems to be working well so far, and may be something we could try, possibly in tandem with other neighbouring counties. [A more complete description of this from the MCWG minutes is included as an Appendix to these minutes].
14. We are still looking for someone to take the lead in teaching across the county. It was noted that we may find there is a drop in club attendance once face-to-face bridge resumes, unless more players are recruited.

15. Jan noted that the teaching sessions for 3rd year beginners at Cheltenham had been run well.

### **AOB**

16. The AGM is due to take place in a couple of months, and it was agreed that we should prepare to hold it online (having missed out on an AGM last year). It was noted that both Patrick and Andrew will reach the end of their maximum 3-year terms as President and Secretary respectively. Regarding finding candidates to replace Patrick, it was suggested that we should make it clear that Patrick is allowed to and is expecting to continue in his role as Chief Tournament Director.
17. Judy asked about support for directors when face-to-face bridge resumes. Patrick is in an EBU group which are discussing this issue, including new "hygiene issues" which may arise and need to be dealt with. This will be addressed in the coming months.
18. The next meeting will be on Thursday 8th April.

## Appendix

Extracted from the MCWG meeting minutes of 3rd March 2021

### ITEM 3a: Learning Bridge in Yorkshire

1. DG briefed on a venture which started in YBCA in December 2020, following the recognition that the recent hiatus in teaching – when combined with an ageing population and people getting out of the habit of playing bridge – was likely to lead to a serious drop in the numbers attending bridge clubs in the future, and therefore raise issues about the viability of many clubs.

2. DG had been working with the English Bridge School material created by EBED. The lessons, as supplied, are digitised replicas of the face-to-face approach of the Red and Green books, but in that form there are some problems with online usage. In particular, the lesson lengths are too long and they involve switches between lecture mode and other modes, and this mix is very disruptive online. With EBED approval, DG has been trimming and tailoring each lesson to be 45 minutes of lecture followed by exercises.

3. The second stage for DG was using Jim Edwards' play platform (at [bridgeplay.uk/help](http://bridgeplay.uk/help)) built specifically for teaching. It is much easier to use than other platforms, and allows for both mini-bridge and for students kibitzing others. The [bridgeplay.uk](http://bridgeplay.uk) platform is being given free for the YCBA venture being described but generally costs a teacher £60 per year (for access for all their students).

4. When exposed in December 2020 to them, it was hoped that the combination of these two would be taken up by teachers in Yorkshire, but the feedback was disappointing. So DG proposed a different model based more on university teaching – step one is a lecture to students en masse, and step two is tutorial style, doing Assisted Play in small groups. This model is very attractive to clubs, where teachers might be scarce but the helpers needed for Assisted Play are more readily available. After negotiations with EBED (who have valid worries about copyright, and their revenue sources) it was agreed the students could have a 12-week voucher if they registered for EBS and that DG could use the EBS material in this mode. This would give students a free- of-charge starter.

5. DG prepared a guide for Marketing in a Digital Era (included here as Appendix A) and offered a poster creation service which provided clubs (to whom the marketing was delegated) with an eye-catching advert to place on websites and social media (and it reached two local radio stations too). Most clubs were oversubscribed, and numbers have been limited by the availability of helpers for the Assisted Play. Of the 33 clubs under YCBA, 16 took an initial interest and 10 (covering over 50% of the current membership) have stayed the course; a total of 348 students signed up. The number of students has held steady at 350 as the few drop outs have been replaced by clubs from their waiting lists. The first lecture took place on 23 February, three weeks after the start of the advertising campaign, with 310 attendees (next lecture had 272). We anticipate this early days drop being due to the very basic material covered that may be too fundamental for some students. Clubs organised their own Assisted Play sessions, some going immediately after the lecture and some later in the week (and some running multiple Assisted Play sessions).

6. There were considerable administrative overheads in creating this scheme (eg EBED insisted on checking EBS membership against the attendance at the Zoom lectures). Jim Edwards provided intensive training not just for his playing platform, but also for the technology in general for those who were not comfortable with it. Feedback from the clubs has led to each lesson happening twice (Tuesday at 1000 hrs and repeated at 1800 hrs). Each lecture is currently delivered by a different (EBTA) teacher, based on a draft prepared by DG from the EBED lesson. All these arrangements are free of charge to the club initially, and a discussion on the future funding will take place with the clubs after lesson five.

7. In the discussion the following points emerged:

- As in much online teaching, the lecturer lacks any direct feedback from the audience.

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- The Google Classroom provided under EBS is a great service but using Google Meet was problematic, and Zoom has been used instead.
- The plus side of being free-of-charge is the removal of a (perceived) hurdle but there is concern that people will give less respect to a free offering than one they pay for. If the newcomers become regular bridge players, future participation by these people in bridge events will lead to any subsidy being a good investment.
- It is possible that lessons could be made available to buy online, but EBED are keen to retain ownership, and while agreeing to modifications, EBU and EBED have been careful to retain copyright.