



EBU MEMBERSHIP b) What can be done.

It is now clear that urgent and effective action is required to stop the deterioration in our membership numbers. These notes describe developments so far and what is planned for the future.

The first Report on membership statistics drew heavily on those that the Board has considered and taken action on. This one, dealing with the action that has been taken to increase our membership follows the same procedure. Once again the detail can be found in the Board Reports which are here.

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/official-documents/membership-campaign-all-reports.pdf>

When the poor situation with the EBU membership numbers was realised the Board agreed to a Membership Campaign. Support was to be offered on the basis of matched funding for all publicity material. A pilot scheme run jointly with Yorkshire was established. The key to this was the appointment of a Regional Development Officer on a consultancy basis. Research was undertaken on club membership numbers, their activity and how healthy they were. The strategy adopted is described in a Report produced in October 2017...

“The original intention had been to run a campaign with the involvement of clubs on the basis that those clubs could harvest the results of any interest shown by the general public. Very quickly this approach was abandoned. We found that the context and predictions of the statistics ... were borne out by the actual situations that challenged many clubs. Far from the Campaign looking to clubs for assistance, in some cases they themselves needed help. What started as a Membership Campaign became a rescue campaign for clubs that were failing or about to do so”

The approach has been to offer guidance to a club and its Officers or those individuals that are going to run a membership campaign. That is intended to be practical with mentoring and design support for publicity as well as a financial contribution to any publicity costs. In many cases the response has been remarkable. After an initial uncertainty, once people become involved in their own club's membership drive they have taken it on with deep commitment. In some cases many hours have been spent in preparation and the distribution of leaflets.

Eighteen months after the Yorkshire Pilot started the situation was this...

“From the 34 clubs in Yorkshire 25 have been invited to participate. 18 have held meetings with our Regional Development Officer (RDO) and 13 have participated in an active Campaign.

In March this year ...the number of newcomers responding to the Membership Campaign was assessed at just over 200.”

Naturally this activity has attracted interest outside the Campaign some of it within Yorkshire and some outside. Where advice was requested it was given. Only the initial benefits of this had been included in the figures above. More recently, focusing solely on Yorkshire -

“...there have now been 269 newcomers of which 255 are attending classes and at least 145 have become club members.”

There have been varying degrees of success for individual clubs ranging from one or two failures to some remarkable results. One club attracted 30 new members in its first Campaign effort increasing its membership by a third. Another small club of advanced players set up a satellite club attracting former Bridge players back to activity.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

In March this year the Board agreed to start the roll out of a national membership campaign. After many discussions by email and face to face Manchester and Merseyside & Cheshire, working together, became the first two Counties to start a campaign of their own. This has been very much in the style the Yorkshire Pilot appointing their own Project Manager. Recently, Somerset have followed suit and are currently advertising to appoint their own County Development Officer. The varying titles for similar positions should be noted reflecting the slightly differing styles that each County is likely to adopt. Two other Counties, Surrey and NEBA, are giving serious consideration to joining.

A key part of gaining new members is the support that can be given from the EBU to Counties that run a campaign. The initiatives taken so far are as follows.

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OFFICER (MDO)

At the end of July Tim Anderson was appointed as MDO. As was reported to the Board recently...

“His 'in depth' skills include IT, use of social media and writing for all forms of traditional media particularly technical journalism. He is also a good Bridge player, familiar with Bridge administration and has served both as a County TD and Chair of a Club”

This makes him well suited for giving support in the development and running of area membership campaigns. He also has the experience and skills to handle the idiosyncrasies that many of us have as Bridge players! He is continuing the statistical work of David Guild, Peter Stockdale and myself as well as others at Aylesbury. This is needed to understand where our weaknesses lie and which areas might be the focus of a campaign.

RESOURCE CENTRE

The arrangements for this are well on the way to being complete. It is intended to provide the following resources:-

- i) Artwork and photos for leaflets, posters in print and digital form.
- ii) Media support including an outline of how to implement Facebook and other social media.
- iii) Guidance on running a Membership Campaign, including actual case studies.
- iv) Research and collation of new and effective approaches on campaigning, again with case studies.
- v) Monthly review of all these activities with updates to keep the information fresh.

Our MDO has been instrumental in setting up the Resource Centre for online usage. There are already articles, some written by David Guild the Yorkshire RDO ready for loading on the. This will be a separate website intended specifically for this service. When complete it is intended that it may be viewed by visitors to the site.

In addition the actual artwork and related matters are to be available or stored on Dropbox - a cloud facility well known to many users. From there items can be copied, shared, altered and edited by a user or group without the need for emails.

This functionality will be password protected with access being given only to those who are involved in an EBU supported or accredited Campaign. The degree of access to the website itself which also has links to the main EBU website has yet to be decided on.

To add to its worth and interest, Tim will be writing a regular series of blogs containing news, updates and further case studies. It is intended that the Resource centre will be a major tool and source of support for those embarking on a Membership Campaign.

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SUB COMMITTEE

A Board Director has been appointed to be responsible for overseeing and encouraging the development of membership campaigns. That director will be working with the MDO to ensure that as far as is possible there is the necessary support structure offered by the EBU. The Communications Officer and the Club Liaison Officer will also make a contribution to this work. To overview this a Membership Development Sub Committee has been created. Although it will have a strategic role it is likely that individual members will bring their expertise to bear in fine tuning the work and also the services that the EBU has to offer.

TWO MATTERS

a) There has been little mention of Education which of course is the gateway to gaining members. Though it is a crucial component of any membership campaign, for our purposes it is not an end in itself. Too often teaching takes place with a reluctance or even absence of any effort to join a student to a club. The purpose of the EBU here is to create new members, so in a campaign students should be joined at an early stage. The EBU and EBED have special arrangements for this.

b) Linked to membership are costs and revenue. After a newcomer has joined a class and become an affiliated club member, a year to 18 months later they should have become regular player. From that point they will be creating revenue for both the club and the EBU. Over time this should at the very least pay back the money invested in the campaign and help to secure the future of the EBU, our Counties and our Affiliated Clubs

WHAT NEXT?

The resources and commitment by the EBU to develop our membership are there. Now we need Counties, groups of Counties or areas to develop their own membership drives.

On occasion we have encountered some reluctance to become involved. It seems this may be due to a general unease at venturing into unknown territory or the risk of incurring cost with little return. The EBU is ready to give support on both these issues where a campaign is intended. As far as cost is concerned, the Yorkshire Pilot fine-tuned campaign procedures so that the cost for a club can be less than £200.

On studying the Membership figures and Universal Membership activity statistics it is clear that we all need to take effective action to revive our levels of membership. This is needed to ensure that Bridge remains a major pastime available to everyone.