

North Eastern Bridge Association

Extraordinary Executive Meeting Minutes, September 12th 2018, 11.00 am, St George

Present:

Liz Muir (Chair), Nigel Durie, and Adrian Darnell with Bev Godfrey, Ron Millet and Leslie Millet

Apologies

David Gold, Norman Gray, Steve Ray

The Chair welcomed Ron and Leslie Millet from Leeds and thanked them for their time and for their presentation on the subject of EBU 'membership'.

From the presentation it was noted:

1. data showed total EBU Membership since 2011. Numbers rose from just under 50,000 in 2011 to over 54,000 in 2013, but over the last 5 years the numbers have plateaued. The figures are not wholly reliable, but they are the best available;
2. when broken down to frequency of playing, those members who have not played in the last 12 months, or have played fewer than 12 times, is an increasing proportion;
3. the average age of EBU members is in excess of 70;
4. roughly 4,000 members join the EBU each year, but similar numbers leave (either voluntarily or by reason of dying). In the last 5 years the net change in membership has been:
 - +2,136 (to March 2013)
 - +313 (to March 2014)
 - 4 (to March 2015)
 - 33 (to March 2016)
 - 0 (to March 2017)
5. given mortality, other reasons to leave, and older players playing less frequently, most Clubs of 200 members need new members of around a dozen merely to maintain playing numbers. (This number will vary, of course, according to the age distribution within each club and other factors, but the general point is well made);
6. analysing EBU player numbers at the regional level as a proportion of the local population size shows some marked variation, but is everywhere at a low level absolutely. The highest proportion is 30 players per 10,000 population and the lowest is 5. In the North East the figure is 7;
7. the EBU data refer, of course, to EBU players; there are a large number of non-affiliated clubs and bridge is played outside clubs. It is estimated that the membership of non-affiliated clubs is 5 times that of affiliated clubs;
8. the measures of a Club's health include its overall membership, the average number of times each player plays, and its financial position;
9. the overwhelming conclusion from the evidence is that many EBU Clubs are not sustainable in the long-term unless there is a marked change in recruitment;
10. Yorkshire had concluded some time ago that a recruitment campaign was required. To that end the Yorkshire BA had:
 - a) identified the need of a Development Officer (as a self-employed role);

- b) the contract was for 8 hours per month on average and for 12 months in the first instance;
- c) the funding of the role (c. £3,000 p.a. including all expenses) had been supported by both the Yorkshire BA and the EBU;
- d) the Officer had gathered data, Club by Club, and identified Clubs 'most at risk';
- e) focussing on them, and using modern media advertising methods, a recruitment drive had been established, associated with a supported teaching programme
- f) a report on the project has been requested.

In discussion it was agreed that:

- 1) doing nothing is not an option;
- 2) a recruitment drive allied to an expanded teaching programme are essential;
- 3) some clubs are more at risk than others of becoming unsustainable;
- 4) NEBA finances might not be sufficient to fund a Development Officer;
- 5) an alternative to a Development Officer is a Development Group which works with a limited number of clubs;
- 6) having friendly local media – local papers and radio – is not essential but very helpful;
- 7) leaflets are not cost-effective but focussed advertising to well-defined demographic and socio-economic groups via, for example, Facebook can be;
- 8) a 'bridge café' event, perhaps in Durham, might prove very effective (AD and BG to discuss);
- 9) accessing young recruits to the game is the route to long term sustainability; Universities are one source (though not all have Bridge Clubs), while schools and colleges are another;
- 10) given the large number of non-affiliated clubs, the 'problem' may be one of EBU affiliated clubs, as distinct from the overall numbers playing bridge. The EBU itself might look profitably at its own approach to encouraging non-affiliated clubs to join the EBU. It was observed that becoming an EBU club is perceived in some quarters as adopting a more competitive and less friendly approach;
- 11) while NEBA are keen to participate in a recruitment programme:
 - a) NEBA's reserves are modest;
 - b) there is a dearth of teachers within the region;
 - c) most clubs do not own their own premises and have limited (in some cases no) capacity to devote to an expanded teaching programme;
 - d) the NEBA region often gives the appearance of being two regions divided by the Tyne and this separation hinders the implementation of any single approach.

Action

Ron and Lesley were thanked for their most helpful presentation and the ensuing discussion. It was agreed that the NEBA Executive would take this forward as a matter of urgency.