

NORTHERN IRELAND BRIDGE UNION

Report of the Honorary Secretary 2024-25.

There are currently 31 affiliated clubs with a membership of approximately 1200. This compares with a total of 48 affiliated clubs and membership of almost 2000 some 15 years ago.

The NIBU Council met 3 times during the past season – in September and December 2024 and March 2025. Members also met in May to receive a presentation on the proposed merger with the CBAI by their Chief Executive Dermot O'Brien.

The NIBU continued to be represented in each of the Home International Series :-

1. Camrose in Prestwick and Belfast (Open)
2. Lady Milne in Bristol (Women)
3. Teltscher in Dublin (Seniors)

The Online Senior league continued to grow with 16 teams from all over Ireland entering. The Intermediate league only attracted 6 teams possibly because of a move to Real Bridge. Once experienced however, Real Bridge is most online player's preference. Our thanks are due to Brian McDowell for organising the Senior League and Knockout Cups and to Helen Hall for looking after the Intermediate League. Helen also arranged a series of training sessions for players who were new to Real Bridge.

Face-to-Face competitions continued to attract fewer entries despite concerted attempts to draw players out. Several fixtures were cancelled due to lack of interest. Anne Hassan deserves our thanks for her tireless efforts in persuading members to come out and play 'live'.

The year ahead will hopefully bring a new sense of optimism in the Bridge world. Assuming members agree to proceed with plans to amalgamate with the CBAI and form a new all-Ireland Bridge organisation, we can look forward to a new strategy designed to market our game to a wider audience. These days the vast majority of new players are of retirement age who have learnt to play from attending classes organised by one of several NIBU teachers. This has resulted in a growth of Intermediate level players but a decline in senior players eligible to play at the highest level.

The advantages of forming a single body are common to both Unions. It would bring obvious economies of scale and a greater combined membership. Bridge teaching resources would be greatly enhanced and standardised. The problem of a dearth of NIBU tournament directors would be addressed. A standardised masterpoints and membership scheme would facilitate the many players who already play regularly in both jurisdictions. Above all it would be a wonderful opportunity to re-model Bridge for the years ahead.

Michael McFaul