



## Revised Strategy Proposal --- A Discussion Document

### Introduction

There are several objectives of the first stage of the strategy embodied in the proposal:

- To achieve Universal Membership for all duplicate players at an EBU-affiliated club. Significantly enlarging and strengthening the membership:
  - Makes the EBU more compelling in approaches to government, the media, and potential sponsors. In its turn this would allow the investigation of partnerships and funding to develop the game for people of all ages.
  - Arrests and reverses the membership decline which has been observed in the past few years. Naturally, this implies that the EBU must make itself relevant to the club player who currently is not an EBU member. It is the Board's intention to do this.
  - Reduces the effort of administration by the implementation of electronic processes where possible and the removal of outmoded practices.
  - The collection of annual subscriptions and the recording of Master Points are costly in monetary terms as well as being particularly labour intensive at certain times of the year.
  - However, this workload reduction at Aylesbury must not result in significant additional work elsewhere, particularly in the clubs.

This document describes the amendments to the strategy proposals being made as a result of the consultation phase. It attempts to do this through responding to or accommodating the questions and suggestions which have occurred more commonly in the emails or at the County Consultation meetings. This document also acts as a compendium of the themes which were more frequent over the last four months. In some cases providing the thinking which led to the amendment or why a suggestion was not incorporated. However, it does not contain responses to all the detailed points which were raised, such as "How do the proposals accommodate individuals who have been made Honorary Life Members of a club and are exempt from the payment of club table money and the club annual subscriptions?" Details such as these will need to be factored into the proposal, when the overriding principles are more completely established.

### Pay to Play scheme and Fee

#### What is the EBU going to do with the extra revenue that the Pay to Play scheme generates?

This was a common misunderstanding. The strategy proposal was not, nor intended to be, a revenue generating activity. It was devised to be income neutral, based on today's operating costs making allowance only for inflation and a small contingency, so as to illustrate the cost on a per session basis to the individual for this alternative method of collecting revenue.



The Pay to Play fee of 43p (i.e. the 30p replacement for the annual membership subscription of both the National Organisation and the County Association plus the 13p replacement for the Master Point income) had been calculated on the most accurate data available, namely the Master Point returns of recent years. From this information the amount of Bridge played annually was determined in terms of "player sessions", where a "player session" is one person participating in one session of duplicate Bridge (i.e. a club evening with 9 full tables would represent 36 "player sessions"). Then it was straightforward to determine what fee (i.e. the Pay to Play fee) would be required for every "player session" in order to provide the same amount of overall revenue.

There is emerging evidence that the number of "player sessions" is significantly higher than had been calculated and this in itself would have created the impression that much more revenue was being generated. However, increasing the revenue is not the approach so, if the number of "player sessions" is proved to be much higher, then the effect would be to reduce the Pay to Play fee, so as to retain the income neutrality.

### **Isn't the Pay to Play fee making Bridge much more expensive for the club player?**

The Pay to Play scheme redistributes the overall cost over more people. Accordingly, some will pay more and some will pay less. The individual who is currently not an EBU member who plays in an affiliated club is the most affected, but it is considered appropriate that such an individual should make a contribution, as in other sports and pastimes, to the National Organisation.

Consultation will take place over the next three months amongst our clubs to determine a more precise count of the number of "player sessions". We thank all those members who have provided us with detailed information about their club or county "player sessions". We know from this information that the number of sessions is very likely to be higher than that on which we have based our existing calculations. One aspect our research has identified is the large number of clubs who do not issue Master Points at all. This means that their "player sessions" have not been included in our calculations which are based on Master Point returns. Their inclusion will bring the Pay to Play fee down substantially.

The revised figure will be provided for the first Shareholders meeting in 2008. It is expected to cause at least a 20% - 30% reduction to the figures on which we have worked to date. Note that this is also an incentive to an individual to encourage participation at the club, so as to increase the number of "player sessions" and thereby reduce the Pay to Play fee.

### **Won't the Pay to Play scheme cause many clubs to consider disaffiliating?**

We certainly do not want to price anybody out of playing Bridge in clubs and thereby cause the club members to ask its management committee to consider disaffiliating. A vibrant and flourishing club network is essential to "receive" the new players which hopefully will be created with initiatives in future phases of the strategy, such as on Youth and through Education. This is another reason why the EBU must do all that it can to make the player experience in a club the best possible.



We have recognised that there are different styles of club who provide the types of game that their membership requires. There are those who want the more competitive style as exemplified by the collection of Master Points, in addition to those who wish to play solely for the enjoyment of the game and the social interaction. These will be referred to as "competitive" and "social" clubs respectively. A club will be exclusively either "competitive" or "social" and will pay the Play to Play fee applicable to each; the "social" rate being less than the "competitive" rate.

### **My club doesn't issue Master Points, so do we have to pay the same Pay to Play fee?**

No, you will pay a reduced Pay to Play fee. The reduction will be based on the data that we collect from our clubs in the coming months, but it is expected to be in the region of 10p less per session.

### **What is the applicability of the Pay to Play fee?**

Christmas parties, celebratory events, supervised play sessions and charity events will be free of the Pay to Play fee. All other duplicate sessions will qualify for the Pay to Play fee.

Note that ordinary EBU Simultaneous Pairs events will incur the Pay to Play fee, whereas EBU Charity Simultaneous Pairs events will not.

### **Isn't the individual who plays several times a week contributing significantly more through the proposed Pay to Play fee?**

In the initial proposal this certainly was the case. Now it is proposed that those who play more than 150 times per year in clubs will be eligible for a rebate of their Pay to Play fee for further sessions played in that year. (A year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March). This is in recognition of the contribution that these players are making to the revitalisation of the game. This rebate will be paid by cheque on an annual basis, but only for amounts of £5 or more. Note that only playing sessions which have attracted a Pay to Play fee count towards the eligibility for a rebate. The rebate has to be paid to the individual because it can be achieved by that person's participation at several clubs. This means a club can continue to apply the same Pay to Play fee all year without having to worry about players who become eligible to play without incurring a Pay to Play fee. This ensures that an individual does not become a significant "over-contributor" and keeps the club administration simple.

Note that the total rebate returned to all the qualifying members has to come from somewhere. So, since income neutrality is the objective, this rebating mechanism actually has the effect of increasing the "base" Pay to Play fee. However, the effect of the rebate on the Pay to Play fee is expected to be minimal.

### **Can you reduce the Pay to Play fee any further?**

It has been suggested that we remove English Bridge and the Diary from the services provided to individual members. However, it would still be necessary to communicate with our members, but with the current demographic profile, using the Internet may not provide a satisfactory coverage.



The additional costs of print and postage of some paper communication would mitigate any reduction of the reduced Pay to Play fee. Thus we propose we keep English Bridge but make it more relevant to our members. We believe that our new Editor, Elena Jeronimidis, can help us achieve this for our membership.

As you will see later the County component of the Pay to Play fee will be determined by the County and becomes a separate part of the total Pay to Play fee. Although this will not necessarily result in an overall reduction for an individual, it is a reduction of about 4p on the amount which has probably been attributed to the National Organisation from the June document.

### **Will the Pay to Play fee deter juniors from playing in clubs?**

Juniors, i.e. players under 25 years old, will not have to pay the Pay to Play fee. Individual clubs will address their own table money and club annual subscription for junior members. Their Pay to Play fees will not be included in the bills to the clubs.

## **Counties**

### **What is the role of the County in the Pay to Play scheme?**

Nothing has really changed here, although the Membership Secretary may have a less arduous time since some of that role is now undertaken by the clubs. The EBU is the association of the Counties, and this is very much of the essence. The County will still provide services on behalf of some (segment of the) membership, in particular the provision of regional tournaments and communication.

### **County membership - prime and dual**

Existing EBU members will retain their County of prime allegiance (although they will have to indicate their club of prime allegiance). Individuals who currently are not EBU members will, by default, become a member of the County to which their prime club is affiliated. Anyone can choose to become a prime member of any County by request to the EBU, just as they can today.

Dual membership has never been and will continue not to be a matter for the National Organisation. Counties can make whatever arrangements they choose with regard to charging individuals for dual membership.

### **Will the counties get the membership subscription income they are receiving per capita currently through the Pay to Play fee?**

In the original proposal the County annual subscription was integrated into the Pay to Play fee. There were a number of implications which made this unnecessarily complicated. The County Consultation meetings suggested an alternative which has been adopted.

The Counties will be able to set their own component of the Pay to Play fee for the "player sessions" which occur in their affiliated clubs. This means that the Pay to Play fee will probably vary from County to County. In setting the Pay to Play fee, a fraction of a penny will be permitted.



With this new suggestion the County will continue to have financial autonomy from the National Organisation as today, and avoids any possibility of less expensive Counties subsidising more expensive ones if a standard rate per member were applied nationally. A county will determine its financial requirements for the next financial year and report this to Aylesbury in terms of a component of the Pay to Play fee. If a County wishes to undertake some specific project which requires funding it can do so, presumably with the approval of its membership.

To determine the amount in Pay to Play terms implies that the County will need to have a value for the number of "player sessions" within its clubs. This information will be provided initially by the EBU as determined from the consultation with the clubs; in future years the County will know this number based on the outcome of the previous year. Note that with this proposal the County annual subscription revenue is also based on the number of "player sessions" which occur in its clubs. This is an incentive for the Counties to ensure that the clubs are successful in this regard.

### **What type of Pay to Play fee will county competitions and events attract?**

No county events, other than the leagues as below, will be subject to the Pay to Play fee. This includes any extra charge levied by the County for heats held in clubs.

The reasoning here is that the Counties are the EBU and that their events are part and parcel of the service to some segment of the membership and therefore should be treated in the same way as National Tournaments.

Note that this means that Counties will no longer pay for the Master Points that they consume and it is expected that this saving will be reflected in the County component of the Pay to Play fee. The £25,000 which the EBU received previously from this source represents less than 1p of the Pay to Play fee and, although this revenue will need to be made up, some of this will be through the Pay to Play fee for leagues (see below)

### **Clubs**

#### **Many clubs will not be able to afford the proposed club affiliation fees and will be priced out of existence.**

We have listened to the worries expressed during the county consultation and have amended our proposals so that the club affiliation fee will be a flat fee of £30 per affiliated club. It will be paid at the beginning of each year preferably by Direct Debit.

Clubs will affiliate to the EBU through their counties. The county element of club affiliation fees will be determined, as now, by each county.

Each club will be asked to sign a simple annual contract of affiliation, setting out terms and conditions which amongst other things will specify the regulations for the Pay to Play playing sessions.



## Services to affiliated clubs

We recognise the important contribution that clubs make to the development of the game and we want to encourage them to continue with this important role.

Clubs can benefit from the support, advice and communication services that we are offering to help clubs develop and attract new members. Free scoring software (not CASS) and Website hosting is available to those clubs who wish to benefit from these products but this is not a requirement of affiliation.

## Doesn't the Pay to Play scheme delegate the administrative work to the clubs?

The Board has always recognised that it must not introduce processes which significantly increase the administrative workload in the clubs. Indeed this was the main reason for the removal of the proposed £5.00 one-time joining fee and the attendant different Pay to Play fee rates for EBU members and non-EBU members playing in a club.

The Pay to Play scheme should not entail much additional work at a club. The reason for this is that there are only three facets, namely: the annual club membership reconciliation, the addition of new members, and the financial implications of the Pay to Play scheme. Let's look briefly at each of these.

Presumably a club reconciles its membership list annually, if only to collect any annual subscription due for the forthcoming year or in order to report to an AGM or an auditor (noting that it is possible that some clubs do not have an annual subscription). The same membership list, with a prime club indication, would be sent (electronically) to Aylesbury, or alternatively Aylesbury might send its record of a club's membership with a request for its verification and/or amendment.

The Board feels that the former is actually simpler for the club, because the latter would only be a list of the prime club members.

A new member joining a club may require a more immediate action, since that individual's information needs to be recorded (even if only temporarily) before they can play. This entails the scoring software providing the capability of recording a new participant (literally on the night).

The financial side depends on what the club does today, since some clubs have annual subscription only, some have table money only and some have a mixture (and there may be other arrangements too). A club which has both an annual subscription and table money may choose to derive the total Pay to Play fee through adjustments to either or both. It is a club matter as to how the Pay to Play fee will be accumulated.

Where a club has a table money arrangement it is likely that this income is recorded.



All that has to happen is that the table money to be collected has to be a larger amount (and presumably rounded to some convenient value to make that collection straightforward, perhaps with a reduction in the annual subscription by way of compensation or simply making an increased surplus).

The EBU will send an invoice to the club every two months in arrears. This account will show each of the playing sessions with their number of participants, as well as the total to be paid. Remember that the playing sessions are reported to Aylesbury by way of the scoring software. It should be straightforward to reconcile this with the record that the club will necessarily have made for its own purposes. The EBU bill will presumably be paid by direct debit for administrative ease and convenience.

There was a suggestion that an eligibility card should be issued to players who qualified for free duplicate playing session - please see the Pay to Play section for those who would qualify - but this would put too heavy an administrative burden on club treasurers in terms of collecting different amounts of money.

#### **Will my existing electronic scoring system work with the new processes?**

Any electronic scoring programs that can upload Master Point results will be effective in the new administration, although they may need some adaptation in order to provide the more extensive information required in the Pay to Play scheme and the National Rating mechanism.

The EBU will make available the IT specification - when it has been developed - necessary to be able to make these changes and also will provide an acceptance test to ensure that that implementation is correct, before that software is approved by the EBU for use.

If required the software will be provided in advance of the implementation of the Pay to Play scheme in 2010 to assist with familiarisation.

#### **Does every club have to have a computer?**

The Pay to Play scheme is dependent on electronic processing. Accordingly, every club must have access to a computer which can communicate with Aylesbury by way of the Internet, at least, through one of its members. It is not known to what extent this is a difficulty and this will be an aspect of the consultation with the clubs.

#### **How will the Pay to Play fee affect county, district and club leagues?**

The following Pay to Play fees will apply to all leagues - County, District and Club and will be paid as part of the entry fee to the National Organisation.

Teams of 4 (allowing up to 6 players) will attract a charge of £5.

Teams of 8 (allowing up to 12 players) will attract a charge of £10.

Note that, as today, teams in the lowest division of any league need not be members of the EBU.

The reasoning behind this is that some players only participate in leagues and therefore it is appropriate that they make a sensible contribution to the National Organisation and the County Association.



Also, arguably, playing in a league detracts on occasion from participation at a club and this factor needs to be accommodated too.

**The Pay to Play fee will increase a club's subscription income and the club will therefore incur VAT registration**

The current VAT registration threshold for 2007/2008 is £64,000. If a club finds it is liable for VAT the EBU will assist, where possible, with the practicalities of registration. It may well be advantageous for a club to be registered for VAT even if it is below the threshold, as it will be able to claim the VAT back on the Pay to Play fee and other costs.

**Individual membership**

**The £5 one off registration fee will deter players joining.**

This has been removed. Members of an affiliated club will automatically become members of the EBU. Members will nominate a primary club of allegiance. As long as an individual's affiliated club membership is current that individual will continue to be a member of the EBU.

**Some individuals want to remain anonymous and do not want their name, rating or ranking in the public domain.**

Anonymity will be available to all members. If so required we can allocate an EBU number and/or a unique pseudonym to any player who doesn't wish their details to be retained by the EBU, as long as the club of prime allegiance information has been supplied. Those members who opt for anonymity will not receive any mailings from the EBU so they will not receive the magazine or diary. They will not be eligible for Pay to Play rebates. However, their Master Point accrual and their Rating will be recorded, confidentially, in Aylesbury. Their membership cards will be delivered to their primary club of allegiance. When they play in a club duplicate session, their EBU number and pseudonym is reported to Aylesbury, so that the club will be billed for their "player sessions" as normal. Only the club of prime allegiance will know the translation between the artificial membership record held in Aylesbury with the true details of the individual. If such a member wishes to play in another club, then the EBU number (or prime club identification plus the unique pseudonym) for that individual must be used for any result reported to Aylesbury from that club.

Overseas membership will still exist by subscription, as will direct membership for those members in England who are not members of affiliated clubs.

All membership information held by the EBU is governed by the Data Protection Act and the EBU's Privacy Policy. This information is available on the EBU's website or by request via post from Aylesbury.



## Rating System

### On what attributes will the Rating System be based?

The rating system will allow all players to have a National Rating, which will provide a current evaluation of a bridge player's skills, running alongside the life time achievements offered by the existing Master Point scheme.

Although the details are not yet finalised the basic principle is that the result of every board of every rated session is reviewed taking into consideration the rating of one's partner and the ratings of the opponents. In this way an individual's contribution - good or bad - to the overall result at a duplicate session can be assessed and a weighted (i.e. the immediately previous results are taken into account, the older results carrying a progressively reducing influence) adjustment to that individual's overall rating made. Note that the adjustment is **NOT** solely based on the percentage score obtained at a rated session.

Note that this allows a good player to partner a less good player without significant risk to the better player's rating, or increasing the lesser player's rating by an unwarranted amount.

Also it will be possible to declare - but only before the commencement of a duplicate session - that a pair's results are not to be included in the determination of the rating. This will accommodate the potential randomness that could arise where a club has a "hosting" individual on "stand-by" to make up a partnership i.e. without much opportunity to discuss methods. It would also allow an emerging pair to practice without jeopardising their current individual rating.

Rating systems exist in the Netherlands and France and are being introduced in the USA and these will be studied.

It is possible to start this system with everyone having the same rating and allow the scheme to adapt naturally. Alternatively, it might get it to a meaningful state more quickly if it was seeded, perhaps based on current Master Point rankings. Note that the scheme is **NOT** intended to produce a percentage value, but a position in a list - the former would carry the unintended connotation that any individual whose rating was less than 50% was a below average player.

County and National tournaments will be included in the Rating scheme.

### How is the rating of two individuals in geographically separate regions comparable?

The calibration between individuals occurs as a consequence of playing with or against individuals who participate in other environments, such as at other clubs, County and National tournament. This "diffusion" causes a natural standardisation across the whole country.

Of course, any individual who plays within an "island" i.e. only plays in a club with others who only play in that club, will not have a genuine National Rating.



## **Will the National Rating have any other value that an indication of an individual's current ability?**

Hopefully, yes. There is considerable scope for its applicability.

For example, it is possible to perform the Rating evaluation on a partial section of the overall data and in this way develop regionalised or local Ratings (mathematically this is different to just taking a subset of the National Rating list, although doing this might be an excellent approximation and easier to achieve). This would allow clubs to stratify and handicap their own events through their own local rating data.

Similarly, it would allow County and National stratified and handicapped events.

Finally, it will allow us to run a new competition to find a Club Player of the Year in the various strata of the National Rating Scheme.

## **Education**

### **How will this affect other teachers and their students?**

No supervised playing session will attract the Pay to Play fee. However we ask all teachers who will be running this type of session in our affiliated clubs to register as an associate teacher with EBUTA. This costs just £13.50 per annum and all members receive many benefits including insurance cover. Please note all methods of teaching bridge are welcome at EBUTA. If you wish to you can progress through the EBUTA qualified and professional teacher programmes. However, this will not be a requirement. For more information access our website here:

<http://www.ebu.co.uk/education/ebuta/benefits.htm> or telephone John Pain on 01296 317200.

### **Partner Teachers, Learn and Play Clubs and Partner Clubs**

The free and discounted services available to Partner Teachers will be provided up to the point of the formation of the Partner Club, when the full affiliation fee will be gathered and the Pay to Play fee charged per player per session.

### **Alternative options**

The Board of the EBU through its Membership Development Action Group considered many options for universal membership. They include the following ideas which have been suggested during the consultation since 6 June. They are mentioned briefly here with the key features and effects.

### **Universal membership based on an annual subscription**

Same price for all members collected annually

Master Points dealt with in the same way as they are today with the attendant costs and administration.

Higher levels of administration at both club and Aylesbury thus keeping the level of the subscription high.



### **Two tier membership based on annual subscription - higher for tournament players, lower for non-tournament players**

Low take up on higher membership subscription so the lower subscription is not significantly less.

Master Points dealt with in the same way as they are today with the attendant costs and administration.

Same high administrative levels for Aylesbury and clubs.

Investigated in the last 15 years, piloted and failed.

### **Hybrid membership - a mixture of annual subscription and Pay to Play for tournament players and those who wish to collect Master Points, and Pay to Play only for those who do not.**

Same basic issues as two tier membership but effectively needing two separate types of administration for both clubs and Aylesbury.

Pay to Play fee high due to low annual membership fee take up, and paid by all including those with annual subscription

### **Summary of the overall Pay to Play Scheme**

The Pay to Play fee is the sum of the County Association and the National Organisation parts, noting that the latter has two variants, namely that for the "competitive" club which issues Master Points and that for the "social" club which does not issue Master Points. All duplicate sessions are Rated. Thus, there will be a:

- Pay to Play<sub>County</sub> which will be set by the County for its clubs and simply reported for any year to Aylesbury (in Pay to Play terms), much like the annual County subscription is reported today. Fractional values can be used in order to provide adequate granularity. Aylesbury will collect this amount as part of the Pay to Play scheme and disburse this amount to the County. The amount is expected to be around 4p, but will vary from County to County.
- Pay to Play<sub>Social</sub> and Pay to Play<sub>Competitive</sub> which are both set by the National Organisation as part of the budget process and discussed in the Shareholder meetings, in the same way as the various annual subscriptions are considered today.

The values of these cannot be determined until a more precise count of the total number of "player sessions" is known, which will be the next phase of work for the MDAG as part of its consultation with the clubs. However, there is an expectation that Pay to Play<sub>Social</sub> will be around 10p less than Pay to Play<sub>Competitive</sub>.

The Pay to Play fee determines the contribution that any individual makes to the County Association and the National Organisation. The National Organisation will not charge an individual for playing more than 150 times per year. (A year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March in line with the EBU financial year). This will be achieved by a rebate by cheque to the individual (but only for amounts of more than £5, smaller amounts being retained) at the end of the year, in order to keep the club administration simple.



The clubs will be billed two monthly in arrears and at the same time the Counties will receive their payment based on number of “player sessions” which have occurred.

In addition, the clubs will be charged an annual affiliation fee of £30 and be required to sign a contract which, amongst other things, will specify the regulations for offering Pay to Play playing sessions.

The nub of the matter is the actual value of Pay to Play<sub>Social</sub>. For argument’s sake, suppose that it turned out to be 20p, then this would mean that a person who plays once a week would contribute about £10.00 to the National Organisation and a further (say) £2.00 to the County Association. If that individual played many times a week then the rebating mechanism would come into effect, thereby limiting that contribution.

### **Next Steps**

The Board looks forward to further discussions about the proposals. We will continue to listen and accommodate to achieve our aim of strengthening the EBU’s membership which will allow the future development of the game in England.