
New Normal News April 2024

1 message

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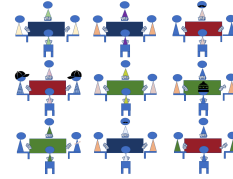
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Bridge Clubs Network!



APRIL 2024



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Next Discussion LINK/Previous Discussions

Thanks to everyone who gives feedback about the newsletter!

The audience for this newsletter is growing. If you would like to receive it, you can subscribe at:

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Bringing Teaching to Market Harborough BC

Market Harborough is a one/two session a week bridge club playing in shared community premises. Like many such clubs the membership was static and not getting any younger.

Member Graham Logan contacted me about arranging some beginners bridge lessons. I live within driving distance of the town. I like teaching beginners. I was very happy to help, especially if we could turn MHBC into a teaching club.

We agreed that the club would find a venue, advertise the class, manage the enquiries, provide tea/coffee at the venue and most importantly, as many “helpers” as possible from the club’s membership.

The advertising was very successful. We accepted 24 students but had to wait list about a dozen more. I led the first set of 10 lessons, using my own curriculum. I provided lesson plans, notes, glossaries, quizzes, and deals.

All my materials are available for free from the Bridge for Pleasure website. My lessons are dovetailed with materials on No Fear Bridge. Students were signed onto NFB and guided to use it between lessons.

The second half of all lessons is spent by the students playing set hands. We provided a set of the hands for each table. Each table had at least one helper from MHBC.

The students enjoyed the course, and most of them signed up for more lessons. Two of the MHBC members went for EBED teacher training, and they, with the rest of the helpers carried on with more lessons after I withdrew. They are planning another intake in the spring.

“Thank you for helping MHBC to run some bridge lessons.

Another beginners' course for 21 people is about to start this Spring.

The club has done well thanks to you kick starting bridge lessons in MH. Hopefully, teaching around 40 beginners in 2023/4 will produce a healthy intake of some new duplicate players in the time ahead”

I would be happy to help other clubs/teachers pair up and launch teaching in their club.

The English Bridge Union Board of Directors is in trouble.

The bridge world is emerging from the challenges of the pandemic and adjusting to new ways that people spend their time and their money on leisure.

The Board now faces two big issues.

Firstly, the board itself is depleted and unable to tackle either the long list of actions it's been carrying forward for months or to define, gain backing for and carry out the changes that could divert the organisation and the game from its current decline.

Secondly the dysfunctional relationship between the English Bridge Education and Development charity (EBED) and The Board has now come to a head. The trustees of EBED have resigned en masse, and the The Board has appointed three of its own directors as trustees.

There is now both a serious moral hazard and an opportunity to rapidly reshape the whole approach to the development of bridge particularly where the community of teachers is concerned.

Already there are signs that change will be slow.

The EBU Board

David Parry and I sought election to the The Board last November. We both love the game. We see existential challenges to it. We want to ensure its future existence. We didn't seek the agreement or cooperation of the current board. We know they are well-intentioned people struggling with the situation.

The Board reacted by becoming defensive, less transparent and seeking to reduce the already limited power of its shareholders. It is making its governance even less democratic and transparent. For example, deciding to leave the current format of AGM restricting the ability of “remote” County Bridge Associations to attend; deciding that the board will appoint Vice-Chair, Treasurer and selection committee members rather than letting the shareholders elect them; refusing to allow ordinary members to attend the AGM.

The Board is making no progress on the wider issues threatening the future of the game, particularly those concerning the two most important grassroots communities: clubs and teachers.

Before the November AGM, two directors, Kay Preddy and Gayle Webb indicated their intention to stand down. Neither attended the AGM, neither has attended a board meeting in over six months. They were persuaded not to stand down in November. Two vacancies that would have resulted in our election were avoided. Now that they have formally announced their departure, there are two vacancies on the board.

At the AGM, there were three vacancies for elected directors, and a third candidate was fielded by the board very late.

We canvassed heavily and received an encouraging number of votes. However, the board made several promises to change and ensured that “outside” candidates were defeated.

There are now several critical vacancies, including that of treasurer which has been filled temporarily.

In the draft minutes of recent board meetings, arrangements are made to distribute various responsibilities.

Some are now in the name of Tony Russ, currently vice chair. However, Tony himself has advised that he is suffering ill health and cannot undertake EBU activity. Tony is nominally responsible for Bridge It's A Big Deal and Clubs.

In board minutes, it is recorded that “in accordance with previous practice”, they will not co-opt directors who failed to be elected to the board. There is nothing in any governance document to stop them, they simply want to keep the drawbridge raised.

In the minutes of at least the last six months of EBU board

meetings, there is a long list of actions on which no progress was being made.

In the minutes of Thursday 18th January 2024

“The board discussed refusal of membership and confirmed that in the following circumstances it would be expected to use the power to expel or refuse membership to someone:

1. A person seeks to join the EBU, having indicated that their aim is to work to undermine the organisation, perhaps with the aim of setting up a rival body.”

It is surprising that they can find time to discuss this. How likely is it that anyone wants to undermine the organisation? Could they prove such an allegation to a level that would justify refusing membership? Is this really good use of the board’s time?

The board is critically short of resources, especially volunteer resources.

EBED and The EBU Board

The ill-advised creation of EBED to exploit phantom tax advantages without clear terms of reference has finally come to a head:

“Following EBED’s 13 March 2024 meeting of trustees, they sent the EBU Board a set of proposals that the EBU Board, at its meeting of 21 March 2024, did not approve. Lee Guy's term of office as Chair of Trustees for EBED was up for renewal in March and this is an appointment constitutionally made by the EBU Board. The Board decided not to renew this appointment and, following that decision, the remaining Trustees of EBED resigned.”

The EBU Board is required to appoint the Chair and Treasurer of EBED, is allowed to appoint up to five trustees, and the minimum number of trustees for EBED CIO is three. Accordingly, the Board has appointed Ian Sidgwick, Paul Gibbons and Abbey Smith as Trustees with immediate effect, with Ian Sidgwick taking the role of Chair and Paul Gibbons taking the role of Treasurer. Further appointments to the Trustees of EBED will be made in due course.”

The creation of EBED set the development of bridge back years. It has never worked well.

- Chief executives have been appointed with little knowledge of bridge.
- Until recently it had little success in stimulating charitable donations. The purpose and activities of EB Teachers Association has never been clear and the raising of its annual fee from £25 to £45, quite suddenly, drove many teachers away.
- EBED has embarked on some unfortunate projects, for example, the “English Bridge School” based on Google Classroom.
- EBED’s reliance on the income from Bridge For All publications stifles its ability to reach and work with teachers who use other materials.

The EBU board and EBED have failed to work together.

- During the pandemic and during the next two years, there was no county level TD training. When it resumed the EBU board took over administration of the County TD weekend. At the November AGM it was clear that there was confusion about the Preparation Day.
- The EBU board created its own teacher directory. This is now a working system of leads from learners being passed to registered teachers. The number of teachers registered is stalled at 200. Compare this to the number of members of the EBED Teachers Association, 500.
- Over the last few years there have been many references to potential meetings with EBED that do not take place or do not produce results. These references evolved into an apparent “Heads of Agreement” negotiation between two organizations that share an office and a bank account. The “Education Working Group” which may be relevant to this, has not met for years.

The Future

The EBED trustees are now a subset of the EBU board. A moral hazard, and a major opportunity has been created. EBED has received a major legacy, somewhere in the region of £900,000. The disbursement of this donation is constrained by the terms of the charity.

After so many years of the organisational gap in governance **a real strategy and plan for education and development can be created and carried out.**

This is urgently needed. It mustn't just be an aspiration that drifts unfulfilled from meeting to meeting for years.

An education stakeholder group should be created NOW. It should be prepared to meet over the summer, it should define goals, include all the communities, list resources and opportunities. Resolve the conflict between relying on sales of a particular set of materials and the many creators and users of other materials. It should have a strategy for EBU membership and student status to be recorded so that progress can be monitored and managed. It should decide how membership of EBTA and presence on the wider EBU teacher directory will work. It should create the basis for a wider promotion of bridge to be steered to attractive opportunities to learn/improve and play bridge, perhaps even including the commercial teacher and holiday organisations. A knowledgeable, experienced, and determined group could sort this out in a few weeks.

Grass Roots Bridge

Most people who enjoy bridge play in local groups. They do not play in county, national, or other elite events. Teachers and clubs bring new players to the game and provide opportunities for them to play and develop. This community provides the money that keeps the EBU afloat. The EBU board tends to ignore them.

There are occasional noble exceptions. The EBU teacher's directory has the potential to provide the kind of central support that only the EBU can. However, it hasn't been further developed or promoted in months. It is not clear who is responsible for this area on the EBU board.

There is now no functioning EBU Board director responsible for clubs. By the next board meeting in June, there will have been no responsible board director for clubs for a year.

The EBU board needs to work with teachers and clubs to devise strategies that play to strengths and resources of each to build the grass roots game.

Five goals for the EBU in 2024 - APRIL Update

There is no progress.

1 EBU Member Numbers

Let's see this deficit get smaller in 2024

It is now three months since it emerged, that in the year to Nov 2023 there was a 3.000 net loss in membership. That's a quarter of a year. The EBU will have access to the latest position and so will know whether there is any sign of improvement.

At the recent Chair's conference (date) (link to recording), David Gould gave a truly magnificent presentation. He included a plea for more management information. Come on EBU, publish more recent membership figures at the next, and each subsequent chairs conference, so that the chairs and the rest of us can see how it's going.

2 The Annual General Meeting

Let's have a more practical, more open, more democratic format in 2024.

The AGM reverted to Face to face in a London hotel. This meant that representatives from counties some distance from London faced more expense and travelling time. Many resorted to proxies. The meeting was only open to shareholders and their proxies, no public, no press, no playing members, no representatives of clubs, teachers or other bridge organisers. It was not recorded, so the record of the proceedings is limited to formal minutes and informal notes and discussions.

The chair undertook to look at a hybrid online and face to face form with electronic real time voting. This would allow a far greater audience, more participation, and a recording easily made widely available.

The draft minutes of the AGM appeared over a month after the meeting, and the draft minutes of the first EBU board appeared eventually. There is no progress in this area.

There also appears to be no director responsible for club representation to the EBU.

3 Updates from Aylesbury

Any member able to request this newsletter by opting for it in their member account.

That way more people can be informed about bridge organisation.

The monthly update from Aylesbury is largely used as a vehicle for marketing EBU run events. However, it can contain information important to club and county organisers, and of interest to teachers and players.

At present, the EBU sends to its own distribution list of club and county officials. It is difficult to keep this list up to date.

It would be so good if the EBU could adopt a policy of actively informing and educating about bridge, especially organising bridge. You have to persist in searching the web site for so many things, or directly request access from individuals. It would be so much more powerful if any member can subscribe or unsubscribe from a complete and dynamic list of interests e.g. events, teaching, directing etc

4 EBU Teachers Directory

There are about 200 entries at the time of writing. With wide publicity, let's double this number in 2024.

This directory is used by the EBU to pass on enquiries for lessons. Any teacher can be on the directory. It's not limited to EBEDTA members, or to those who use particular materials, systems or methods. It shows real potential to boost numbers learning the game.

Teachers have to put themselves into the directory.

Regrettably the count on 2nd March is still 200 entries. This is an area the EBU should be using all channels to promote. This directory has the potential to be the "landing page" for all people looking to learn bridge. This is key to recruiting new bridge players.

The EBU could promote it in:

All EBU members email

All Club/County organisers email (Updates from Aylesbury)

By agreement with EBED to EBTA members

5 Freeze UM

Freeze UM in 2024/25 to reduce financial pressure on clubs.

UM is a cost of doing business for affiliated clubs. The level of EBU plus County UM has reached about 50p per player per qualifying session.

Table money is generally £2, £2.50 or £3. The median is £2.50. That means the EBU UM is 20%. Clubs have venues, and various other expenses to meet.

There is no official response to this idea. Informally, the comment is that the EBU don't see how they can afford it.

In the Jan 2024 EBU board minutes ([link](#)), there are notes of a discussion about the offer to non affiliated clubs to join. This has met with, at best, mixed success. It shows that the value of affiliation is unclear to non affiliated clubs. Affiliated clubs are likely to question it.

During enquiries we made before the 2023 AGM, it emerged that the Aylesbury building has been valued at £1.1M. There is over a million pounds of shareholders money invested in a building that is clearly too big.

How are clubs doing?

The 839 clubs in the database offer about 1251 weekly duplicate sessions.

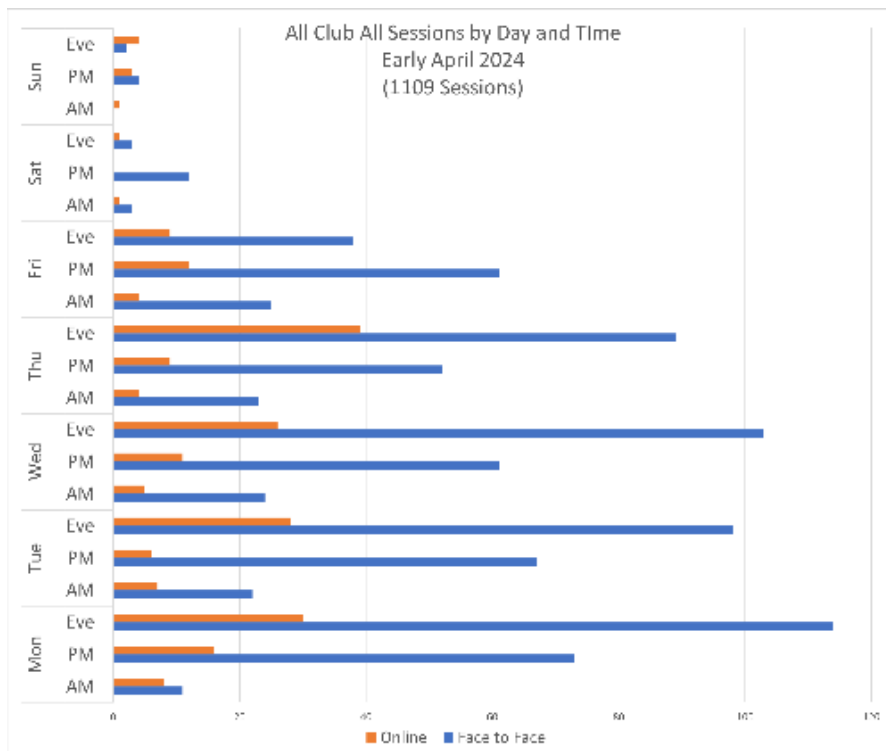
1132 weekly sessions have been analysed in some detail. The

session details include tables numbers (average of latest three weeks at review data) by day of week and time of day. The type of venue or online platform is also recorded.

F2F Average Tables

Again slightly up on March.

All Clubs F2F	6.72
EBU Clubs F2F	6.96
Non Affiliated Clubs F2F	6.34
Dedicated Premises	7.58
Shared Community	6.52
Section	5.39



There's more information here, typically updated once a fortnight.

Click here to view previous newsletters

Monthly Discussions

Interest in the monthly discussions has dwindled. I am not going to arrange any over the summer. I wonder if a session in mid/late September might be of interest. We could talk about how BIABD went, how clubs manage their membership lists, and the latest in Aylesbury. What do you think? Hit reply.

Previous New Normal Zoom Discussions

The meetings are informal gatherings. They are intended to bring together a wide range of perspectives. They should allow constructive debate.

The proceedings are informal and are recorded and published on YouTube.

Previous Zoom conferences:

2020	16th September 18th November	21st October 16th December
2021	20th January 17th March 19th May	17th February 21st April 16th June
	21st July	https://youtu.be/PbTyAz9vuHA
	18th August 22nd September	https://youtu.be/pPEzFxs8VBA https://youtu.be/QJlu3PIn02s
	20th October 17th November	https://youtu.be/VRP7eaeqaH8 https://youtu.be/DAv-7POhNHU
2022	19th January 16th February 16th March 20th April 18th May 22nd June 20th July 17th August 21st September 19th October 23rd November	https://youtu.be/3w9hl3UWG70 https://youtu.be/Z5jOfwcpueU https://youtu.be/nlW1BIMG6-0 https://youtu.be/ekPnjt-KIZs https://youtu.be/hond7ZCvKzM https://youtu.be/cz1sBGPMisE https://youtu.be/1McE5pexdjg https://youtu.be/5pegkP_R_Ro https://youtu.be/uxmPqzTQNqo https://youtu.be/uxmPqzTQNqo https://youtu.be/H-xaZ-moSGg
2023	18th January 22nd February 22nd March	https://youtu.be/aRoMH6l68g0 https://youtu.be/Og5VRoX9lXY http://youtu.be/ZdhvzIVeZw

6th June
15th September
20th October
1st December

<https://youtu.be/WY2PUDMHBQA>
https://youtu.be/1j6yXjO_cLc
https://youtu.be/J6R8u_a5CdI
https://youtu.be/J6R8u_a5CdI

2024 2nd February <https://youtu.be/aRoMH6l68g0>

New Normal Newsletter

This is issued roughly once a month. It is written and distributed on an entirely non profit basis, takes no advertising or commission.

Previous New Normal newsletters and a subscription form are available on the Bridge for Pleasure web site.

There is also information on playing Covid-secure bridge.

A freely available bridge teaching scheme with lesson plans, notes, deals, homework quizzes and answers is there for all.

Bridge for Pleasure - Information Web Site

Please forward the letter to anyone in the bridge world who might be interested. Anyone can subscribe using the link below,

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