

Surrey County Bridge Association

Response to the EBU's Strategy Proposals and Feedback

1. Introduction

This document is the Surrey County Bridge Association's (SCBA) response to the Strategy Proposals presented by the English Bridge Union (EBU) through its web site 'to elevate and maintain the status and procure the advancement of the game of Bridge in England', including the results of the consultation meeting held with the EBU on July 30th at the Young Chelsea Bridge Club.

In order to formulate the response, the SCBA Committee:

- held an e-mail forum within the SCBA Committee;
- wrote to all the Clubs in Surrey asking them to provide feedback;
- made a request at the AGM asking individuals to provide feedback;
- placed an entry on the SCBA web site urging visitors to view the Strategy Proposals on the EBU web site and provide feedback;
- held a Committee meeting to discuss the various feedback received;

In all, the SCBA Committee received written feedback from 20 Clubs and 13 individuals. The Committee reviewed all feedback and constructed a précis of the common themes found. Wherever an opinion was voiced by three or more correspondents, the Committee included it in the précis. Since everybody represented their opinions in slightly different language, the "highlight" responses were not easy to establish. However, the Committee tried to capture the main points. The response also includes some additional concerns which were raised at the Committee meeting, but were not identified by Clubs or Individuals.

The Committee also included queries where individuals or the Committee felt that the Strategy Proposals required clarification or extension in order to provide information to the respondents. Where the EBU provided feedback on these queries, this has been embedded with the queries.

A few other related items have also been included at the end of the document.

2. Points Discerned from Collective Feedback

- 1/ The proposals to abolish the Annual Membership Subscription and Master Point charges have been generally supported.
- 2/ The Costs to smaller clubs, in terms of the increase in table money and club affiliation fee based on the number of sessions per week will be too large.
- 3/ Increased costs are likely to drive smaller clubs to disaffiliate from the EBU, leading to a weakening rather than strengthening of the EBU membership base and a 'two-tier' or 'elitist' environment, where Affiliated Clubs carry higher table money than Non-Affiliated.
- 4/ The range of Club Services has limited value to established clubs, and there is no obvious application for rating system software within most Clubs; the Free weekly online club night might also drive down attendance at clubs.
- 5/ The Quality of software which might be provided is a concern; the last scoring program offered by the EBU was poor quality and caused issues; most clubs have already purchased scoring software and would prefer to retain it.
- 6/ The role of the County is being eroded to the point where their influence in the EBU is significantly diminished (membership centralisation has also contributed to this).
- 7/ Members may leave clubs rather than pay the £5 EBU membership fee.

3. Points Emerging from the Committee Meeting

- 8/ The strategy proposals need to be extended to include a risk assessment on what might happen to finances if people and/or clubs disaffiliate in large numbers; at present, the charge for P2P seems to have been calculated on an assumption about the number of EBU members who will remain once the proposals are implemented; this needs to be augmented with an analysis of how the EBU's finances will stand if the numbers are significantly less;
- 9/ The strategy proposals need to be extended to include measures to bring younger people into the EBU membership, or else the membership cannot be strengthened; the present proposals would only swell the EBU ranks by bringing in members of Clubs who are not currently EBU members – these are likely to follow much the same age profile as the existing EBU membership – as such, although numbers could theoretically be increased, the age profile means that the numbers would decline at the same rate as the membership ages; we believe that 'strengthening' the membership has to include proposals to reduce the Age profile, or at least to prevent it increasing;

4. Queries Emerging from Collective Feedback

- 1/ What would be the VAT payable on the invoices sent by the EBU? At least one club has expressed concern over the VAT they already have to pay.
[EBU Clarification: P2P charges will be inclusive of VAT.]
- 2/ How would P2P impact:
 - Green Point events?
 - League or Knock-out events played at home?*[EBU Clarification: A lower rate of P2P charge was being considered for Leagues and KO matches, with the expectation that this would be collected by increasing entry fees for such events, rather than attempting to make a charge at each match. One day Green Point events would be run under licence and would not attract a P2P charge.]*
- 3/ What exactly is meant by a free online night per week? Does this mean that members of a club which plays on a Thursday night would be given a free entry on to EBU Online on a Tuesday?
[EBU Clarification: The free on-line bridge service is likely to be on a Sunday evening so that it does not clash with club nights. It is envisaged that each club will have a separate on-line session in which only its members will play.]
- 4/ Do the 'Partner Teacher' proposals replace 'Bridge For All'? Is BFA being phased out as part of these proposals?
[EBU Clarification: The partner-teacher proposals incorporate Bridge For All. 30 partner-teachers have already been trained.]
- 5/ How do we handle honorary members? How would players specify their 'primary county of allegiance'?
[EBU Clarification: Players who are members of several bridge clubs will have to nominate one club as their primary club. Their county of allegiance will be the county to which that club is affiliated, unless they inform their county secretary otherwise. Each player will be given a membership card with an EBU membership number, so this is one's identification wherever one plays.]

5. Queries Emerging from the Committee Meeting

In addition to the points above which were discerned from the collective feedback, the SCBA Committee raised two further queries:

- 6/ Will the EBU issue multiple copies of the scoring program to clubs with multiple scorers?
[EBU Clarification: It is anticipated that results from most computer-based scoring systems could be handled at EBU HQ so that few clubs would have to consider acquiring new software.]

7/ How will P2P be allocated to counties? Without knowing accurate amounts, it will be impossible for Counties to estimate income from P2P, whereas subscriptions were much easier to budget from. Would Surrey as a County be allocated a percentage of P2P from Surrey clubs or from all clubs?

[EBU Clarification: The role of the Counties under the new scheme was not expected to change, especially as the Shareholders, who have to approve all policies and developments recommended by the EBU Board of Directors, would continue to be appointed by the Counties.]

County funding is expected to be in the form of a lump sum equivalent to their income from subscriptions before the change to the new scheme. At the moment, it is not planned to allocate them an exact share of the P2P income generated in their County, as this might cause the income of some Counties to fall. If a county needs any additional funding, they can approach the EBU for additional assistance.]

6. Report of Consultation Meeting held on 30th July 2007 @ YC

Present were two delegates each from Surrey, Essex, Kent and Middlesex, the Chairman, Sally Bugden, with Mike Hill as Financial Advisor.

6.1 Consultation Process

There are 10 meetings with the counties scheduled between now and the end of September, (ours was the second) after which time a more modified Development Strategy will be put to the AGM/Shareholders Meeting in October for consideration.

Among the changes expected are:

- The proposed £5 membership fee will be abandoned. All members of affiliated clubs will automatically become EBU members free of charge.
- The higher P2P charge proposed for non-EBU members will also be dropped. Clubs to make their own arrangements for their visitors.

Between October and January, all clubs will be invited by the EBU to comment electronically on the amended proposals, and in January will be asked the direct question: "Will you continue to affiliate?"

Using the responses from Clubs, a risk assessment will be carried out to ascertain whether the proposals are feasible. If feasible, a final version of the Strategy will be presented to the Shareholders in February 2008 for approval.

6.2 Other Points of Clarification

- Proposed club affiliation fees will be re-examined to see if the burden on clubs with a small membership could be eased.
- The proposed rating system will not affect master point rankings already attained, but will give an indication of a player's current performance.

6.3 Membership Development

A paper was passed round showing ideas for taking bridge into schools, U3A and universities and partner/teacher developments.

6.4 Confirmation of Objectives

Sally did emphasize that the objective of the Strategy was to nurture and increase membership, whilst being revenue neutral.

7. P2P Future Increases

One of the concerns voiced about P2P was what control would be exercised over future increases.

FAQ4 of the Strategy documents states unequivocally that the charge will be set by the EBU Board of Directors. However, following an exchange of e-mails with Sally Bugden, the SCBA Committee have received the assurance that approval of any proposed change will have to be given by the Shareholders.

8. EBU Club Liaison Officer

Krys Kazmierczak has recently been appointed Club Liaison Officer with the EBU. This is a new role at the EBU created in order to strengthen contacts with Affiliated clubs and make the EBU more accessible and responsive to their needs and wishes.

In the course of his duties, he has begun a programme of visits to bridge clubs all over England. A major part of the work consists of listening and learning from clubs which are prospering while giving advice to those which are struggling to maintain membership.

Krys will contact SCBA when he intends to visit clubs in Surrey and may ask for advice on which clubs to visit. If any club has a specific interest in having Krys visit, then by all means advise the SCBA Committee and we will ensure that the request is passed on.

Chris Stableford
Surrey County Bridge Association Chairman
01 August 2007