

DRAFT

Minutes of the 1st AGM of the Scottish Bridge Union (SC051361)
Zoom Conference Tuesday 24th May 2022 at 7.20 pm

Notice of Meeting was read out by the Chair

Attendees: Alan Goodman (Chair) Julia Scott-Barrett (Secretary)

Brian Allan, Ann Anderson, Neil Archibald, Mike Ash, Hazel Brown, Susan Chapple, Allan Downie, Gavin Easton, Emily Garden, Fiona Greenwood, Sarah Gunn, Martyn Halsall, Margaret Hodder, Mike Hodder, Peter Hodgson, Doreen Hollywood, Alan Kennedy, Gordon Milne, Angus Macdonald, Scott Macdonald, Eddie McGeough, Mike McGinley, Ian Patrick, Anne Perkins, Ying Piper, Jean Robertson, Bill Ross, Margaret Ross, Iain Sleigh, Elaine Slinn, Iain Slinn, Harry Smith, Kevin Strathern, Finlay Marshall, Iain Taylor, Janet Unsworth, Tim Wickens, Bill Whyte, David Wiseman & Sandra Wiseman

1. Notice of Meeting

The Chair read the notice of the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for their absence were received from the following:

Ann Armstrong, Doris Campbell, Alice Cowieson, Marina Evans, Paul Gipson, Ian Hunter, Ann Lyon, Julia Palmer, George Roberts, Gillian Roberts, Callum McKail, Terag McKenzie & Jill Russell

3. Trustees Report - Alan Goodman

As members will know, the new SCIO became operational on 1 March 2022. The existing Council has now been disbanded, and the running of the SBU has been passed to the trustees of the SCIO (SC051361).

The new structure separates overall governance, which is the responsibility of the trustees, from the operational running of the organisation, which is the responsibility of the Operational Management Team, under the leadership of Janet Unsworth, the newly appointed General Manager.

The biggest challenge at present is to ensure that our bridge clubs can survive and flourish, whilst ensuring members have access to both face-to-face and online bridge to meet their needs. Those needs are difficult to establish, which is why we are grateful to over 1500 members who completed the recent survey questionnaire. What is abundantly clear from the responses, is that both forms of bridge are required by most of our

members. We plan to hold a series of meetings with clubs to discuss how both clubs and SBU can best support those needs.

Our mission is to foster, promote and communicate participation and enjoyment of bridge in Scotland, with an increase in the number of people of all ages, abilities, and diverse backgrounds playing bridge. Consequently, our planning and activities are being aligned to that goal. A number of workstreams are being set up to ensure our efforts are appropriately focused.

The pandemic has raised awareness of the social and health benefits of playing bridge, with 70% of our members confirming that bridge is good for their mental health and well-being. We are currently working with U3A (University of the Third Age), and plan to work with other charities interested in issues of loneliness and social exclusion, to introduce bridge to a wider audience.

Although Mempad has served us well over several years, it has now become critical that we assess what IT infrastructure will be required to meet our future needs. A project team has been set up and we expect to have a clearer picture of what changes need to be made by the end of the summer.

SBU is run by volunteers who individually and collectively spend many hours each week supporting the organisation. However, it is imperative that the work is spread more evenly across more of the membership. I am delighted that over 150 members have responded positively to our request for volunteers in the recent questionnaire. What is particularly encouraging is the large number of members who are happy to help in the teaching of children and adults, and the mentoring of other players.

I am delighted to report that Scotland has recently won both the ladies and senior trophies against the other home nations, and that follows a commendable 12th place finish by the ladies' team in the Venice Cup World Championships.

We are undergoing massive change, both organisationally and post-pandemic. Inevitably that can be painful and frustrating. My wish is that we all try and work together to get back to some form of normality so that we can introduce many more new people to bridge, and we can all continue to enjoy the game that we love.

4. Election of Trustees

The Chair reminded the meeting that under the current Constitution the five existing members of the Board would have to stand for re-election and that there was scope to elect a total of eight Trustees. The five existing Trustees were unanimously re-elected, namely Michael Ash, Joan Forsyth, Alan Goodman, Sarah Gunn, and Ian Patrick, and the three Trustees standing for election were also unanimously elected, namely Neil Archibald, Gavin Easton, and Michael Hodder.

5. Resolution

The Trustees propose that the Constitution be amended to remove the necessity for each Trustee to retire at each AGM (other than those appointed under sections 73 and 74), by replacing sections 66 to 76 with those shown in the attached paper - see Appendix 2.

The change being made is for members to elect trustees for a period of up to three years, rather than each trustee having to seek re-election at every AGM. Thereafter, a trustee can seek re-election subject to their continuous term not exceeding six years. Any member co-opted to the Board must retire from office at the next AGM but can then stand for election. Any non-member trustee co-opted to the Board must still seek re-appointment every year.

This is being proposed for practical reasons to ensure we have continuity and the necessary expertise and experience on the Board, and to ensure that the turnover of trustees can be managed effectively.

There was concern expressed that there was now no space if issues came up that were not covered by the expertise of the existing Trustees, but the Chair confirmed that, if deemed necessary, then an existing Trustee could step down to accommodate that need. He also reminded the meeting that there was room to co-opt if required.

After discussion, the Chair called for a vote to adopt the resolution. Including proxies, the vote was carried 46 for and 1 against. There were no abstentions. The Resolution was therefore carried with the necessary majority.

6. Trophy Winners

The Chair informed the meeting that the list of all trophy winners was available on the website and wholeheartedly congratulated all winners.

7. Election of Independent Examiner

The appointment of Henderson Loggie as Independent Examiner was unanimously agreed upon.

8. Any Other Business

The Chair tabled five written questions he had received from members.

(a) Allan Downie, Ness Bridge Club President

"Is the SBU going to cut back on online competitions? If they do not, it will be the end of F2F bridge, as clubs with their own premises will no longer be able to sustain them."

Chair's written response:

We have just completed a member-wide survey to find out members' appetite and preferences for online bridge, as against face-to-face, and for their participation in

different types of events. We are also planning to follow up the survey with road shows with affiliated Club Secretaries across Scotland. The Board are conscious however of their responsibilities to members, clubs, districts, and the future health of the SBU to try to "get the balance right" in respect of different playing opportunities.

The survey results are helpful in that it is clear that a return to F2F is desired by a significant number of members, but access to online competition is also of significant benefit to many. We need to provide access to online competition in a way that doesn't impact significantly on the clubs' ability to attract F2F competition. Obviously, any online competition will have some effect on F2F attendance, but we feel that an appropriate balance can be struck by the SBU not offering competitions that are likely to coincide with similar club competitions.

Our current thoughts are to retain the three online competitions held weekly on Saturdays and Sundays (because clubs do not normally hold competitions on those days) but offer these to the clubs and districts to organise, so any income would go to them.

We also need to review the Tuesday pairs because it is perceived to have a detrimental effect on clubs and sends the wrong message to clubs. It was initiated early in lockdown as an opportunity to play competitive bridge when no F2F bridge was available, so it has fulfilled its original purpose.

We are also minded to retaining the SOL and the Bronze League because of their popularity and the fact that national leagues can only realistically be played online.

This thinking is an attempt to retain an appropriate balance between the availability of online and F2F for our members. This balance will be reviewed regularly.

More than half of our membership has yet to return to playing F2F with a significant number still expressing Covid concerns. Hopefully, the numbers will recede over the coming months allowing clubs to flourish again once the new season starts in September.

The Chair opened the discussion to the floor:

There was considerable concern expressed about the urgency of returning to F2F, particularly for those clubs with rented premises. There was considerable support from members for the SBU to cease the Tuesday pairs and move the three online competitions to weekends. The Chair reported that from the recent survey carried out by the Board 65% of the respondents wanted to play both F2F and online, 15% only want to play F2F and 12% only wanted to play online so there was clearly a need for both. It was pointed out that the role bridge played in people's lives had been changed by the pandemic and that a middle ground to help both sides should be sought.

The meeting urged the Board to seek clarity as soon as possible about the nights for SOL and Bronze competitions and that guidance to Clubs and Districts should be received well before 1st September so that Clubs can plan their programmes accordingly

There was an appeal from the floor that the Trustees look at the top-down as to how to address their strategy so that both online and F2F benefit.

It was pointed out that less than 10% play in SOL and less than 400 people took part in the bronze league.

After a lengthy discussion, the Chair assured the meeting that the Board would ensure that the best possible balance was achieved between online and F2F to ensure that Clubs continued to thrive and that members got the best of both worlds, although it would be no easy task.

(b) Allan Downie, Ness Bridge Club President

"Why are people receiving more masterpoints playing online than can be achieved in a club?"

Chair's written response:

People do not receive more MPs playing in a club online competition than in a club F2F competition. All policies, rules, tables, scales, etc apply equally to face-to-face bridge and online bridge. National competitions have always attracted higher levels of masterpoints than club competitions, whether played F2F or online.

(c) Bill Ross

"All SBU competitions which were played face-to-face should revert to face-to-face as from August 2022."

Chair's written response:

This is more difficult because although the survey gave us lots of data on the propensity to travel, pros/cons of F2F etc, it didn't ask the questions specific to national competitions. There are very strong polarised views being expressed by those who used to play in national competitions pre-pandemic, so any decision must be based on facts and the balance of opinion, rather than reacting to individual opinions / loudest voices.

We need to get the balance right for the 30+ national competitions and need more consultation with those who play regularly in national competitions. It looks conceivable that our calendar will include some F2F and some online. To reach a decision, I think we need to conduct a mini-survey targeted specifically at our membership who play in national competitions. Ultimately, we must respect and respond to the views of our members.

(d) Paul McKay, Largs Bridge Club

"Since online Bridge is now a normal method of play, is there a way to add BBO points to Masterpoints for SBU members?"

Chair's written response:

Online bridge played in affiliated clubs or in SBU events does attract MPs. We also have

reciprocal arrangements to transfer MPs for events run by some of the other home nations. However, these reciprocal arrangements do not apply more widely, and we have no knowledge of how BBO points are calculated for different worldwide events. Unfortunately, there is no simple solution to this.

(e) Ted Black, Buchanan Bridge Club

“Do the SBU have or are planning to have a strategy for embracing Kibitzing, given it has enormous income potential on pay and watch basis (it would become a growing habit) and should also be viewed as a major contributor to attracting new bridge players, and teaching?”

President's written response:

Kibitzing is available free of charge on both BBO (Vugraph) and RealBridge. The amount of kibitzing is limited, although both platforms offer substantial archive material. Although expert commentaries do exist, they are not universally available and can appear more like a chat room for participants, rather than expert help to kibitzers. What would be beneficial (and is used in teaching) is facilitated play sessions with expert advice and formal commentaries on the games taking place.

What may be difficult is using these platforms as you envisage for commercial gain, since our contracts with the platforms wouldn't allow such income generation. Where SBU is enthusiastic, is using the platforms as a means of teaching and mentoring. Commercial gain would be a secondary consideration.

The meeting suggested that mentoring was appropriate for taking novice players up to a certain level but did not necessarily take them to a higher level. The Chair confirmed that the survey had revealed a demand for more mentoring and the people to deliver it.

(f) A question was asked about further Congresses

Janet Unsworth reported that Peebles had been well received but that numbers were well down with only 24 tables, about half previous levels. Janet Unsworth reported that she had attended the Congress in Majorca and that numbers were also well down, and whilst feedback was very positive, it appeared that this was a result of a reluctance to travel due to COVID.

Fiona Greenwood told the meeting that work was continuing on Congress dates, and districts were encouraged to tell Management about their initiatives so that these could be posted on the website.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked members for their attendance and input and assured them that their concerns would be considered in any future strategy that the Board might recommend.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.