



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY CHAIR'S MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY 12TH JUNE 2024**

1. Attendance EBU representatives

Board Members		Staff			
Ian Sidgwick	EBU Board	Gordon Rainsford	EBU Chief Executive	Ro Kaye	Safeguarding adviser
Abbey Smith	EBU Vice-Chair	Tim Anderson	EBU IT Manager	Espen Gisvold	BIABD! festival
Patrick Shields	EBU Board	Jonathan Lillycrop	EBU Club Liaison Officer	Tony Cherrett	EBED
		Sam Kelly	EBU Communications		

County Attendance

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Avon	David S Jones	Kent	Norman Inniss	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot
Bedfordshire	Colin O'Hara	Merseyside/Cheshire	Mark Madeley	Suffolk	Jeff Orton
Cambs & Hunts	Roger Courtney	Middlesex	Harish Patel	Sussex	Peter Clinch
Devon	Jacqui Munns	North East	Sue Davies	Worcestershire	Eddy Blackburn
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick	Norfolk	Neil Tracey	Yorkshire	Nick Woolven
Hertfordshire	John Eyre	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard		

Absence

Board Members					
Adrian Darnell					
County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Berks and Bucks	Michael Green	Hants & IOW	Mike Kinsey	Somerset	Mike Letts
Channel Islands	Daniel McIntosh	Herefordshire	Robert Wilkinson	Staffs & Shrops	Pamela Booth-Jones
Channel Islands	Norman Le Cocq	Isle of Man	John Large	Surrey	Tim Warren
Cornwall	Liz Perry	Lancashire	Andrew Petrie	Warwickshire	Darren Evetts
Cumbria	Christine Ward	Leicestershire	Anne Wright	Wiltshire	Lucy Cross
Derbyshire	Alastair McCance	Lincolnshire	Mark Wardell	Yorkshire	David Guild
Dorset	Mark Hooper	London	James Smith	Westmoreland	John Ellwood
Essex	John McCoy	Manchester	Irene Davies		

2 Welcome and Introduction. Gordon Rainsford

Gordon Rainsford (GR) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted that Tony Russ (TR) has stood down from the Board and thanked him for his work on the Board and with the County Chairs meetings before having to step down due to personal reasons.

GR asked if anyone was interested in organising or speaking at future meetings to let him know. GR gave a brief overview of the meeting agenda and passed over to RK.

3 Apologies

See above.

4 Safeguarding. Ro Kaye

Ro Kaye (RK) gave an overview of the EBU safeguarding policy. The policy has been changed and improved recently to emphasise vulnerable adults more, as well as children and young people.

RK noted that safeguarding should be something that all clubs are engaged with to ensure the safety of members and the reputation of bridge in the community and the country and showing that we are up to date and aware of our responsibilities as members of our communities.

RK confirmed that the safeguarding policy helps clubs make hard decisions about what to do if a member has been convicted of serious crimes involving safeguarding but would still like to play at the club. The policy also gives guidance about what to do if a member is showing signs of dementia and they are at risk of abuse. If club members see potential abuse of a vulnerable member, the safeguarding policy gives a simple set of guidelines for clubs, with information of who to contact. The policy should be followed in the same way as fire safety and first aid by acting as a guide of when to get help and who to contact.

GR thanked RK for her presentation. He added that the new leaflet is written to be straightforward and simple, with an emphasis on maintaining a happy and safe environment for all in your club.

Espen Gisvold (EG) noted that the focus on the new policy is a very good idea.

5 Update on the Bridge – It's a Big Deal! Festival. Espen Gisvold

EG confirmed that we currently have 90 events happening around the country to take part in the *Bridge – It's a Big Deal!* Festival. The hope is that more clubs will confirm their events in the coming months. Manchester is planning two county events, one is a twinned town tournament between clubs and Manchester and clubs in France, the other event is hosting an event in a Manchester shopping centre.

EG stressed the importance of the county officers and coordinators to email their clubs, affiliated and non-affiliated to encourage them to register and think about arranging events. A lot of clubs have signed up to play in the Sim Pairs events happening during the festival week, this is a great way for clubs to get involved.

The planning for the festival is progressing well and with the help of everyone, it will be a huge success.

GR added that the festival events are not limited to affiliated clubs or to England, Scotland are also running their own bits of the festival as a joint side-by-side effort. If you have a relationship with a non-affiliated club, invite them to join the festival. Perhaps invite them to a joint event, offer an introduction to duplicate bridge. TR has also proposed an online game on the final day of the festival to end the week. There will also be a cheque presentation to Cancer Research UK at the AGM. Finally, for small clubs who don't have the resources to organise a larger event, they can simply donate the UMS from their weekly games by including "BIABD" in the title of the event when submitting sessions. Counties should contact GR if they do not wish the county UMS to go to the Cancer Research UK page during the festival week.

GR noted that events that attract non-members from the community to the club are particularly welcome.

EG stated that sending out regular emails related to the festival to all clubs including non-affiliated clubs to encourage them to get involved.

AS stated she has taken over from TR and is picking up contact with U3A clubs, but local contact with U3A clubs may be the best form of contact to invite their members to the festival.

6. Club Statistics and Keeping Membership Up to Date. Tim Anderson

TA gave a presentation about statistics for membership from 2019 to 2024, see appendix B for the full presentation.

TA confirmed that 95% of EBU members join via their EBU affiliated club. Direct members and students account for the remaining 5%.

Total membership has decreased since 2019 and is now standing at approx. 5,000 lower members than in 2019. However, the accuracy of the membership totals relies on clubs to maintain their membership databases. A more accurate figure is to look at how many people played in sessions. Traditionally the EBU tracks three categories of players:

- UM0 – has not played for a year
- UM1 – plays fewer than 12 times a year
- UM2 – plays 12 or more times a year

For the year March 2022 – March 2023 which was reported at the last AGM the figures for UM0 and UM1 have decreased, but the figure for UM2 has increased. This indicates that active members are playing more frequently.

TA observed that while the number of unique player sessions from 2019 decreased to 2021, since 2021 the unique player sessions have steadily increased. On average, a player plays just under once a week, which is to be expected.

The number of online games increased during lockdown but have since dropped back and seem to be stabilising. The number of active clubs have decreased. The number of county sessions, e.g. congresses or other county events, have declined.

TA suggested that more research is needed to determine the reasons for the increase in player sessions. He gave some suggestions for the increases, including, more teachers and recruitment from clubs, members feeling more confident and returning to face-to-face play, clubs changing their sessions to accommodate members and the popularity of online bridge which means people in bridge isolated areas can play.

TA noted that the average age of our members is an estimated 74. The age increase and lack of young players for our membership is concerning. TA concluded that a high priority for all of us must be to bring bridge to a new generation.

GR stated that the EBU is looking at possible incentives for clubs to keep their membership databases up to date, this will help us maintain accurate statistics. GR asked for counties help in encouraging clubs to maintain their membership databases.

Neil Tracey (NT) asked if it would be possible for counties to have a list of inactive members in their areas. It was agreed that this would be a good idea and TA will look into the details of providing this information.

John Eyre (JE) asked if the statistics could be broken into online and face-to-face sessions. TA confirmed that this information is difficult to separate out, but he would try to look into it. Jonathan Lillycrop (JL) noted that he had looked at this recently and for many club sessions it is impossible to determine accurately if a session has been played online or face-to-face.

TA confirmed that club sessions have steadily increased and the EBU online sessions have decreased.

7. EBED Update. Ian Sidgwick

IS gave a presentation with an update from EBED, see appendix C for the full presentation.

IS noted that the basics of EBED, teacher training and TD training, are run smoothly. However, there is potential for improvement in their project work such as Smart Bridge which has had several frustrating setbacks.

IS highlighted that EBED is a charity that has two formal public benefit objectives:

- A. The furtherance of duplicate bridge as an activity which enriches the life of all
- B. A specific aim to foster duplicate bridge among those in full time education

He noted that currently the breadth of coverage geographically is much greater for the first point than the second.

IS talked through the strengths for EBED, the gaps to fill and action areas.

EBED is working very well in certain areas, but there is room for expansion to other parts of the country. There are a lot of resources for teachers via EBTA membership. Approximately 800 people attend teacher training or TD training courses each year, with many clubs taking advantage of the free of subsidised places for their members.

EBED are looking to define and adopt a youth strategy. This will help expand the existing areas of youth bridge. IS noted that EBED are looking to create a website or teaching tool to help new people on their bridge journey.

IS confirmed there are two new trustees with EBED, Tony Cherrett (TC) and William Bourne (WB) who is now the new treasurer. IS is still looking for a couple more trustees. EBED are also looking for a new CEO as Mark Humphris (MH) is stepping down for personal reasons. A new Youth Officer was appointed last week, Charlie Bucknell (CB) who will be working part time, along with Joan Bennett (JB).

The safeguarding leaflet was developed at a joint meeting with the EBU. This was a great example of the two organisations working together.

The creation of a single database to find a bridge teacher is being developed in conjunction with the EBU. Until now there have been two separate databases.

EBED will hold a strategic review over the summer to define further action areas and policies.

EBED have a substantial bequest, and while the figure is not yet known, they are looking to deploy this prudently. IS noted that bridge runs on volunteers and enthusiasm, the large sum of money is far from a panacea.

IS concluded that he hopes for a new and more natural relationship with the EBU and the changes to EBED's leadership team are a great opportunity for a comprehensive review. The overall success depends on effective teamwork with EBED, EBU, Counties, Clubs and volunteers.

8. Open Discussion

Peter Clinch (PC) asked if EBED had any plans in the strategy for creating a stream of teaching that might be more appealing to younger players.

There was discussion about the benefits of teaching 5 card majors over Acol. It was agreed that young people prefer to play to have fun and learn bidding systems later.

GR asked for input from county chairs regarding items for the agenda for the next county chairs meeting.

Appendix A - Meeting Chat:

00:19:48 EBU Host: Link to new safeguarding leaflet, intended for clubs but may be of use to counties and teachers. <https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/official-documents/Safeguarding-Leaflet.pdf>

00:32:34 EBU Host: <https://www.ebu.co.uk/festival/map>

00:32:56 EBU Host: <https://www.ebu.co.uk/festival/festival-events>

00:42:37 Colin O'Hara Beds: Will this presentation be available offline?

00:42:58 Neil Tracey NCBA: Reacted to "Will this presentation..." with 👍

00:42:59 EBU Host: We can organise that it will be

01:07:33 Mark Madeley - Merseyside: Can EBU share this presentation?

01:11:06 Gordon Rainsford EBU: Yes, we'll do that

DRAFT

Appendix B

EBU Membership and player activity

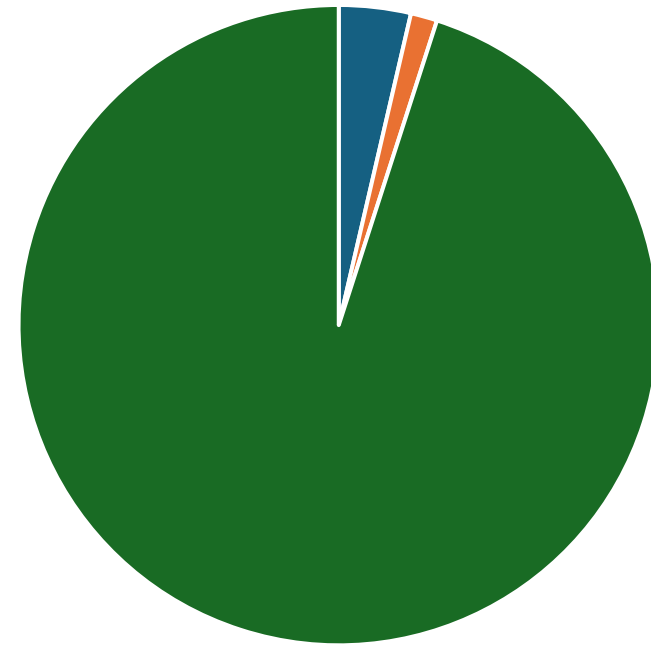
What is happening to our numbers?

Presentation by Tim Anderson tim@ebu.co.uk

What is an EBU Member?

- An EBU member is someone who belongs to an EBU club (95%)
- Or a Direct member (Pays subscription to EBU)
- Or a student

EBU Membership breakdown
Total is 50,094



- Direct members
- Student
- Club members

Total membership over time

June 2019: 54,376

June 2020: 55,273

June 2021: 55,503

June 2022: 53,574

June 2023: 50,679

June 2024: 50,128

Problems with membership totals

- Accuracy of total rests on diligence of clubs in keeping EBU membership records up to date – we know this is mixed!
- We care more about how many people play in our sessions
- Traditional EBU approach to stats defines three categories:
 - UM0 – has not played for a year
 - UM1 – plays fewer than 12 times a year
 - UM2 – plays 12 or more times a year

UM0 down, UM2 up – a good thing

Excludes direct, juniors and students

March 2022

UM0: 18,231

UM1: 9,343

UM2: 23,713

March 2023

UM0: 14,007

UM1: 7,838

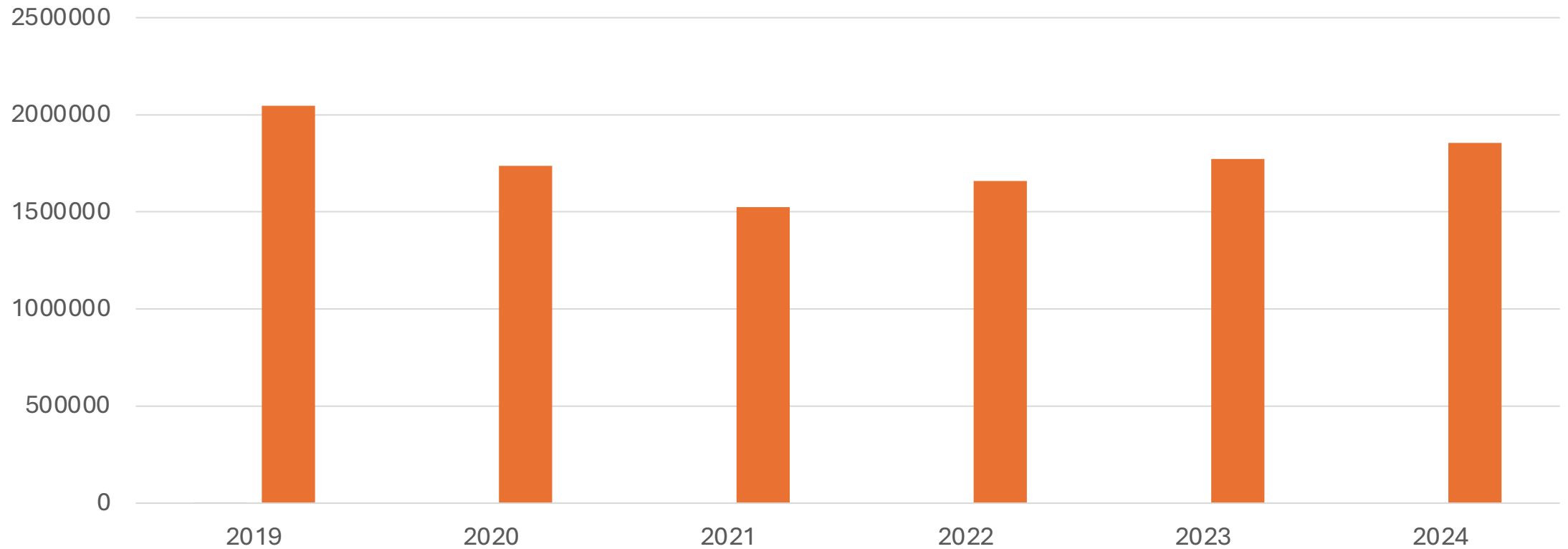
UM2: 26,220

Another way to look at membership stats

- Former role as membership development officer – focus on health of clubs
- Monthly tracking of player/sessions, average number of tables per session, number of unique players
- UM0 will not figure at all. Ignores UM1/UM2 distinction but we can measure average sessions per player

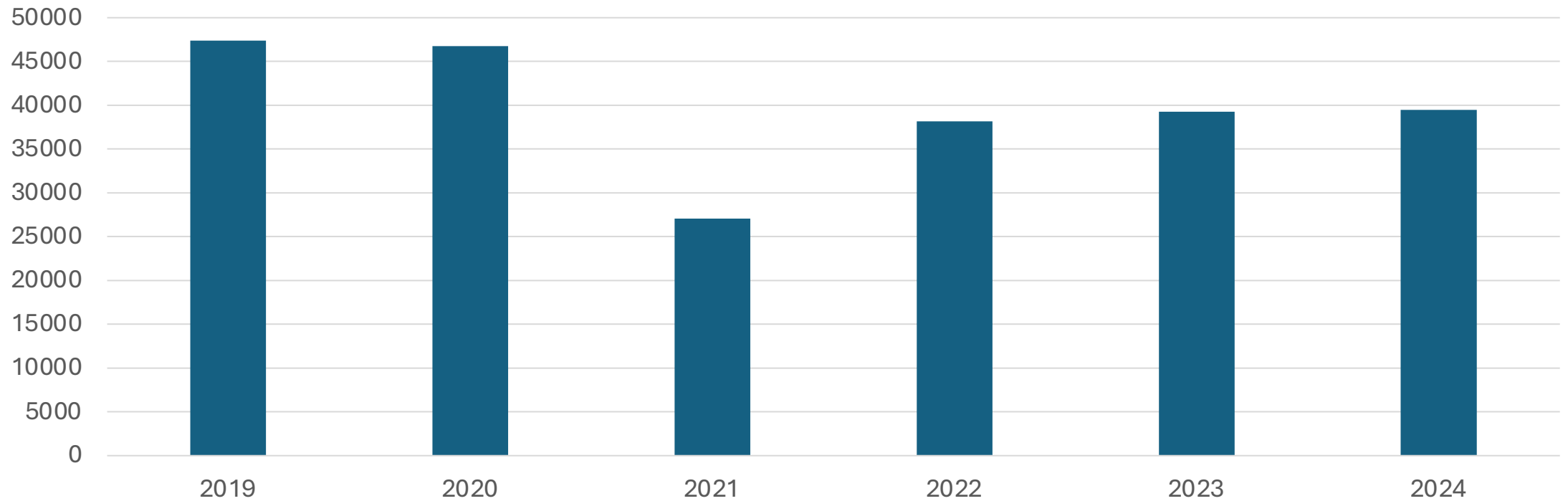
Player sessions since 2019

Player sessions
Year ending 31 May



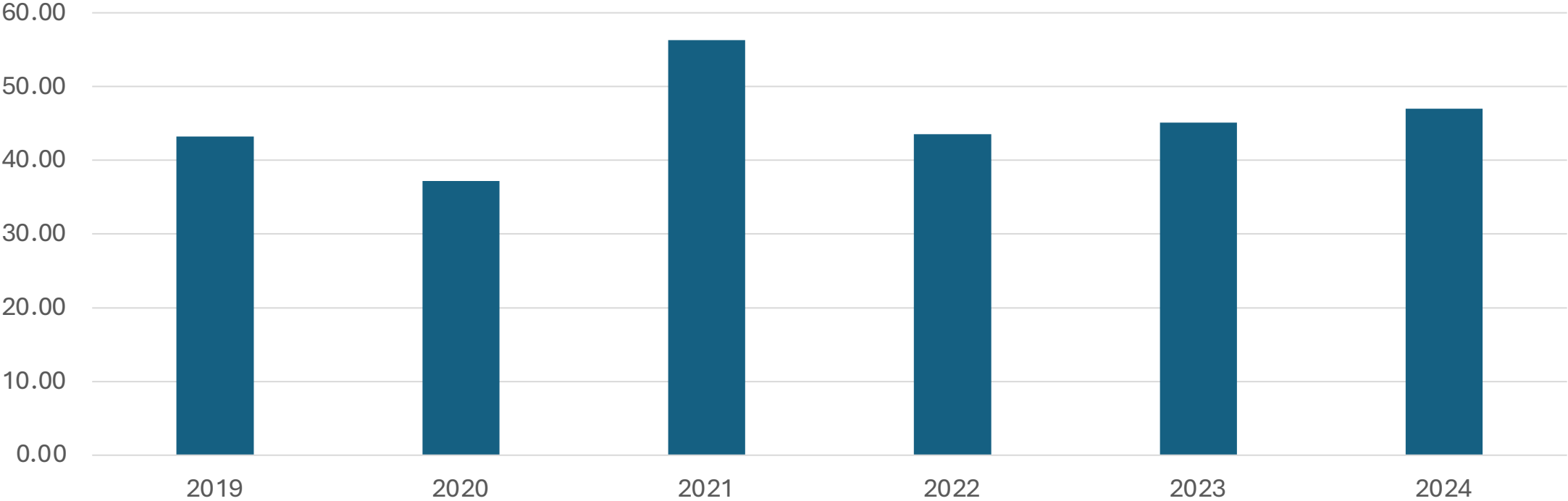
Unique players since 2019

Unique players
Year ending 31 May



Sessions per player since 2019

Sessions per player
Year ending 31 May



Observations

- 2019 was a peak in activity to which we have not returned (lockdown)
- Since 2021 player sessions have **steadily increased**
- During lockdown, fewer players played more often (more than once a week *on average*)
- Players today play a little less than once a week *on average*
- Note that activity figures exclude league matches, and all figures only cover EBU sessions uploaded to us
- Clubs joining or leaving the EBU impacts the stats

Further observations – changes since lockdown

- Online games have permanently increased
- Games run directly by the EBU have increased mainly because of daily online games, but are now in slight decline
- The number of active clubs has decreased:
 - April 2019: 637 approx., including counties, holiday companies
 - April 2024: 560 approx., including counties, holiday companies
- The numbers in county sessions have declined, dramatically in some cases (HIW for example)

Interpreting the figures

- Why are numbers increasing? More research needed but could include:
 - Teaching and recruitment by clubs
 - Extended period of members regaining confidence in face-to-face play
 - Clubs changing to accommodate more socially oriented players
 - Popularity of online events – more people in bridge-isolated areas can play

Bridge demographics a continuing concern

- The *average* age of an EBU player probably around 74 years old
- We think that the average age continues to increase
- Lack of youth players likely to mean fewer competitive players ie. those who want to play to the highest standard and in regional, national and international events
- Bringing bridge to a new generation remains the highest priority to mitigate this issue

Appendix C

A New Dawn for EBED

Keeping Strengths, Filling Gaps, Seizing Opportunities

My Starting Point

- Surprise!
- Perspective of 3 years as a county chair
- Have been ok with the basics
- Projects frustrated
- Recognise that there is potential and find this exciting and motivational
- Willing to volunteer my time to give something back to a game that has given me much

What EBED is about

- The charity has two public benefit objectives:
 - A) the furtherance of duplicate bridge as an activity which enriches the life of all
 - B) a specific aim to foster duplicate bridge among those in full time education

National coverage is greater on the first than the second

Strengths

- Very large “bank” of comprehensive & maintained online and in book form to support a classic approach to teaching
- Small team of 4 experienced staff and one contractor +1, all part time
- Youth: 3 residential camps; Inter Schools League; Grand Prix; Schools Cups; Certificates of Attainment; working really well with fellow enthusiasts at certain schools and counties
- Teacher’s club EBTA with access to resources, newsletters, seminars, insurance and something of a support line
- Meeting requests from clubs/counties/individuals to run TD and Teacher Training courses, turning out 804 individuals last year and same rate YTD. Many of them discounted/subsidised/free to attendees/clubs (are all clubs aware of this perk?)

Gaps to Fill

- Define and adopt a strategy for youth in liaison with major stakeholders (GP May draft)
- Expand the excellent base that we have for youth bridge to more children and counties.
- Youth bridge varies greatly county to county. How many have active youth officers - 21 have a named YO, 8 are known to be active
- Have a destination website/tool for youth with multiple functionalities
- Define and support a “quick hook” process for new people to get them started on their learning journey

Current Action Areas

- Recruit and form a new team of Trustees - two recent great additions
- Recruit a new CEO - process underway
- Recruit a National Youth Officer to expand success - appointed last week
- Reinforce Safeguarding to further protect children - EBED/EBU meeting 22/5: new joint briefing aid, Adviser and Leader
- Develop a web based destination for youth bridge, building on something existing (no “massive vanity project”) - being formalised
- Create a single data base for prospective students to find bridge teachers - agreed EBU/EBED being implemented
- Carry out a strategic review over the summer and define further action areas and policies. Need new CEO to input & implement

Finance

- We have a substantial bequest, final figure not yet known. It is naturally a focus of widespread interest
- It is our duty to deploy it for bridge and to do so prudently. Related to this is our intention to define a Reserves Policy
- If we were to make our offerings free and expand to establish a marketing function then it would be depleted to nothing after some years and EBED would then cease to exist
- We are not profit oriented but do aim for sustainability
- In any case, money may be great but it is not the answer to everything. Actually more important is willing, able and active volunteers in all counties. Getting a bridge club going in a school takes very little money for example and adult lessons can often be self financing

Conclusion

- A completely new leadership team
- A new and more natural relationship with the EBU
- Great opportunity for a comprehensive review
- Several immediate actions taken or initiated
- Overall success depends on effective teamwork
EBED/EBU/Counties/Clubs/Volunteers