

IT IS NOT TOO LATE!

says Sandra Landy as she pleads for clubs and counties to reconsider their position on the EBU strategy

I joined the English Bridge Union when still at school, so as a member of fifty plus years standing, I can claim to be a genuine supporter. So why, after so many years, am I now so strongly against the latest EBU strategy? I think Pay to Play (P2P) will be a disaster and could even bankrupt the organisation. Here are some of my reasons for thinking so:

- P2P replaces the two income sources, member subscriptions and masterpoint sales, with just one income source – not a sensible move for any business. Nearly half of the EBU members pay by direct debit, something most organisations only dream of achieving. Our income is steady and secure; it even increased this year. Put the very modest prices up if more money really is needed.
- At the shareholders' meeting almost every county, whether for or against P2P, said that many smaller, social clubs would leave the Union. These clubs currently pay a subscription and award masterpoints.

The EBU loses income from both when the club leaves. P2P may well bring the cost of affiliation to members' attention and cause a rethink of this use of funds. If the club has money to spare, the membership might well see better uses for it, such as tastier biscuits, more jollies, a reduction in table money or donations to charity. There are no services the club gets from the EBU that cannot be found elsewhere. Any organisation that is happy to lose such a high proportion

of its membership stores up serious problems.

- Many smaller clubs are started by teachers to give students somewhere to play, as many larger clubs don't welcome the inexperienced. I encouraged my students to start a club and seven years on, it is still thriving, affiliated and giving points



weekly. P2P will make starting such clubs more expensive and complicated to run. It's likely they will never affiliate, possibly losing these players to the EBU for ever. Remember, the first masterpoints you win are the most exciting ones you ever get.

- Bridge players are cunning people. Players whose clubs disaffiliate can join an affiliated club and play there just once a year, thus becoming EBU members and getting both the magazine and the right to play in

EBU competitions very cheaply. Under P2P, both county and EBU income comes only from members playing in an affiliated club. Some clubs plan to split into two, one affiliated and the other not. So the P2P fee will only be paid on some sessions, where currently masterpoints are awarded for all games.

A recent vote of the counties showed 60% to be in favour in P2P. Since no discussion was allowed in *English Bridge*, I suspect many people did not understand the implications. There is a general feeling that "something must be done" and P2P is the only thing on offer. The response of the EBU to this situation should be to address its failings and make the Union important and relevant to the wider bridge playing public so that people want to be members. Instead, it has come up with a plan to attempt to force all club players into EBU membership. I fear P2P could bankrupt the EBU; they are already talking about mortgaging our HQ premises to cover the P2P losses. I hope every player will tell their

club and county to vote against the scheme when a formal vote is taken to change the bye-laws next year. **Clubs and counties, it is not too late to change your mind.**

Sandra Landy has been a successful member of our women's bridge team, twice winning the World Championship among many other titles. Recently, she worked for the EBU developing the *Bridge For All* initiative.

Message to EBU Board Members

Please delay implementing P2P for a year. Consider alternative ideas to secure our future. Change may be inevitable, but we cannot afford to get it wrong. The EBU could well die whilst receiving the P2P treatment!