

Dear All,

1. AFFILIATION FEES

There has been a wonderful response to our request to get your affiliation fees to us by end of November and avail of a reduced rate of €10 per member.

Good News! Because of the Level 5 restrictions eating into the time allowed to get your fees to us, we are extending the date to 11 December, to allow physical collection from members. After that date the fee will be €12.50 per person, as last year.

We are getting quite a few calls in the office about affiliation fees, so I thought it might be helpful to set out briefly again what was agreed for this season. The most important point is that anyone playing in CBAI virtual clubs, or congresses, or national events, **MUST** be a paid up member of the Association for the 2020/21 season. (The only exceptions are members of other bridge organisations, such as the NIBU, EBU, etc, who are entitled to play in our events by virtue of reciprocal arrangements with their home bodies.)

If you are playing regularly in two or more virtual clubs, then you should be affiliated in each of them, **UNLESS** a club is specifically open to non-members currently. We have no easy way to police this, but we do expect members to respect the spirit of the agreement in this regard; an occasional visit to another club is fine, but if you are playing in it every week, or in their major competitions, then you really should be an affiliated member of the club.

We do recognise that there are practical difficulties in collecting money in current circumstances, especially for clubs that are completely closed and not playing online, so we have offered a facility whereby we will accept affiliations based simply on last season's member count, or an approximation thereof, and will credit any excess affiliations paid to your 2021-2022 affiliation fees once things get back to normal.

We also realise that we need to be pragmatic on this matter. For the avoidance of any doubt, we will absolutely **NOT** be cutting ties with any club that remains closed for the season and does not affiliate any members. These clubs will continue to be valued members of the Association and will be welcomed back whenever they choose to reopen. By the same token, however, it seems to us that €10 (or even the standard rate of €12.50!) does not seem a lot to ask a bridge-lover to pay, even if they are not currently active online themselves, to ensure that the CBAI weathers the current storm and is as well-resourced as it needs to be to manage all the current online activity and plan for what we all hope will be a reasonably swift return to real-life bridge. Certainly I can assure you that all of us in the office are as busy as we ever have been, and are doing everything we can to make sure that all members are well served.

And on a final note, we have no real facility to take individual membership applications within head office, as affiliation has traditionally been arranged within the clubs. But we are getting lots of calls from individuals who either have been playing in unaffiliated clubs, or whose affiliated club is not active, looking to join up with one of our virtual clubs. We will do our very best to link those individuals up with a suitable club, and would ask for your assistance in this regard please.

I hope that this will clarify the position and would be grateful if you could make sure your members are aware of it please. If anyone has any questions on it, please let me know.

2. **RETURN TO FACE-TO-FACE BRIDGE**

A very few of our clubs managed to open up for live bridge just before the recent lockdown, only to be closed down after a few sessions. I know we are expecting to return to Level 2 before Christmas and this may enable some more clubs to reopen - to 50 players at a time.

The good news is - our first shipment of screens has arrived - and those who have ordered may collect from HQ. We may be able to accommodate some from the second shipment to pick up their orders also, as the second 600 is due to arrive with us on 23rd December.

We are putting together a section on www.cbai.ie which will provide some information on the various items you might need to allow you re-open safely - so keep an eye on the website to check on what you might need. Here again, I must emphasise that players must be allowed the freedom to make their own decisions on whether to return to live bridge in the future; many may feel that they are not ready to take that step just yet or even ever and we must respect that. The vaccines **WILL** appear and **WILL** be effective, so fingers crossed we will all meet again at the table – soon!

3. **IBU SIMULTANEOUS PAIRS**

A huge thank you to all who played in the recent IBU Simultaneous Pairs on BBO. We had a wonderful turn-out across all four previously scheduled nights, and we even managed to put together a Friday night event to cater for quite a number of clubs. The success was only marred by some instability on BBO which affected entries on Monday, leaving us nervous about the platform for the rest of the week – but it didn't let us down! Full results can be found at <https://www.cbai.ie/ibu-simultaneous-pairs-results/>

4. **COMPETITION CALENDAR**

From an initial situation where we imagined that we would have few enough of our usual events online, our horizons have expanded, so keep an eye out for new additions to the Events calendar. A number of Congresses that would normally have been organised in the months after Christmas, initially withdrew from planning, but now are gung-ho and are back in their usual slot in the calendar; online for sure, as the prospect of large events is still months away.

5. **OFFICE OPEN**

The office is manned by a skeleton staff for the moment from 9.30am until 5.00pm, Monday to Friday, so you will get a chance to meet or talk to someone.

6. LUCKY

Just consider how lucky we are – We are so fortunate that we could transfer easily to play bridge online, firstly on BBO and now with RealBridge appearing on the scene; those who are not computer minded, might not feel so lucky, sorry! But think of the golfers, bowlers, tennis players etc who can't get out.

We are blessed that we have so many wonderful Tournament Directors, led by Fearghal O'Boyle, Diarmuid Reddan and Eamon Galligan, who were able to adjust to the new "normal" without turning a hair – thank you all!

We are privileged to have so many volunteer club officers who adapted to new skills when they could see the future for their members lay online for the moment – cheers!

We are extremely lucky that we are all still here – above ground – to hope and pray for the good things and "normal" routine life that having a vaccine will bring!

So let's close with a thought for those of our members and friends who have passed away since last March and who won't be around to celebrate Christmas this year – in whatever strange shape it might appear.

Kind regards to all

Paul

Paul Porteous

Chief Executive

Contract Bridge Association of Ireland