

Chairman's report.

As you are aware, I am the first Chairman to hold a two year term of office as allowed in our new constitution adopted at the last AGM. It is hard to believe that I have been in office for a full year and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve another as I feel I am only now getting to grips with the job. I have found my year as chair, demanding, exhausting but above all rewarding.

We have achieved much in what has been a year of great change but there is still much to be done. Many of the structures envisaged by the new Constitution are not fully operational. It is hoped that they will be fully implemented by the end of my term. There have been some minor issues with the Constitution and a sub committee met to resolve these. Unfortunately these were not approved by Council in good enough time before the AGM and will be dealt with next year.

We are all trying to get to grips with the new framework. The Council seeks to be more representative of our clubs throughout Northern Ireland and it was satisfying to see club delegates from Derry, Maghera and Enniskillen becoming involved.

Initiatives have begun to encourage more clubs to affiliate. I have tried to obtain a proposal for a club insurance scheme and have been let down by several companies who had seemed enthusiastic at first. In the last few weeks I have had more promising dealings with Osbourne's who provide insurance to the EBU and WBU. It is hoped that clubs will avail of public liability and property damage cover through them at a cost of £63.

We are looking into the NIBU purchasing a "master policy" which would cover all the NIBU officers, committee members and Council members for claims arising from alleged wrongful acts committed by officers in the discharge of their duties. This cover would be extended to cover all committee members and post holders in all of the NIBU's affiliated clubs. It is hoped that this benefit, providing peace of mind to our clubs, at no charge, will encourage others to join our organisation. We are yet to receive a quotation but I am hopeful that this one will bear fruit.

A subcommittee of our finance committee has prepared a comprehensive business plan for the Union which will go before the finance committee and thereafter the Council for ratification and implementation.

Improvers' seminars have been held in Downpatrick and Maghera which have proved a great success. It is hoped that these will increase the profile of the NIBU and give something back to our club members. Almost 50 people attended the Downpatrick seminar and we got great feedback. More will be held throughout Northern Ireland next year.

The NIBU have formed a partnership with Stena Line. In turn for our assistance in promoting the one day bridge cruise, they have given us sponsorship by way of raffle prizes. They are also paying us for the hire of some equipment. It is hoped that this mutually beneficial relationship continues to develop.

We ran an extremely successful Camrose at La Mon Hotel both on and off the table. The venue was superb. We have also developed a relationship with the hotel thanks to Harold Curran. We are running the North/South match and the Egan there and have booked the hotel for the Junior Camrose in 2014 and for the Camrose in 2015.

I cannot speak highly enough of Brian McDowell in his first year as International Match Manager. His efficiency and attention to detail are extraordinary and he received compliments galore after the event from players from other countries. I am very glad that I took to stalking him to persuade him to take up the role. Again thanks to Anne Hassan who ran the hospitality end of things with seamless efficiency.

Greer Mac Kenzie and Robin Burns have been working on a new website which we hope will be up and running before the new bridge term in September.

Ian Hamilton, in addition to the great deal of work he does running the Inter Club pairs, ran the Celtic pairs which were a great success and raised funds for the Union.

I now have a cast of thousands whom I wish to thank and hopefully this will not sound like an Oscar acceptance speech. Everyone has been incredibly supportive of me this year even during my neurotic ravings and worrying. I had not really been involved in the running of the NIBU before and I have been astonished at how willingly people give of their time - from volunteers at the Camrose through to every officer of the Union. We are the smallest of the Home Nations but time and time again we prove that we do things better.

Thank you to the irreplaceable John Murchan for all his hard work in rounding up people for events. Testimony to his efforts were the Inter A/Senior pairs which had an entry of 20 tables and the Northern Ireland pairs which attracted an entry of 34 pairs. Thanks to Robin Burns who tirelessly works away at masterpoints and has been a great listener and adviser to me. To Anne Hassan for all her work as congress organiser and for all the "wee jobs" she has done for me this past year. Thank you to Liz Scott, our secretary for all her efforts and hard work. I think we will both be very relieved when the Constitutional issues are ironed out. Thank you also to Derek Cannell for the superb magazine. Thank you to Rex Anderson for all his work behind the scenes.

Norma Irwin is standing down after nine years as honorary treasurer after nine years of service to the NIBU. I know that she will miss her books and her figures and I will miss her good advice. The NIBU owes her a debt of gratitude.

Alan Sharp's term of office comes to an end this year. He has been an excellent ambassador for the NIBU. His diplomacy and tact diffused many potential damaging situations. I hope this year has been a little quieter for him.

I have enjoyed being Chairperson immensely and cannot wait for another year and all the challenges it may bring.

