

**REPORT BY SEAN HEWITT, NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The role of the non-executive is of course to guide and support the board. Consequently, I have attended every board meeting this year and my advice has prevented the board from inadvertently breaching a council resolution as well as saving an ECF officer from breaching the UK Bribery Act!

2012-13 has undoubtedly been a challenging year for the English Chess Federation, but one where it is much better placed at the end of the year than it was at the beginning. The Board, both collectively and individually have developed and instigated policies which have significantly strengthened the federation. Of course, not everything has been unanimous, nor has all gone smoothly, but only he who does nothing never makes a mistake.

The board has, in the main, been more professional this year. It has, at my suggestion, scheduled board meetings for the whole year in advance which has maximised attendance and participation at these meetings. It now publishes in full the minutes of those meetings, save for items of a personnel or commercially confidential nature. The principle is that an item should be in the minutes unless there is a good reason to exclude it, rather than the other way around. I am hopeful that the new board will seek to expedite further the publication of these minutes. In a further move towards openness, the board identified all game fee exemptions which had previously been rather secretive and has published these on the ECF website. This activity proved enlightening, as it identified exemptions which the board were not even aware of.

However, the board has tied itself in bureaucracy, against the advice of both the non-executives and the company secretary. It passed a motion requiring of itself 7 days written notice to vote on any issue, unless the entire board agrees that an item is 'urgent'. This led to the foreseeable and entirely avoidable farce at the very next meeting where nothing could be decided because the agenda had only been sent out 5 days in advance. I urge the new board to dispense with this unnecessary rule at its first meeting.

There have been a number of occasions when details of board meetings and discussions have been 'leaked'. Whilst this phenomenon is not new, privileged, 'inside' information has also been used in relation to nominations for the forthcoming elections. This led to a situation where free and fair elections could not have been held and might have led to the postponement of the AGM.

Thankfully, the company secretary John Philpott found a suitably elegant solution which avoided this but I urge all Directors to take a collective action to ensure that their first responsibility is to act as a Director of the ECF.

The board has been hampered, as were previous boards, by a vocal minority seeking to disrupt its activities. As a result of a number of spurious complaints the ECF was forced to suspend its code of conduct and whilst this presents an opportunity to instigate a more coherent code for the future, the ECF should act to prevent serial complainers in the future. It does seem that for some, the only thing worse than the ECF doing nothing is the ECF doing something. However, it has been pleasing as the year has progressed to observe that the silent majority has recognised the good work done by the board.

The board was faced with the challenge of three board positions remaining vacant following the 2012 AGM. The board worked hard to fill these vacancies and whilst I personally acted as first International Director and then Membership Director, I was pleased that the board was able to appoint both David Openshaw and David Thomas respectively to fill these positions. I was also pleased that the board had the confidence to turn down two separate applications for the position of CEO from people it deemed unsuitable for the role.

The biggest success has undoubtedly been the implementation of the ECF's new membership scheme. Membership fees received have been in line with expectations and we have not seen the doomsday fall out that some predicted and as a result there has been no need to increase fees to players for the first time in many many years. The federation now has the opportunity in the near-term to restore its financial reserves from the precarious position that they have been in and I urge the board to bring forward plans to do that. There will be a temptation, and perhaps even a pressure, to spend the surplus immediately, but the federation must be patient. If it is, then longer term benefits can and will be realised. The offering of free silver junior membership to new members presents the ECF with a real opportunity to grow participation from the base up. The challenge for the Junior and Membership Directors will be to get this message out to new junior players. Junior organisations are of course key to this and some have been reluctant to adopt membership. I am confident that the two Directors will work together and in conjunction with Junior Organisations to produce a coherent plan to achieve this.

The board has started to see some commercial benefits, from tickets for the Candidates tournament to MasterGame DVDs to sponsorship for the 2013 and 2014 British Championships. As membership grows and develops, so will these opportunities and the board have recognised this by seeking to appoint a Commercial Director. The board must also consider the ECF's social media strategy going forward. This is vital for communication, and leads to real opportunities for two way engagement with the membership.

I trust that the board will continue to develop the federation in coming months and years so that the decline in participation that we have seen in previous years can be first arrested and then reversed.