

Phil Ehr
Election Statement for Chief Executive

C21.10.2

Throughout the momentous events within the Federation (resignations of the President and a Non-executive Director) and the FIDE elections, the principle I tried to maintain with my focus fixed on ECF interests is summed up by, “We want a functional and cohesive Board, supported by Council and effective in the Community.” Although core business continued throughout the year, most of the Board’s initiatives prior to the Council meeting in April were impeded by distractions that have now largely disappeared. The second half of the Board’s year addressed—but did not yet fully correct—shortfalls in governance. Improved external communications and commercial activity are incremental steps by the Federation that are part of the general advance of chess in England.

My vision for the future remains an English Chess Federation that grows into a strong national governing body guided by a Board of leaders—rather than a collection of autonomous administrators—who inspire and enable capable and committed volunteers pulling in the same direction. This vision was articulated in the outline of a Strategy (C20.9) and Transformation White Paper (C20.16) noted by Council in April. Some of the details in those papers have changed (e.g., we need executive directors focused on chess for youths and females); however, those papers reflect the broad direction in which I propose to lead (e.g., ECF mission to inspire and develop exemplary chess in sport, education, recreation and culture; re-align director responsibilities by function; greater outcomes in female participation, secondary school chess and international championships; more financial sponsorship). These papers are works in progress and now available on the ECF Forum for further development in a transparent manner. Although I cannot guide the Independent Constitutional and Governance Review Commission, I will advocate for their recommendations and Board actions to enable the Federation to develop into a national governing body more worthy of that description.

Electing a full, collegial and capable Board is essential. In my opinion, Council should elect leaders who are competent executives prepared to collegially grapple with proposals within and beyond their allocated responsibilities; who can recruit and lead effective volunteers; and who instinctively declare conflicts of interest and appropriately recuse themselves. When Council elects an incomplete Board (as in 2012-13 with no chief executive), or a non-collegial Board (as evidenced in early 2014) or a Board comprised of good people in ill-suited roles, dysfunction results. In the interest of forming a more cohesive team, I consider it a duty on this occasion to respectfully advise Council on its election choices.

Traci Whitfield is the better candidate for Director of Junior Chess and Education because of the importance she places on continuity, her suitability to lead the current group of Junior Directorate volunteers, her aim to improve cooperation with other national junior chess organisations, her demonstrated leadership within EPSCA and Staffordshire Junior Chess, and her background in schools and higher education. David Levens is an accomplished colleague. I hope he continues to serve junior chess in other capacities.

Malcolm Pein is the best candidate for FIDE Delegate because he commands international respect on the world stage from his many positive contributions in each of his chess-centred professions—as player, coach, businessman, tournament director, journalist and charity executive. His historical understanding, sound judgment and superior communications skills can be relied upon amidst the unfortunate reality of international politics in FIDE. He explicitly aligns with Board policy (C21.6.2). I have great respect for Lara Barnes as former Manager of the British Championships and Stewart Reuben as ECF Awards Committee Chairman and his contributions with the FIDE Rules Commission, which are among their other many contributions. This endorsement is about the right person with the proper perspective and aptitude for this important ambassadorial post.

David Robertson would enrich the Governance Committee with his qualifications and experience as Professor of Public Policy and advisor to Government, which is especially important in the period when independent recommendations to change our constitution will be scrutinised.

Although I nominated one of the Non-executive Director candidates, it was done without knowledge of a third candidate. I regard each of the three to be well qualified. If re-elected, I will nominate the third place candidate to a position of responsibility should he still wish to serve.

Together—a functional Board, supported by Council and effective in the Community—we can substantially improve chess throughout England.