

The Board is grateful for Council's support of our stewardship of the English Chess Federation and our contribution to English chess. Throughout the momentous events within the ECF (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 functioning Board, supported by Council and effective in the Community." Although I acknowledge shortfalls, the current Board was, and remains, successful.

Papers submitted for this AGM show how the Board is addressing the some of the shortfalls. The highlight is the independent constitutional and governance review. Initiatives not included in the papers will continue in the weeks leading to the AGM, such as organisational development to enable greater diversity, child protection, junior training and commercial viability.

Outcomes largely met aspirations in the British Championships, the Olympiad and European Team performances, international youth and school championships, and several outstanding individual accomplishments described in my colleagues' reports. Outcomes exceeded expectations in secondary school chess with the addition of the Team Chess Challenge, school team competitions and an English player winning the European Seniors Championship. Outcome shortfalls remain in female participation and development of the next generation of professional players.

Strategic planning has occurred this year, but an agreed strategy or strategic plan is not yet prepared for Council to review. Features that demonstrate the strategic direction in which the ECF is traveling may be discerned by activity and initiatives: delivery of core championship tournaments, pending establishment of The Chess Trust, more activity secondary school chess (mentioned above), increased use of social media and the new ECF Forum, improvements in the membership scheme and the grading database, fundraising for the international teams, integration of the new Commercial Director, emerging commercial partnerships and a commitment to principles in the *Voluntary Code of Good Governance for the Sport and Recreation Sector*.

Some strategic initiatives were not successful. Negotiations were attempted with Delancey UK Schools Chess Challenge to increase mutual support and association. They proactively offered to guarantee new ECF members in exchange for assured places for leading players in their 2014 tournament to represent England in the 2015 European and World Schools Individual Chess Championships. We also requested their Gigafinals to be graded and their cooperation in discussions with potential ECF sponsors. While both parties were receptive to these concepts, we were unable to agree specific terms. Cooperative dialogue with the UK Chess Academy ceased due to their premature application for FIDE Academy status, which is currently an unresolved issue among the UKCA, the ECF and FIDE. Efforts to communicate better with the membership are hampered by inability to produce timely minutes.

The Board would be pleased to discuss these at the AGM; however, AGM time is limited. In the interest of efficiency and transparency with the wider ECF membership,

Council delegates may wish to engage these issues with me on the ECF Forum prior to the AGM.

Council's attention is invited to two important projects:

- The ECF Office under-staffing situation is not sustainable. We are examining the benefits and costs of moving the office to a more accessible location with similar not-for-profit organisations, which should ultimately improve oversight and performance. Council will be given a verbal update.
- The National Chess Library must move out of its two locations in Hastings no later than March 2015. Potential solutions range from combining the National Chess Library with the ECF Office, placing the National Chess Library in deep storage, reducing its size by selling duplicates, and the occasional suggestion of selling it. In my view, selling or disbanding the National Chess Library is not an option. We continue to accept legacy collections into the National Chess Library. The Library Committee has provided the Board with its view. A discussion thread on the ECF Forum is now open. Council's views on the importance of the National Chess Library would be a welcome aid to required actions.

In summary, the Board is engaged in legal matters (reference the Finance and Junior Directors' reports) and internal governance matters; yet the Board and other dedicated ECF volunteer officials continue what we recognised as important for this year—deliver championship tournaments, compete internationally, address governance issues and improve commercial activity. Council may safely anticipate continued positive progress.

Phil Ehr

Chief Executive