

2013-14 Report from Lawrence Cooper Director of Junior Chess and Education

It has been an honour to be the ECF Junior Director and I would like to thank everyone on Council who voted and gave me this opportunity. I would also like to thank all the juniors, parents and coaches and everyone in the Junior Directorate who have shown me unbelievable support throughout the year, in particular, I would like to thank Jim Wadsworth whose backing has been invaluable throughout a very difficult year for me, both professionally and personally. Below I have given a summary of some of the more prominent events that have taken place in the last year.

The 2013-14 Youth Grand Prix started with events at the 2013 British Championship and culminated in the National Junior Squad event in Daventry in April. Winners in all twelve age groups qualified for the European/World Youth and it will be interesting to follow their progress later this year. I was pleased to be able to visit both the Swindon and Daventry events and whilst I am already excited about the Grand Prix I hope that it will prove possible to add some events in the North and Midlands to sit alongside the impressive array of events that already exist in London, Yateley Manor, Swindon and Daventry. I am sad to report that the federation is currently subject to a legal challenge from one of the parents of a player involved in the Grand Prix but I am unable to say more until the case is complete.

Nonsuch School from Surrey won the U19 National Schools Girls' Championship and Howell's School Cardiff won the U11 girls. My thanks to St Catherine's School in Bramley for hosting and sponsoring the girls' championship.

The winners of the 2013/14 U9 National Schools Chess Championships were Reading School who by beating Manchester Grammar in the final broke a run of 18 consecutive years when independent schools have won the title. The Plate was won by Wilson's School. Thanks to Winchester College for their continued sponsorship of this event.

King's College School Wimbledon, from Surrey, won the National Schools U11 Championship. My thanks to Heathside Preparatory School for their generous sponsorship and their support of junior chess over many years and also to Uppingham School for hosting the event.

This seems an appropriate time to thank Andrew Martin who has stood down and been replaced by Neill Cooper as ECF Manager of Schools. Julian Clissold & Richard Haddrell also deserve a big thank you for fantastic work in support of these events.

In addition to all the work he does for English secondary schools chess Neill also found time to organise the English Under 18 County Championship at Wilson's School in Walington on 29th June. The Championship event was close throughout, and at the end of the second round Sussex and Herts were equal first. The tiebreak of number of wins still did not separate them and so 'Bottom board elimination' was required at which point Sussex won.

The minor event was won by Sussex Bishops. Thank you to Jim Wadsworth, Chris Howell, Christine Golding and Phil Ehr for the work on the day and to Jim for all his hard work leading up to the event and on the day. Saffrey Durrant and her team from Surrey Hills Bakery provided fantastic refreshments, all the teams, managers, parents and other supporters behaved fantastically and left the school in a clean and tidy state. Sussex Junior Chess provided large numbers of digital chess clocks, whilst Surrey County Chess Association and Wilson's School provide the rest of the chess equipment. I am also grateful to Wilson's School for providing such an excellent venue.

Whilst not ECF initiatives no junior report would be complete without congratulations and thanks to Chess in Schools and Communities (CSC), United Kingdom Schools Chess Challenge (UKSCC), English Primary School Chess Association (EPSCA), National Chess Junior Squad (NCJS), Junior Four Nations League (J4NCL) and all the many organisations in England who contribute so much to the junior chess scene.

Medals in international tournaments are great for morale and for giving belief to other players that they can be successful. I was extremely fortunate this year that so many English juniors were successful. Dhruv Radhakrishnan won the bronze medal at the World Schools Under 7 Rapid Chess Championship in Kavala, Greece in June, just a week later Harvey Zhang took the silver at the European Schools Under 9 in Kavala. My thanks to the seven coaches, twenty-eight players, all the supporting parents but in particular, the Head of Delegation Jay Atara for making this such a memorable trip.

Moving on to the Commonwealth Junior Championship in Glasgow in July Nugith Jayawarna became the Commonwealth Boys Under 12 Champion and Peter Batchelor took bronze in the Under 18. The latest success came at the European Amateur where Louise Head won the women's silver.

In August in Stirling, Scotland, England made a clean sweep at the Glorney Cup in the U12, U14, U18 open and U18 girls events. Whilst England were the favourites on grading in all events it was very pleasing to see so many players been given their first opportunity in the event. Congratulations to all, especially Debbie Taylor the Head of Delegation (HoD).

Sharon Daniel of Bolton School not only took part in the Channel 4 show Child Genius but also qualified for the final and then proceeded to win it! As well as being very intelligent she is also very down to earth and a great role model for other girls.

At the time of writing we have organised the following delegations: Ten players and three coaches will be going to the World Youth in Durban, South Africa in September with Debbie Taylor as HoD, Jim Wadsworth will be taking 28 players and 7 coaches to the European Youth in Batumi, Georgia in October. I will be in charge of a group of twelve players and three coaches going to the World Schools in Juiz de Fora, Brazil in November. We have also sent more modestly sized delegations to the two EU Youth Championships in Mureck, Austria and Kouty nad Desnou in the Czech Republic, the World Schools Rapid & Blitz in Kavala, Greece and will be sending a player to the World Junior in Pune, India in October.

Girls playing chess is always something I have cared a lot about so I was very proud to see Akshaya Kalaiyalahan make her Olympiad debut in Tromso in August, to score 50% on board four (although several of her games were played on board three) and to qualify for the Women's Candidate Master title. I was also very happy for Amy Hoare to become British Women and Under 18 Girls Champion in Aberystwyth after a tense battle with Akshaya. She remains on the verge of the Olympiad team and hopefully her chance will come soon.

A big thank you should go to Julian Clissold, Angela Eyton and David Levens who at six weeks notice organised a very successful English Girls Championship in Nottingham in 2013 that attracted over seventy girls. With the appointment of a Manager of Girls Chess, Sabrina Chevannes, I hope that the girls' scene will be able to build on these successes. I am very grateful to Sabrina for organising coaching for Akshaya & Amy with grandmaster Stephen Gordon. We need to find a way to encourage more girls to play and to keep playing and I hope my successor is able to contribute to this.

Looking back over the year, one important target I set myself was to improve the ratio of ECF Accredited Coaches with recent DBS (Disclosure Barring Service) clearance. In October 2013 it was around 50% but now it is around 90-95%. This is only the first step, the ECF may have a list of one hundred plus coaches with the relevant clearance and references but more needs to be done in terms of a proper programme for assessing coaches and ensuring that high standards are maintained. I would also support a first aid qualification to be included as part of the overall assessment.

There are many things I had hoped to achieve that have yet to happen, my apologies to those people involved in those projects. The year has largely been one of ensuring all the events we were committed to took place with little time for new initiatives. There have been some tough challenges along the way, trying to fit 116 UKSCC nominated players into the World and European Schools delegations certainly ranks as one of them but I have tried to tackle every hurdle honestly and openly.

One of my biggest frustrations is that many talented juniors are unable to represent their country abroad because they cannot afford it. We have taken the first steps to improving this, a bursary fund has been created and donations have been received including a top up from the 2014-15 ECF junior budget. The first grant was made at this year's Glorney Cup and more will follow.

My successor will be able to call on a fantastic team within the Junior Directorate who have supported me from day one and it has been an absolute joy to work with so many talented and enthusiastic juniors. Support from parents has also been fantastic.

Lawrence Cooper
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English Chess Federation
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