

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 12 OCTOBER 2013

PROPOSAL ON MEMBERSHIP BY THE SOUTHERN COUNTIES CHESS UNION

That the Board's decision 17.3.2013 requiring ECF Membership of all players in events organised and graded by the ECF **be RESCINDED in respect of school team competitions.**

The Board's decision was made by a majority of 4 to 3, with scant consultation and less publicity: they did not even inform the Council meeting held a month later. The decision seems positively designed to discourage chess in schools, and has already occasioned the resignation of a Junior officer who has taken his activities outside the scope of the ECF.

The event principally concerned is the national Schools Championship. It has three very new sections - U11, Girls U11 and Girls U19 - which can easily avoid the Membership requirement by not having their games graded. Indeed they were not graded in 2012-13. But the main U19 (formerly the *Sunday Times*, then the *Times* and more recently the Yateley Manor) is a different matter. It is a prestigious event with a distinguished history, having existed continuously since 1957, and ceasing to grade the later stages would send entirely the wrong messages. But, while the strongest teams are very strong, many consist of casual players who could not be expected to buy Membership for perhaps two or three games, even if their teachers were willing to undertake the administration. The competition could not survive for long in its present form.

The Board, in response to protests, has come up with a sweetener: one year's free silver Membership for juniors who have not been Members before. This is welcome in itself and would enable a school to play for one year (though free Membership does not come free of admin). In the second year, it is likely that many teams will drop out.

But what teacher will want to handle this anyway? He must not only ensure his team take out Membership - whether free or not - but also keep track of last-minute reserves (they are entitled to one free game, but only one). He must find out once a year - how is not obvious - which of his players have and have not been Members before. We are talking of schools, not chess clubs. Teachers have enough to do without burdening themselves with this.

To add to the complications, the Membership rule will be almost impossible to police given the nature of the competition. We do not know whether the Board knows this.

In short, the competition can probably struggle on in its present form for one year under the new rule, but would be likely to collapse when the free Memberships ran out. Or we can overturn the new rule.