

Statement of Phil Ehr Candidate for Director of Junior Chess and Education

It would be a great honour and privilege to serve as Director of Junior Chess and Education and I respectfully ask for your support. I am a parent of two juniors who are in their eleventh year of competitive chess. They benefit greatly from the experience, which my wife and I consider an essential component of their education. I am also a chess coach at our children's former primary school, which recognises the value of our game to the extent that every pupil is taught how to play. Chess maintains a presence in every classroom, where teachers actually use it to develop academic focus and promote good behaviour. Everyone from Year 1 to Year 6 participates in the UKCC. The after-school club produces excellent teams and individual players. My background outside chess also prepares me for this role, having served in positions of responsibility in similarly diverse organisations, re-built a professional training program and represented the interests of children. Specifics may be read at [LinkedIn](#).

With respect and many thanks to Peter Purland and his predecessors, a thorough review of junior chess is required to address the challenges outlined in the ECF's Strategic Plan and to set the way forward. As director, I would work to advance two simple goals: (1) **recruit and retain more juniors**; and (2) **strengthen our top performers**.

My first priority would be to select an alternate director with a greatly expanded remit than the current role. Ideally, he or she would be a titled player, professional educator or coach, assume the title of **Deputy Director** and focus on matters 'internal' to the directorate. He or she would chair the 'Player Development and Selection Committee' that would serve as the name implies, focused on and actively seeking to develop our top tier, as well as selecting juniors to represent England. I would recuse myself from selections involving my own children and their peers, focus on policy, budget and 'external' matters, such as relations with other institutions that enjoy closer relationships with the majority of juniors. This director-deputy team is a leadership model with which I am comfortable and I believe is necessary to strengthen the junior directorate. The following partial list provides a flavour of where I would lead:

- **Budget and Membership.** It is naive to suggest that no additional resources are needed to improve junior chess, but some aspects can be improved with policy development, delegation within the junior directorate and a fresh approach to cooperation with other bodies. While it is yet to be seen, revenue from juniors under the proposed ECF membership scheme is likely to produce more federation resources for the junior game.
- **The Masses.** Few would dispute that Mike Basman's initiative, which attracts over 60,000 children playing chess each year, is the most substantial contribution to youth chess in living memory. I am therefore committed to advance cooperation between the UKCC and the ECF as announced in Sheffield. Additionally, there may be scope to better promote or assist the CSC's work in state primary schools as well as the 4NCL's junior training weekends. There is certainly scope to accelerate the resurgence in girls' chess led by the managers of women's chess. To increase public understanding, I would work to attract more academic research on the effects of chess in education, extracurricular coaching and participation in tournaments.
- **International Representation.** While I would seek to retain objectivity in the present system where players select themselves in competitions such as the junior grand prix and world trial, I would also increase the number of players to more credibly represent England at major international tournaments. I would ask candidates seeking to serve as deputy director to outline a plan for England to substantially improve our results within the next three years in the 80+ opportunities at the U16 Olympiads, the European Youth, World Youth and World Junior Championships.
- **Schools.** In view of the small number of schools in the ECF National Schools Championships and the ever-rising cost of participating in the premier primary schools championships run by EPSCA, a fundamental review is warranted with a view toward collaboration with EPSCA and other bodies who run national or nation-wide school championships at the primary and secondary levels. The chronic atrophy at the secondary school level may well be reversed with motivational incentives for players and proactive introductions of proven coaches to secondary school authorities.
- **Parents.** No greater source of dedication to junior chess exists. Many parents share their exuberance by volunteering in local clubs, but their collective support is missing from the national junior chess scene. To fill this gap, a few parents including yours truly, will soon be recruiting other parents to join a non-profit association dedicated to supporting youth chess generally. Read all about it on www.chessparents.org.uk.

Whoever is elected as Director of Junior Chess and Education will require the ongoing support of ECF Council members and the organisations you represent. Please make your decision wisely, keeping in mind that a vibrant junior program is absolutely essential for a healthy federation. I pledge to dedicate my volunteer efforts to make it happen.