

***Personal***

The post of Director of Membership & Marketing was vacant for the bulk of the twelve month period to which this report relates. I was appointed to the post in early summer; unfortunately a combination of the problems of synchronising diaries and the onset of the holiday season meant that the handover period was much more prolonged than was desirable. Therefore a large part of this report will consist of thanks to those who covered the gaps while the post was vacant.

***Membership***

At the time of the last Annual General Meeting of Council the new Membership Scheme had just been launched, but the date for the submission of returns from Membership Organisations was still in the future. Therefore no firm data on the uptake of the new scheme was available. It has now become clear that the system has been a success: membership reached a total of around 9,500 at the end of August, the date at which all memberships expire under the new system; this compares with a maximum of under 2,100 reached under the old scheme even with compulsory membership for competitors in FIDE rated events. The system does seem to have the support (albeit grudging in some cases) of the majority of active players in the country. The Federation owes its thanks to Andrew Farthing for his work in piloting the scheme to fruition. Of course, we have still not reached the submission date for 2014 Membership Organisation submissions, and therefore the figure for currently paid-up members is deceptive, but there is no evidence at present that members are failing to renew in any numbers.

Describing the scheme as a success does not, however, deny that there have been problems in the implementation and the on-line payment system. We are just going through the renewals process for the first time, and this revealed several unexpected pitfalls. We are indebted to Sean Hewitt who, in the absence of a responsible Director, handled the bulk of the discussions with the provider of the system and was crucial in ironing out the inevitable hiccups. There are still some issues outstanding, and I am dealing with these as I become aware of them.

The Federation has investigated the possibility of enabling members to pay their subscriptions by Direct Debit in the past and the conclusion has always been that the cost of doing so outweighed any possible benefit. However, PaySubsOnline, the company with whom we contract for the on-line membership service, have recently introduced a scheme whereby any of their clients are able to accept payment by Direct Debit. This was implemented too late for us to consider it for membership renewals for 2013/14, but in the New Year we will be reviewing the system and, subject to a satisfactory outcome of that review, hope to offer members the option of payment by Direct Debit in time for the 2014/15 renewals.

Various suggestions for minor adjustments to the membership scheme have been made to me and to other Directors. These will be considered during the autumn and winter with the intention of putting the agreed changes before the Finance Council meeting. This is appropriate since membership fees are a significant part of the Federation's income and any changes potentially have a financial impact.

## **Marketing**

Success in searching for a major sponsor for the Federation or any of its activities has again eluded us, a point which will be mentioned at other points on the AGM agenda. However, smaller but significant amounts of sponsorship for the Federation and the British Championships were obtained by the excellent hard work of Stewart Reuben, Alex Holowczak, and Sean Hewitt; there are undoubtedly others I am either unaware of, or have forgotten to mention, and to whom I apologise.

The post of Publicity Officer of the Federation was left vacant by the previous incumbent declining to be reappointed to the post. The Board, with two vacancies in its own ranks, clearly felt that it had more important gaps in coverage of posts and had not advertised the post as vacant. I have rectified this omission, but without noticeable effect. I confess that on reading the job description for the post my reaction is that it is a near impossible post for a volunteer to fill: it cries out for a younger person but requires commitment to availability at a time when someone in full-time employment is unlikely to be able to give it. I would be very happy if someone would prove me wrong and volunteer to take the post!

The website remains the Federation's principal tool for bringing itself to public notice. Sean Hewitt put in place changes which have led to us realising at least some of the marketing potential of this asset. Andrew Walker at the office has done an excellent job of keeping the site up-to-date during the year, and responding quickly to requests from Directors for items to be amended.

David Thomas