

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Report from Chairman of the Governance Committee

I would have liked to be reporting on the many successes of the ECF; alas my brief is governance and so I must relate a mournful story. Two years ago, I identified areas where I felt the Board was not operating as effectively as it could. I reiterated these points a year ago, when alas there was not much progress. This year we seem to have gone backwards and I leave it to enthusiastic Council attendees to read my report from last year to get the details.

Register of Interests

The one significant area of progress by the Governance Committee is the establishment of a register of interests (Item 18 on the agenda). There should be some completed registers on the ECF website and there is an intention that all of the elected officials will provide this information on a voluntary basis. I propose to make it a requirement to provide a declaration of interests as part of the electoral process next year. We will review the register in April to see whether everything is running smoothly. I must thank David Robertson for his work in generating the register and associated papers.

Anti-Cheating Policy (ACP)

Two years ago, the Board was instructed to establish procedures for the imposition of sanctions in proven cases of cheating. Subsequently, FIDE commenced working along the same lines and it was decided to build on their work. It is only in the last month that the FIDE information has become available and thus unfortunately the establishment of an Anti-Cheating Policy will take will not be possible until April 2016.

Board Behaviours

It seems plain that we cannot re-elect the same team as they seem to be incapable of working with each other. The Board seems to be forever arguing amongst themselves as witnessed by a foolish Board motion by one Director directed at another. Management of the Board agenda and time is poor. I think that the drawbacks from the lack of a Chairman been amply demonstrated and I intend to bring proposals to a future Council meeting to reinstate the post.

An example of misadministration has been the 'post' of Strategic Advisor. In times gone by we had a Strategic Planning Officer (SPO) whose important, if humble, job was to prepare the documents that went to the DCMS as part of arrangements connected with the government grant. The SPO was invited to Board meetings as that was considered necessary for his role and this was articulated in Regulation No. 2. The grant has gone, we have foolishly dispensed with strategic planning documents, and the post of SPO has gone. In the last year Chris Fegan became a Strategic Advisor; whether this was to the Board or the CEO was never clear as the post has not been described in an update to Regulation No. 2. Equally mysteriously Chris was added to the Board email circulation and invited to attend Board meetings; though there never seems to have been a Board vote to permit this. This lacuna was a significant cause of friction on the Board.

The ECF Forum

I didn't think it was a good idea when the new ECF Forum was set up given that there was already a well-established rival. There was a failure to get an undertaking from all of the Board members that communicating regularly on the ECF Forum was an important part of their duties. Thus the Forum was undermined from day one by under-use. The ECF Forum was set up on the basis that the ECF needed a forum for debate such that the debate would be suitably moderated and civilised. Alas there seems to be some law of physics that rancorousness increases until some external limit is imposed. In this case we have now had complaints about the standard of debate on our own forum and must either rethink the moderation format or give up.

Strategy

I was very disappointed by the outcome from the Strategy weekend and I am sorry but I would start again with a clean sheet of paper. The Federation needs to ask itself what it is really for with questions (not an exhaustive list) such as:

- What things should the Federation do and what is best left to other bodies?
- Are there any gaps that the Federation needs to fill?
- Are there activities that we should reclaim?
- Do we have the right balance of funding between home and international chess?
- Should our international focus be on building the team for tenyears time rather than sending our best team today?
- What services should we provide to our membership?

The Complaint between two Directors

I will express my personal views on this sorry saga. There had been problems with the broadcast of the commentary at the British and there seemed to have been no one there capable of solving the problem. There was a consequential unpleasant exchange of emails between the two directors. Worse one director read out his email those present in the congress office. Subsequently he apologised but his apology was not accepted.

A formal complaint regarding the language in the final email was raised by one director about the other. I attempted mediation but felt that the views of the complainant left no scope for this. I should have given thought to whether the complaint should have been allowed under the regulation (i.e. was it a case of serious maladministration) but didn't. Instead I went on holiday and out of email and telephone contact. The director hearing the complaint in a difficult position made a poor decision in suspending the director complained of. This suspension was applied at a most inappropriate time. Both parties in the complaint appealed. Meanwhile, back from my holiday, I acted inappropriately in that I nominated one of directors using my Governance vote. I should have remained impartial to support the appeals process. As you doubtless know the first appeal was upheld on the grounds that the language complained of did not constitute a case of serious maladministration and the suspension has been struck from the record. The complaints procedure has been rightly referred back to the Governance Committee. I expect that, when revised, the whole complaints procedure will be set out in more detail and that inter--director complaints will not be allowed. The only person involved throughout the process that comes out of this petty squabble well is Julian Clissold who chaired the appeals.

Finally my thanks to my fellow members of the Governance Committee, and to John Philpott for their support throughout the year and finally to David Sedgwick for his continuing assistance on ACP.

Chris Majer Chairman of the Governance Committee