

Election Address- Traci Whitfield

It has been an honour to be the Director of Junior Chess and Education for the past 12 months. I have tried to use my experience as a “chess parent”, a chess organiser, a chess coach, an academic teacher and researcher, a business manager and a safeguarding officer to guide me and to enhance the role. It has been a busy and challenging year in which I have endeavoured to begin to achieve the long term plans that I outlined in my election address last year.

Junior chess players are the potential league, competition and titled players, arbiters, chess organisers, coaches and “chess parents” of the future. The experience they gain now as juniors will profoundly affect what they choose to do in the future and therefore the future chess community. With this in mind I have worked with the ECF and in particular the Junior Directorate team to maintain a good quality of experience in existing ECF junior chess activities and to develop new initiatives to build towards a stronger chess future in England. In order to do this I have worked collaboratively both within and outside the ECF.

A brief resume of some of my activities in the past year:

The successful launch of the ECF Chess Academy - to enable development of juniors at any age and level toward “elite” player status and support further development of current “elite” players. This is a large collaborative project which has taken considerable effort to put into place. The first 3 year programme to support players at international level is starting in January 2016 and will have 30 students. Within 3 years we expect to have up to 90 students studying at any one time on this programme alone. Over the next year I aim to set up a focus group of elite players and their parents to investigate how we can best develop the elite tier of the academy (those players seeking FIDE titles). We have a wealth of ambitious and highly talented junior players who have successfully achieved title norms and ratings this year or who have come very close and we aim to support them further and to use their experience to guide us to help others. I also intend to set up a working party of interested individuals and organisations to look at developing the local and regional tier (those beginning to play chess up to those playing for their region) of the academy. This will look at how best to work with existing organisations, materials, programmes and competitions to encourage and enhance chess playing across the whole of the country. This will also ultimately link in with development of coaching qualifications.

National Schools Chess Championships – this has expanded over the year and now includes the National Schools Team Chess Challenge. All 5 of these championship competitions are becoming increasingly popular and it is especially pleasing to see an increase in the involvement of senior schools.

International events – We have organised/supported ECF registered and independent trips to chess events around the world which has produced not only success, such as a bronze medal at the European Schools Chess Championships, but also given juniors a chance to improve their chess in the international arena. The new selection policy is aimed at enabling players to participate in ECF registered international events that are suited to their level of skill and commitment.

Junior chess events around the country – I have tried to organise, support or attend as many events and projects as possible around the country especially those related to girls chess, the English Youth Grand Prix, the Junior 4NCL, the British Championships, the ECF counties competitions and many others.

Development of the Junior Directorate – the roles, responsibilities and workload of volunteer posts were reviewed early in 2016 followed by the development of a new structure. We are currently confirming appointments to new posts and advertising vacancies. We have also continued to develop the directorate strategic plan more in line with the overall ECF strategic aims. The aim of this is to develop opportunities and a quality experience for juniors playing chess in England as well as to encourage them to continue playing into adulthood.

My thanks to everyone who volunteers in the Junior Directorate team without whom none of this could be achieved. I hope you will vote to return me to the post so that I can continue to maintain current activities and develop new initiatives to improve junior chess over the long term.