

## **County Championship Proposal Consultation Responses**

### **Introduction**

A questionnaire was put together in Autumn 2017. It was advertised on the ECF website, in the ECF newsletter, and e-mailed directly to Unions, county captains and other relevant parties. At an ECF Board Meeting in December, I provided a paper with the results of the questionnaire, and forming proposals based on the results of the questionnaire. This paper was sent to the same people, plus the respondents, in January 2018. The questionnaire closed on 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2018. This paper outlines the results of the questionnaire, and what the resulting proposal might be.

### **What was the instigator for this?**

The number of County Championship team entries has been declining for a number of years. It is difficult to quantify this, because Union websites vary to some degree as to the amount of information they have available. County chess in the SCCU has remained stable in terms of the number of teams in the last 5 years, whereas MCCU has gone down from 26 teams to 23, and the biggest drop has been in the higher sections. The NCCU has always had a comparatively poor representation from its members in county chess except for Lancashire and Yorkshire, even if its numbers are remaining stable.

I am of the firm belief that “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it” isn’t good enough. You might reasonably argue that numbers in the County Championship are stable-ish, and so what’s the problem? During the same 5-year period, the 4NCL has increased its numbers from 81 teams to 98. While it is perfectly true that the County Championship has fewer teams than the 4NCL because the team size is bigger, it is also true that the 4NCL is 20% bigger than it was 5 years ago (and expanded into a number of other areas), whereas the County Championship is at best stable. Why is one growing, and the other not? What can the County Championship do to be part of that growth?

The consultation was aimed at trying to find out what it was that people disliked about the County Championship, and hopefully helping to fix those problems to make the competition more attractive to them, and to other teams to enter. It remains to be seen whether that will happen, but the result of the process is three proposals being put before Council, plus one thing that the ECF is just going to start doing.

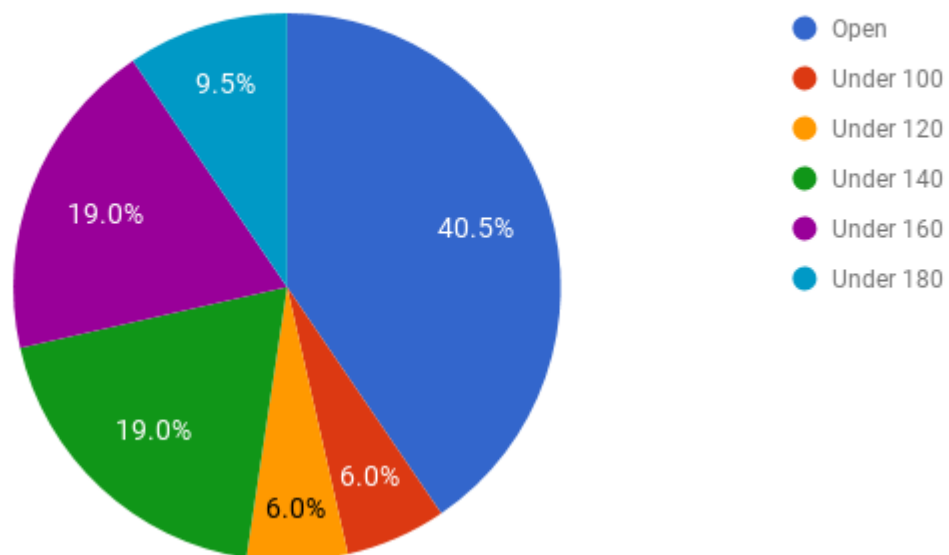
### **Number of Responses**

It was pleasing that as many as 25 counties took the time to respond to the questionnaire, and that there was a total of 84 responses.

Bedfordshire	3
Berkshire	1
Cambridgeshire	2
Cheshire	1
Cumbria	2
Derbyshire	3
Devon	3

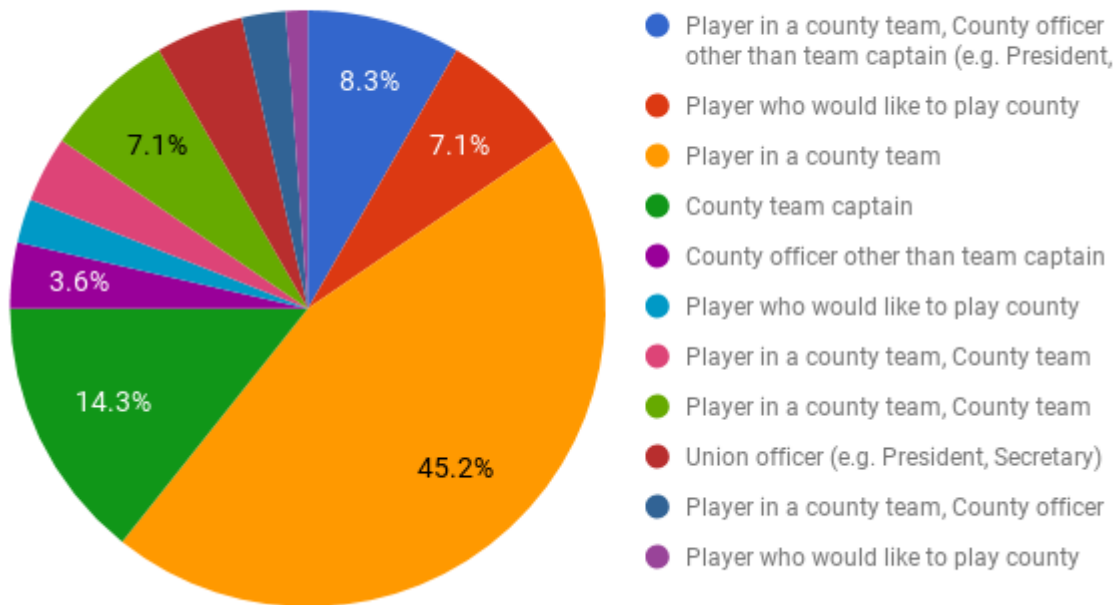
Essex	10
Greater Manchester	2
Hampshire	1
Hertfordshire	2
Kent	3
Lancashire	3
Leicestershire	6
Lincolnshire	1
Middlesex	2
Norfolk	6
Nottinghamshire	7
Somerset	2
Staffordshire	2
Surrey	7
Sussex	4
Warwickshire	2
Worcestershire	5
Yorkshire	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>

Count of Under the current system, which section would you be most likely to play county chess in for your county?



The responses are disproportionately from players who would normally play in the Open section, as opposed to the graded sections.

## Count of Role within the County Championship



Again, there was an overwhelming response from players and captains – which is good. Often we hear a lot from the officials and people who represent them and have votes, but we don't often hear from players directly. I regard this as a positive. Due to the option to select as many options as possible, there are also others counted here who play who are counted in other categories. This final chart is a bit of a mess, and the selections were so varied that the text box wasn't wide enough to capture them all...

*Note: A recurring theme throughout this is that some percentages may be small in places, and omitted due to how Google Forms works when collecting its data. This is due to using Google Forms, and not an attempt to suppress information.*

### **Proposal 1**

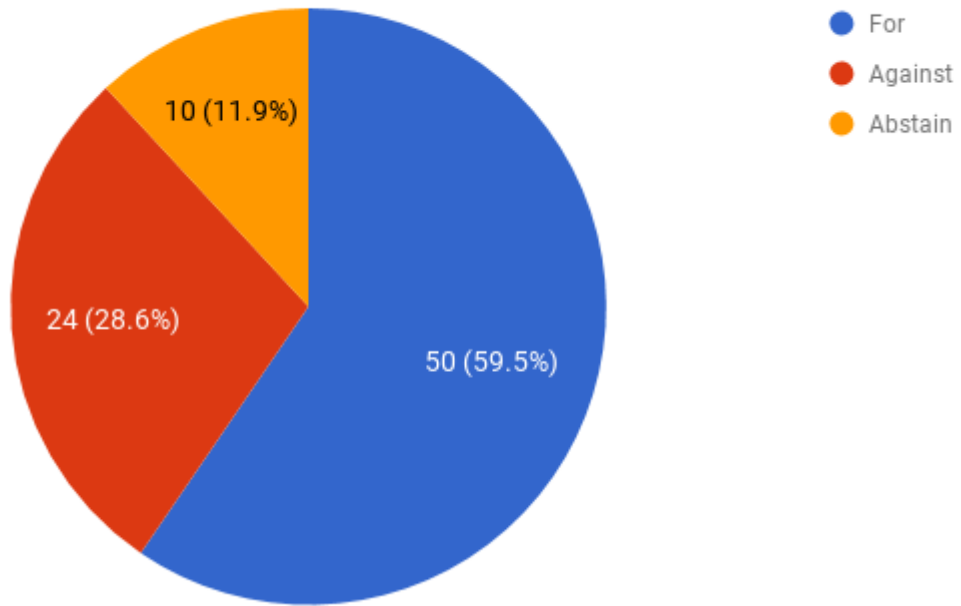
All County Championship to have the following numbers of boards:

- The Open (and Minor) section will remain at 16 players per team.
- The Under 180, 160 and 140 sections will be reduced to 12 players per team; thus all of the grade-restricted sections will be 12 players per team.

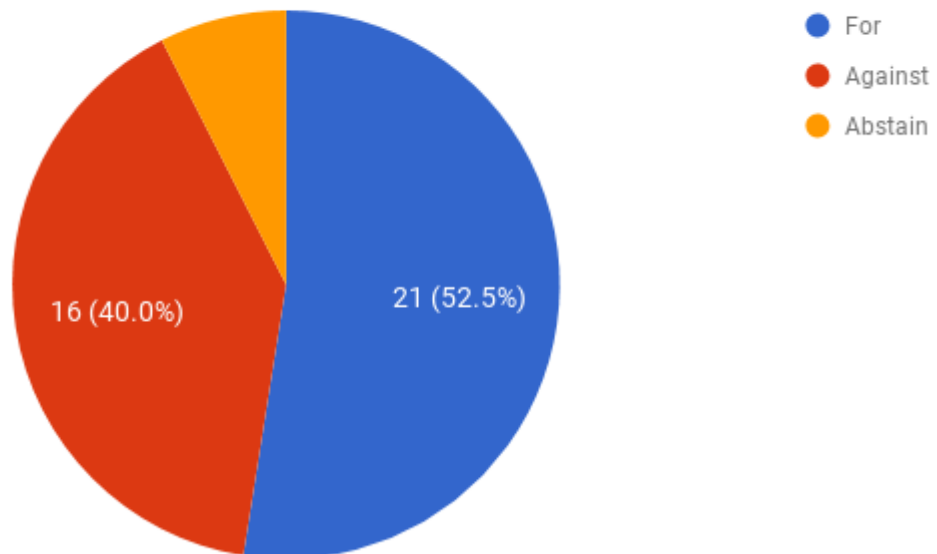
For this motion, I thought it worth producing the graph only for the Under 180, 160 and 140 sections, on the grounds they were the sections that would be changed under the new rules – the rest would be the status quo. I have included the graph of captains' views in these sections too, as well as the view of the global responses.

100% of respondents understood this question.

How would you vote on this motion? (All sections)

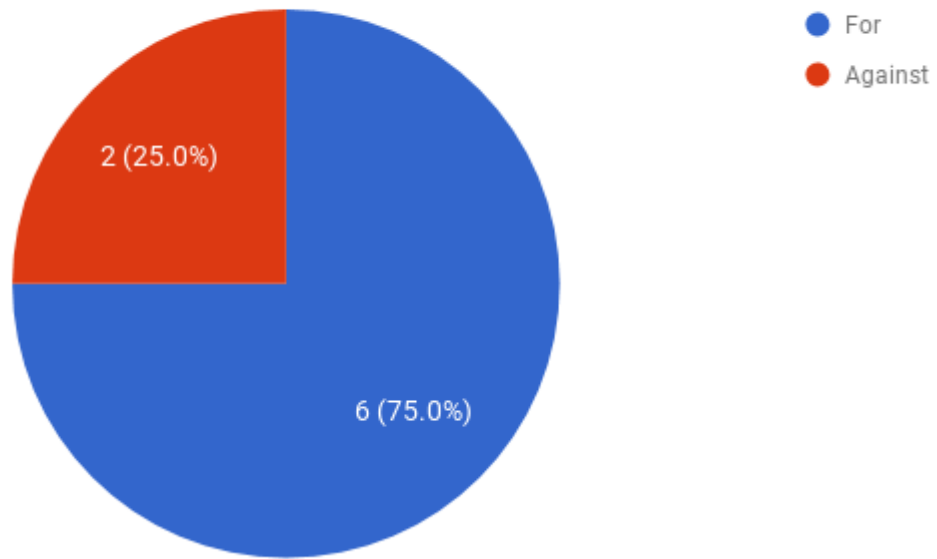


Count of How would you vote on this motion? (Under 140, Under 160 and Under 180 sections only)



There are a majority of people in these sections who would vote in favour of this motion.

Count of How would you vote on this motion? (Under 140, Under 160 and Under 180 captains only)



There were responses from captains of: Cumbria, Derbyshire, Essex (3), Kent, Surrey and Lancashire. I have listed the counties alphabetically.

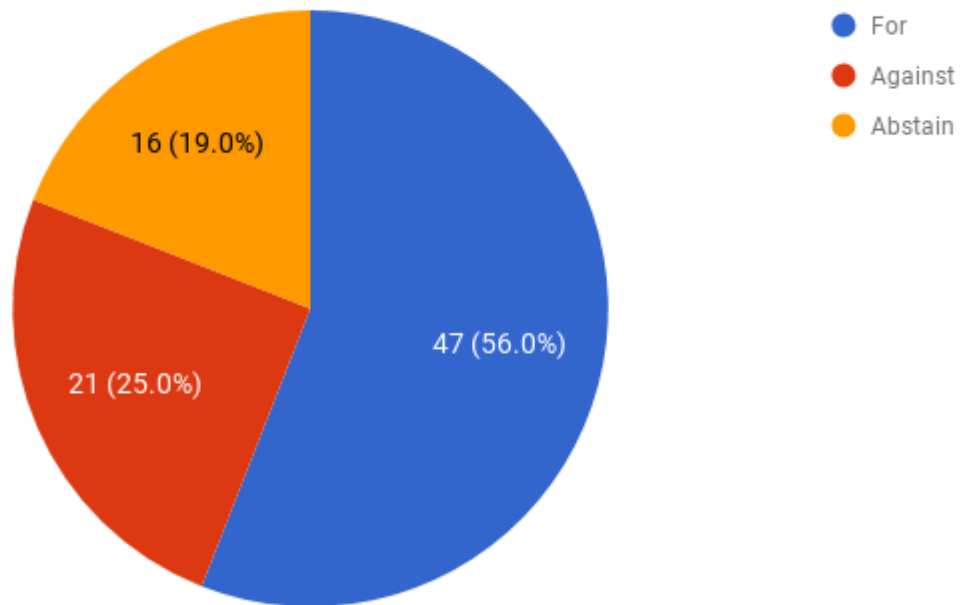
Comments from those captains (6 in favour first, then 2 against):

Help to ease the pressure of finding players.
Finding 16 players to play on Saturday afternoons has become very difficult.
It should make selection somewhat easier, which was the point in putting this forward.
In the NCCU u160 we have always played 12 boards
As a captain I find it difficult to find 16 players especially for away matches and reducing the size of teams would be a big help.
Hard getting 16 boards out especially as some players are used in other sections.
16 players gives gravitas, and can be achieved
Some years I can field a team of 16 others I struggle but this is only because of movement of players between boundaries. Teams started out at 20 and a further reduction is another slip on the slope of taking away the county championships attraction of multi-board chess. Some years I have an oversubscribed squad, which would mean less chess if the number of boards came down.

### **Proposal 2**

The ECF maintains a list of venues at which it is recommended County Championship matches must be played. The ECF will be able to provide contact persons and information for those venues. The ECF will only add venues that meet a certain quality threshold to ensure there are no bad experiences with poor venues being used, as has been reported in the past.

## How would you vote on this motion?



A couple of people abstained or voted against because they misunderstood the proposal. The proposal was mis-worded, with the combination of “recommended” and “must” in the first sentence. The intention was only ever to be recommended, and permit captains to choose wherever they wanted to play. Despite this, a majority were in favour of it.

It should also be noted that some of the votes against were because they understood the motion to be a recommendation rather than an obligation, but felt the ECF should oblige listed venues to be used to stop captains using unsuitable venues.

The intention is that the ECF will start to compile a list of recommended venues for use, and there is no need to put this motion to Council.

### **Proposal 3**

#### Option 1

Run the competition on an average grade basis, rather than a grade limit basis. The sections would thus become:

- Open
- 180 average
- 160 average
- 140 average
- 120 average
- 100 average

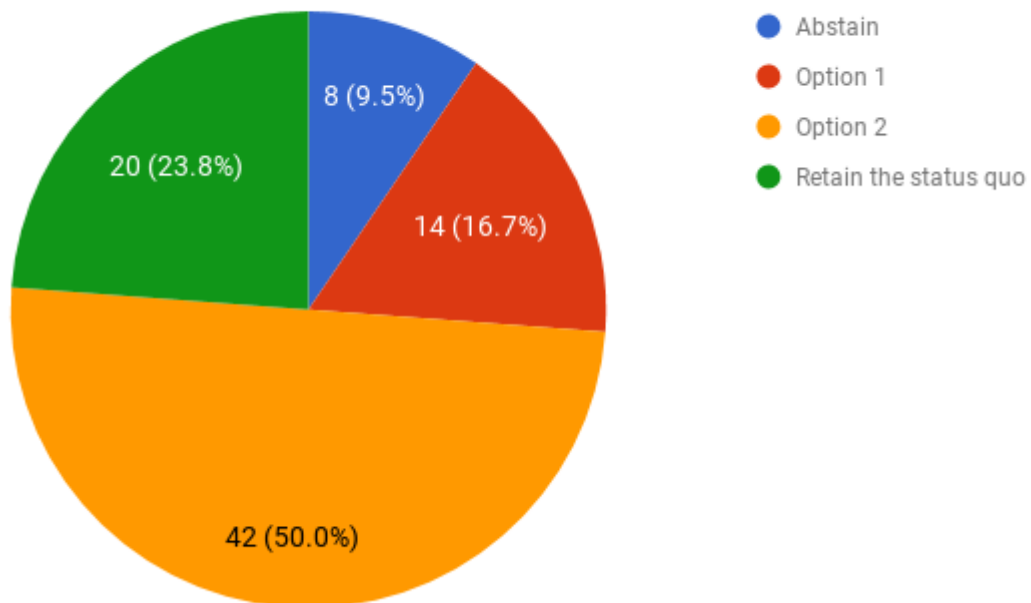
#### Option 2

Run the competition on a grading limit basis, rather than a mean grade basis. The sections would thus become:

- Open

- Under 180
- Under 160
- Under 140
- Under 120
- Under 100

How would you vote on this motion?



Option 2 was the most popular option, and the status quo was second, so a motion to Council will be put that reflects this.

#### **Proposal 4**

##### Motion A

In the Open section, the 16-player teams must include the following:

- At least 1 female player
- At least 1 Under 18 boy
- At least 1 Under 18 girl
- At least 1 Under 11 player

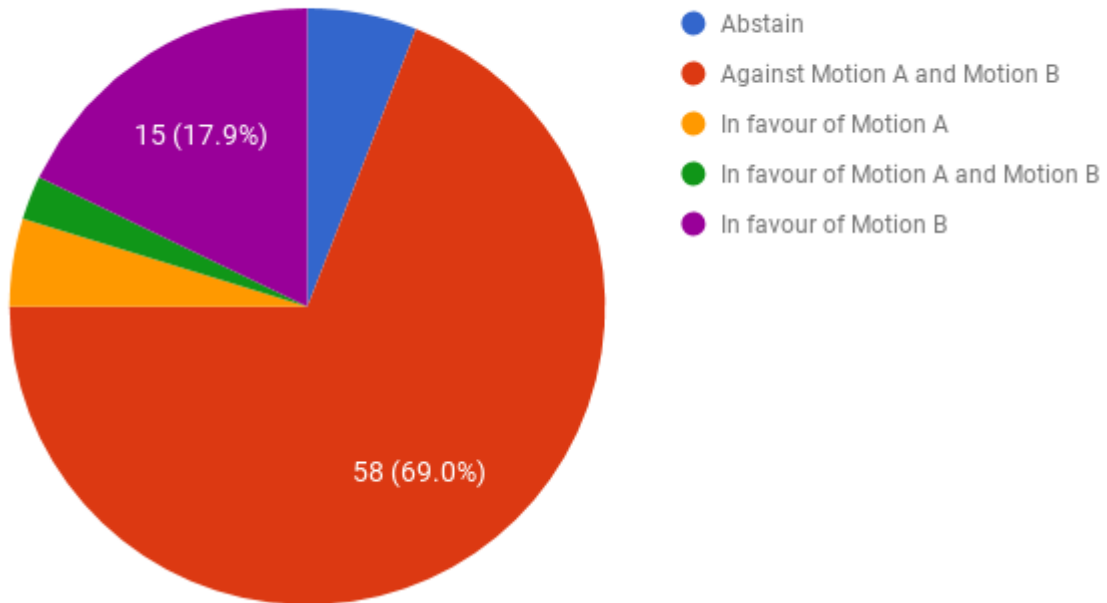
##### Motion B

In the grade restricted sections, if the competition becomes a mean grade competition rather than a grading limit section (see Proposal 3, Motion A), allow the following to count as their grade minus 10 towards the average, to encourage captains to select them.

- Female players
- Under 18 players

Only 1 of each player may be used for this purpose.

## Count of How would you vote on this motion?



The chart speaks for itself. As expected, there is no appetite whatsoever for any changes at all in terms of having junior or female participation.

Various accusations were made about us, including sexism, discrimination and tokenism.

Female participation (and to a lesser extent, junior participation) remains something that the Board wishes to improve, and so it will look at other opportunities of doing that, perhaps working in conjunction with the 4NCL.

### **Proposal 5**

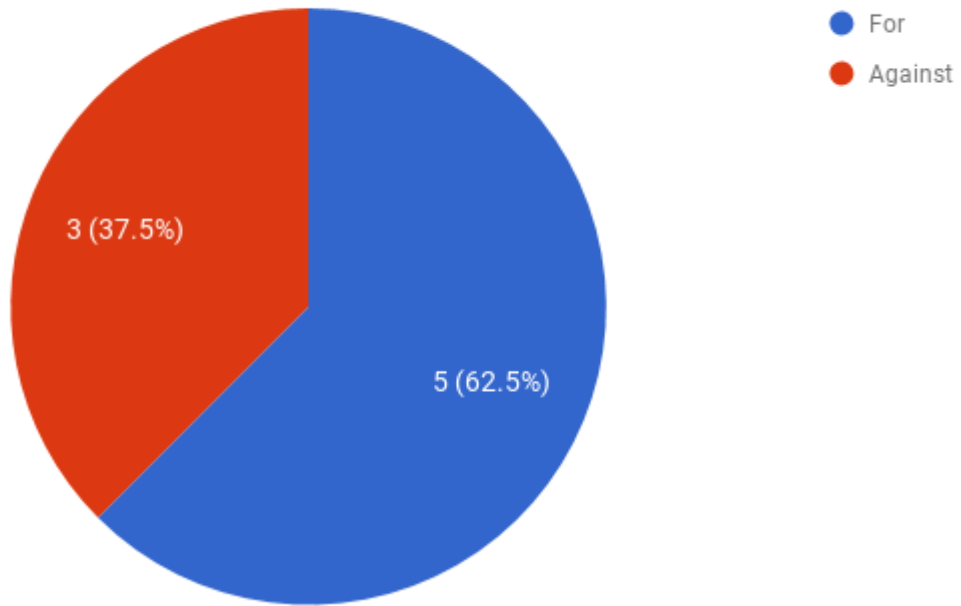
FIDE-rate the following:

- Open section
- Minor section
- Under 180 section

Again, for this, I filtered out the response for the Under 180 section. Minor was not an option, and we are proposing not to have one in future. The Open is already FIDE-rated.

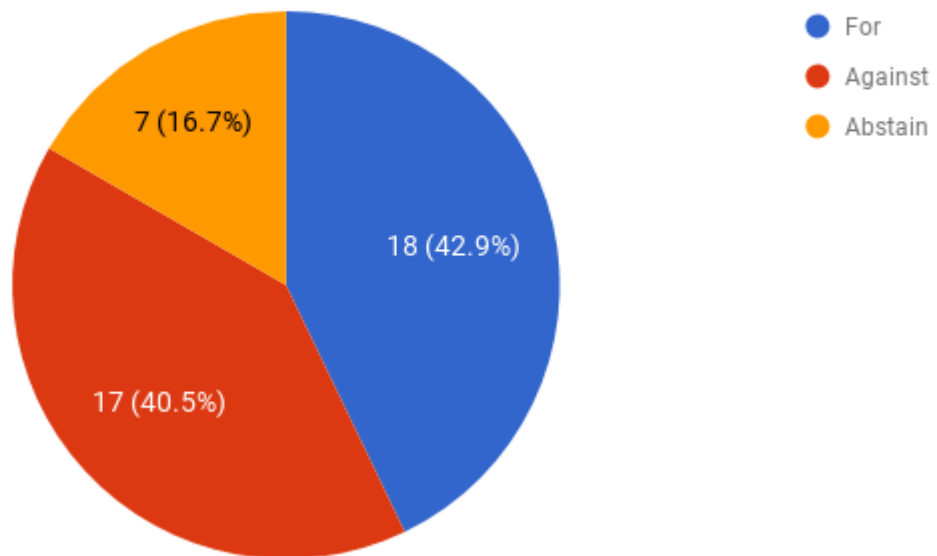


### How would you vote on this motion? (Under 180 only)



There were responses from: Devon (2), Essex, Hertfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Surrey and Sussex (2).

### Count of How would you vote on this motion? (Open & Under 180)



Including the Open and Under 180 together, there is a majority in favour.

#### Recommendation

Put this motion to Council.

#### **Proposal 6a**

Motion A, Option 1 - The Open section

In the 2018/19 season, the Open section will be a 6-team League formed by the following:

- The winner of the 2017/18 Open section
- 1 nominee from each of the five Unions

The dates will be prescribed by the ECF. The ECF will organise the venues for the 5 rounds of the competition, which will be held with the aim of organising 1 round in each of the five Unions' areas. At the end of the 2018/19 season, the team that finishes in 6th place will be relegated.

The Minor section will become a competition for Open teams not playing in the 6-team League, played to the rules that are in force for the Open. It will be run as one of the Graded sections (see Motion B). The winner of the competition will be promoted to the Open competition for 2019/20.

In the 2019/20 season, and going forward, the Open will remain a 6-team League, with the team in 6th place being relegated, and the winner of the Minor being promoted to the Open.

The Union competitions will run in parallel with this, and will not need to be finished by the current deadline of 15th March.

#### Motion A, Option 2 – The Open section

In the 2018/19 season, the Open section will be contested by 8 teams, based on the following:-

- The winner of the 2017/18 Open section
- The runner up of the 2017/18 Open section
- The winner of the 2017/18 Minor section
- 1 nominee from each of the five Unions

The 8 teams will be divided into two regional groups of 4 (North and South, to reduce travel), featuring 3 matches. The winner of each group will qualify for the Final. The dates will be prescribed by the ECF. The ECF will organise the venues for the competition. At the end of the 2018/19 season, the team that finishes in 4th place in each group will be relegated.

The Minor section will become a competition for Open teams not playing in the 8-team competition, played to the rules that are in force for the Open. It will be run as one of the Graded sections (see Motion B). The top 2 teams in the Grand Final of the competition will be promoted to the Open competition for 2018/19.

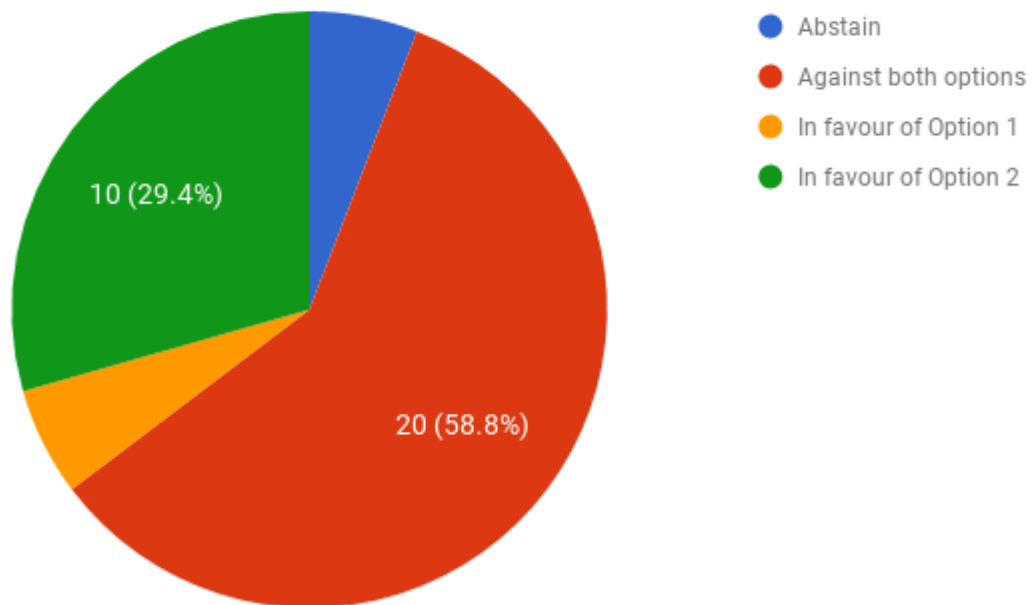
In the 2019/20 season, and going forward, the Open will remain a 8-team League, with the bottom team in each group of 4 being relegated, and the top 2 teams in the Minor Grand Final being promoted to the Open.

The Union competitions will run in parallel with this, and will not need to be finished by the current deadline of 15th March.

\*

Motion A relates only to the Open, so I've included the graph of the Open responses only.

## How would you vote on Motion A? (Open only)



There is no appetite for either of these changes.

### **Proposal 6b**

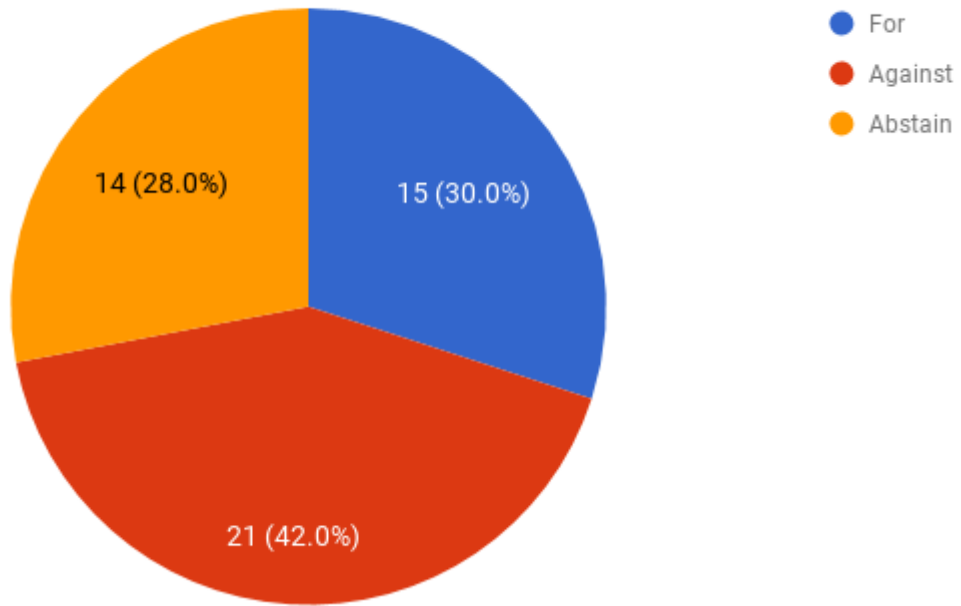
#### Motion B - The Graded Sections

Counties are free to enter the tournament directly, and the ECF will run the competition in micro-regions, organised either as a group of 3 or 4 counties playing matches, followed by a 1-day Jamboree Grand Final for the winning county in each micro-region. The Union competitions will run in parallel with this as a separate competition, and will not need to be finished by the current deadline of 15th March. This will ensure a short distance is required for travel, and only one "big journey", for the Grand Final.

\*

Motion B relates only to the graded sections, so I've included graphs not including the Open.

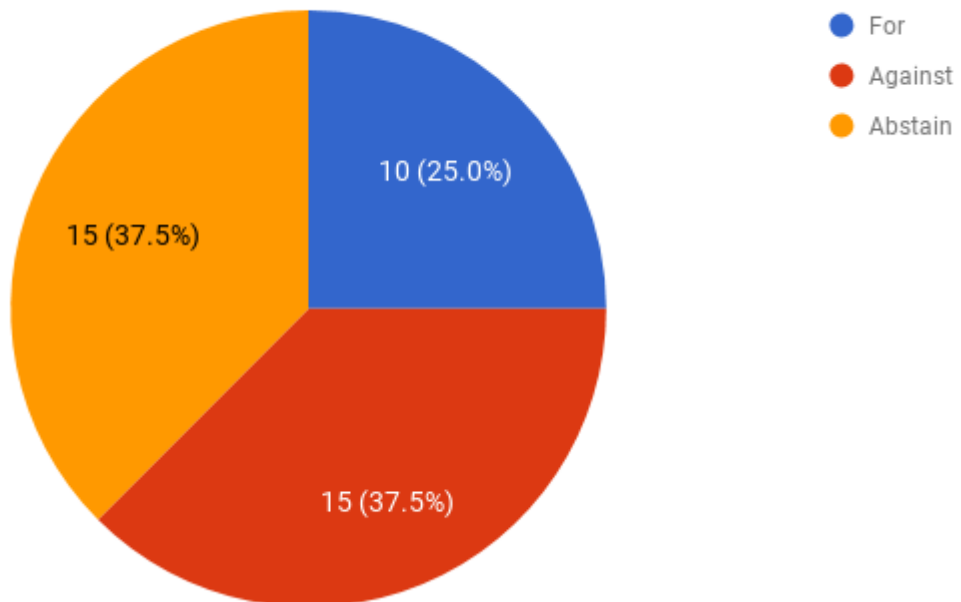
### How would you vote on Motion B? (Graded sections only)



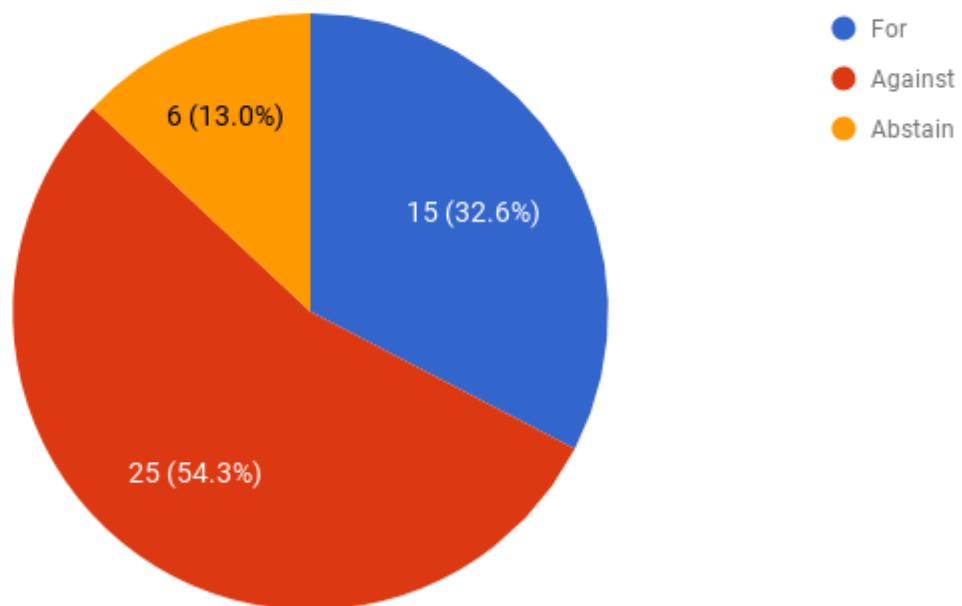
Again, there is no real appetite for change, albeit there is no one option with a bigger than 50% score.

I then did some more graphs: Players only and Officials:

### How would you vote on Motion B? (Players only)



## How would you vote on Motion B? (Officials only)



Officials are far more likely to give an opinion in the role of the Unions than players are; as many players abstained as were against the motion.

Because no one party reached a simple majority, I decided to wade into the comments. The comments can be grouped into categories (some replies fit into more than 1 category):

- Preference for the Unions running qualification competitions over direct entry.
- Disapproval of the league concept, preferring the knockout.

In some ways, giving people two reasons to vote against it wasn't sensible, because it means I don't know which reason they were saying no for.

With 6b in particular, there is a lack of understanding about the implications in the proposal - this proposal had by far the largest number of abstentions, and the lowest percentage of people who expressed they understood the proposal. It would not be right to put a proposal that is not widely understood to Council, and so it is not included below. Should the idea be re-visited in future, then the implications would need to be better spelled out in the explanatory paper leading up to it than I managed, so that people can understand what the implications are one way or the other.

### **Proposals to be put to Council**

1. All County Championship to have the following numbers of boards:

- The Open (and Minor) section will remain at 16 players per team.
- The Under 180, 160 and 140 sections will be reduced to 12 players per team; thus all of the grade-restricted sections will be 12 players per team.

2. The sections of the 2019 County Championship will become:

- Open
- Under 180
- Under 160
- Under 140
- Under 120
- Under 100

3. In addition to the Open, FIDE-rate the Final stage of the 2019 County Championship:

- Minor section [NB The result of 2. above may mean this section will not run in 2018/19.]
- Under 180 section