

ECF Academy Update

The ECF Chess Academy was founded in 2015 as a solution to the development of a larger pool of chess talent in England and future GMs and counter the considerable loss of talent at the age of 11+. It is the first structured professional approach for the development of young chess talent in England in many years. Being part of the Junior Directorate, it is also able to provide a well prepared pool of players for the international junior team. It also creates a community of young talent where parents are provided a clear structured approach for junior development.

Marketing efforts since 2015 have been quite successful. In 2015 the target was to reach a level of enrolment of 100 students. It has now reached this level and the average grade of level of applicants has increased significantly. The best talent is therefore enrolled in ECF Academy and the Academy is harnessing this talent, propelling those that have the most promise further.

The ECF Academy has become a buzzing hub for parents and talented juniors . New parents every year are guided through the various steps that they need to take to develop their child's talent which includes how to prepare their player for International Events, get the best coaching, choose events, training with Chessbase, etc.... It is a forum where parents discuss issues together and share their experiences and recommendations. Players are provided with 13+ hours of high level coaching each weekend with homework assignments to prepare for the next weekend.

The ECF Academy has two main programmes:

1. The Elite - This programme is the highest tier in the Academy. £30K has been allocated so far to a group of selected players and each elite develops a programme that is reviewed and funded.

The older tier of the elite group is composed of:

- Ravi Haria
- Alan Merry
- Adam Taylor
- Alex Golding
- Andrew Horton
- Ezra Kirk
- Joseph McPhillips
- Koby Kalavannan
- Matthew Wadsworth
- William Claridge Hansen

The ECF Academy also has a Young Junior Elite Programme; this takes players as young as 7 years old and provides a mentor (usually one of the above players) to offer moral support and advice from their own experience, weekly coaching with a grandmaster of their choice, 4 group study weekends per year, support with and advice on attending suitable competitions.

The programme includes the following young chess elite:

- Shreyas Royal
- Shlok Verma
- Nischal Thatte

- Jacob Yoon
2. The International Programme - The international programme develops chess talent by providing high level intense coaching during 4 weekends a year. Talented players are accepted to this programme under specific criteria and applications are reviewed in November for the new year. Successful applicants are then divided in groups of less than 10 according to ability. Parents are also trained on how prepare their children for international England events and best practices are shared with other more experienced chess parents.
 3. Tasters - Additional promising junior chess players are invited with their parents on a “taster” weekend. “Taster” students are usually grouped together and are initiated to the coaching provided at the Academy during a selected weekend.

Actuals and Budget Update

It has been very rewarding to see that due to hard work and dedication, the Academy has reached its revenue line objectives and has for the 2018 cohort raised its yearly fee for the International Program by 12.5% to £450. Furthermore, the Academy has also managed to stay well below the budgeted cost figures through such initiatives as advantageous arrangements with Bridge Overseas which have enabled the Academy to keep training room cost figures well below initial budget figures. As a result these initiatives the Academy has run a surplus of £6K for FY15/16 and a smaller shortfall than anticipated of 4K for FY 16/17. Being a start-up, it has been challenging to budget cost figures but as the Academy has now reached its run rate of enrolment and a structure is in place, costs and revenues are much more predictable in nature.

Furthermore and as a result, The Academy has not pulled down the allotted funding available to it and this funding will be rolled over to cover future shortfalls in 17/18 and 18/19. The largest funder/supporter of the Academy has been the John Robinson Trust which has for the last two years provided £19K of funding to the Academy.

Future Plans and Vision

It is clear that although The ECF Academy has fulfilled its initial objectives by establishing a successful platform to develop junior chess talent from promising players to norm seeking elite players, more can be done to enhance this successful platform.

It has been recently decided to move the current Elite programme of the ECF Academy into the Accelerator program setup by the Chess Trust. This change causes a reduction of £15K in the 18/19 budget.

As a result of this change, The ECF Chess Academy will plan to concentrate its efforts fully on the development of its International Programme and will work closely with the Accelerator Programme to identify the most promising juniors that will be title seeking and supported through the Accelerator Programme.

The proposed further developments of the ECF Chess Academy are as follows:

1. Development of ECF Academy teams to compete at top level events such as the Xtracon, Barcelona Open and the 4NCL with an objective to increase the exposure and experience of our Academy players to international FIDE events. This should enhance our results at Youth International Chess events. (+£11K in 18/19 budget)
2. Develop an independent web interface for the ECF Academy and a detailed database of chess talent. The web interface will be used to assign individual targets for each student, recommend tournaments and literature, request additional coaching, assign and receive homework, amongst other things. This database will allow for the measurement of results and better target groups for development. (+£5K in 18/19 budget)
3. Develop an alumni network for the Academy for players to be continued to be supported by the ECF and other peers with their chess endeavours. (+£5K in 18/19 budget)
4. Develop stronger ties with the UKCC, which has become a very dynamic organisation. The UKCC has an ability to really pool the new potential chess talent and promoting the most promising players. The ECF Academy is planning to create a structured process for the UKCC to promote chess talent upwards to the next level to the ECF Chess Academy. This will be done with such measures as providing winners of Terafinal sections places on England team events and places on the International Program of the Academy. There are also ongoing discussions on how to jointly develop web interface platforms to reduce development costs and also offer a seamless promotion between the organisations.
5. Develop performance criteria and training to the pool of ECF Chess Academy coaches to achieve high standards in the coaching provided at the ECF Academy.