

## **REPORT OF THE BOARD TO COUNCIL: OCTOBER 2019**

**Approved by the Board September 2019**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report has, as last year, been prepared in accordance with the recommendation of the Independent Constitutional and Governance Review Commission that “instead of individual Directors reporting to Council, there should be a single report of the Board, approved by it beforehand”. The report focuses on what has been achieved during 2018/2019. The Board has reviewed the Strategy and Business Plan document, also included in the papers to Council, and has made a few relatively minor changes. The Board is happy that the document sets out the Board’s proposed direction of travel over the coming years and the objectives that the Board has set itself for 2019/2020 and beyond.

### **2018/2019 ACHIEVEMENTS**

The Board has:

#### **Finance**

- In accordance with Council’s previous approval, worked with the Chess Trust to transfer £70,500 from the PIF No 1 Fund to the Chess Trust. This money will be used over a three-year period to fund strategic/developmental initiatives that are not resourced through core operational funding from the ECF membership. There will be a further joint ECF/Chess Trust review during June 2020 to determine how much, if any, of the remaining PIF 1 Fund money should be transferred to the Chess Trust.
- Secured Council’s approval at the April 2019 Finance Council to the first year (2019/20) of the ECF’s two-year plan for income and expenditure, including membership fee levels. The second year (2020/21) of the two-year plan has been agreed in principle by Council, and will be presented at the April 2020 Finance Council meeting for formal approval.
- Started work on reallocating Office roles and responsibilities to achieve a clearer split between finance- and administration-related tasks.

#### **Governance**

- Worked with the Governance Committee on a review of the ECF’s articles of association for presentation to Council at this year’s AGM.

#### **Junior**

- Organised a number of successful junior international trips. Highlights included Nina Pert’s 7th place in the World Schools Under 11 Girls Championship, Harry Zheng’s 4th place in the European Schools Under 9 Championship, Patrick Damodaran’s 6th place in the European Schools Under 7 Championship, Sanjit Kumar’s 8th place in the European Schools Under 9 Championship, Thisumi Jayawarna’s 9th place in the European Schools Under 9 Girls Championship, Tashika Arora’s 10th place in the European Schools Under 11 Girls Championship and Savin Dias’ 10th place in the European Schools Under 13 Championship.
- Saw England win the Gilbert Cup (Under 18 Girls) and Robinson Cup (Under 14) in the annual tournaments against France, Ireland, Netherlands, Scotland and Wales.

- In partnership with the United Kingdom Chess Challenge, continued the development and expansion of the International Programme at the ECF Chess Academy. 19 % of attendees on the study weekends are now female.
- Supported the Chess Trust in further developing the Accelerator Programme for our elite junior players.
- Initiated the English Girls Championship, held at Blenheim Palace on 19-20 October.
- Continued to work with junior organisations such as UKCC to roll out free first year junior Silver membership.

## **Women**

- Held the most successful English Women's Championships to date at the Royal Hotel Hull, with no fewer than 34 entrants. This formed the centrepiece of the English Women's Chess Festival, where, as with last year's British Championships, we collaborated with Hull and District Chess Association, Hull City Council, Hull Culture & Leisure and private sponsors to put together an excellent programme including coaching for players and local girls, talks, simultaneous displays, commentary and a barbecue reception.
- Gave conditions support to women participating in the 2019 British Championship held at Torquay and also held a women's reception there.
- Supported women to compete individually and in team events overseas.
- Provided financial support to a number of non-ECF events such as the Teesside International Women's Invitational, Paignton Chess Congress and the Hammersmith Chess Club Women's Chess Month, and agreed to support the Caplin Hastings International Chess Congress. We also provided financial support to allow the 4NCL and Chess England to offer free female entry at some of their weekend congresses.
- Worked in partnership with CSC, FIDE and ECU to organise the 7<sup>th</sup> London Chess Conference, which will take place on 30 November and 1 December 2019 at the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith, and the theme of which will be "Chess and Female Empowerment". This is a major achievement and is probably the first time ever that ECF, FIDE and ECU have cooperated together in a major international chess conference. All ECF women members will be allowed free entry to the conference.

## **Home**

- Presided over a very successful British Championships at the Riviera Centre, Torquay. Our thanks are due to the officers and members of the Devon County Chess Association for their support of the Championships in many ways, including providing a very comprehensive and enjoyable social programme. Negotiations for next year's venue have proved problematic, with our first choice venues seeking to renegotiate prices late in the day. Torquay, however, are very keen to have us back, and we therefore feel that this is the best option given the significantly lower venue costs.
- Successfully organised the second UK Open Blitz Championships, which achieved a total of 453 players in total. The total number is a significant improvement on last year's inaugural event which achieved a total of 333 entrants, and we hope to continue growing this highly successful event with further increases in participation levels next year.

- Organised the Finals Day of the 100<sup>th</sup> County Championship Finals. Kettering Conference and Leisure Centre proved to be an excellent venue and received plaudits from many players, and we accordingly intend to take up the option to hold the next two years' Finals Days there. The new venue, although central, still unfortunately resulted in Devon defaulting in their match; we will be looking at ways to avoid this next year, maybe by allowing counties to make alternative arrangements if certain geographical conditions are met.
- Reinstated the English Seniors Individual Championship with a highly successful event held in Solihull in April 2019. The Event was held over four days, with the winners from the two sections becoming English Over 50 and Over 65 champions for 2019/2020.
- Continued a series of prison visits setting up and supporting chess clubs; visits include Q&A sessions, talks, simulms and donations of equipment and books. In our view the value of this work cannot be over-estimated. England also participated for the first time in the World Online Prison Chess World Championships, facilitated by ECF and CSC at HMP Wandsworth. Eight countries took part from three continents; although England finished last (there was not nearly as much preparation as we would have liked) the prisoners thoroughly enjoyed the event, and our hope is that England will continue to be represented in future championships.
- Developed draft anti-cheating guidelines for discussion with arbiters and organisers.

## **Membership**

- Presided over an increase in membership numbers from 9,946 (9,441 paying) at the end of the 2015-16 season to 12,717 (10,598 paying) at the end of the 2018-19 season. While the underlying increase in paying members is very welcome, the ECF's challenge is to retain a large proportion of the free junior Silver membership increase as longer-term paying members.
- Continued to improve the service and options available to members on the new membership system (Azolve), including giving members the opportunity to pay their subscriptions by direct debit.
- Continued to improve the service and options available to members on the new membership system (Azolve), including giving members the opportunity to pay their subscriptions by direct debit.
- Continued to roll out the League Management System, which has been used with great success in 2018-19 by a number of leagues.
- Launched the new Supporter category, which is targeted principally at casual/social players. Take-up thus far has been slow, and one of the ECF's challenges this coming year will be to advertise and market the Supporter category much more widely.
- Extended the range of benefits available to ECF members and supporters. In particular, we have:
  - Set up arrangements with Chess Direct and Chess & Bridge for ECF members to be able to shop at discounted prices;
  - In partnership with a number of online chess providers, put in place facilities for ECF members and supporters to play online as members of ECF teams / clubs. The platform will allow members and supporters to take part in regular ECF rated competitions hosted by their preferred online provider(s), and to gain ECF internet ratings which will be published monthly based on their results in these events. The platform will also allow the ECF to run national and international online team events for members and supporters. The service is currently being beta tested with

a group of ECF members and supporters and is expected to go live before the end of the calendar year.

- Moved forward with the monthly grading project. We have had some very good discussions with the Welsh Chess Union, the outcome of which is that the two federations will be working together on implementing the planned new monthly grading system. The project is being led on the ECF side by Director of Membership Dave Thomas and Manager of Grading Brian Valentine. We are now producing the detailed specifications document that will enable the requisite monthly grading programming to take place.
- Put in place detailed membership statistics and key performance indicators which are now available on the website.

## **International**

- Supported our international efforts in what has been a great year for English international chess in which the Open team built on their excellent 5th placing at the Batumi Olympiad in 2018 with a silver medal in the World Team Championships at Astana, our best results in nearly 20 years. Our leading players also enjoyed individual success with Luke McShane, Gawain Jones and Michael Adams all qualifying for the 2019 World Cup meaning that England has three players involved for the first time in many years. Gawain Jones won the Sigeman Masters and became the fifth English player to go over 2700 as our top 5 five all hovered around 2680-2700, and we improved our position in the world rankings from 12th to 11th at the time of writing. Our biggest challenge remains replacing one or more of our top six players over the next 5-10 years, as we have effectively lost a generation.
- Saw England field five teams in the 2018 European Club Cup, with entry fees paid for as usual by the 4NCL. It remains an objective to get one of the stronger teams there. There were promising signs on the norms and titles front, with a number of our younger players achieving success; IM titles were achieved by Brandon Clarke, Joseph McPhillips, Adam Taylor and Matthew Wadsworth, who also scored a GM result in the 4NCL.
- Organised English teams' participation in the European Senior Team Chess Championships in Croatia, sending 16 players this year as opposed to only five for last year's event.
- Provided financial and operational support to the growing number of international tournaments in England, including the Northumbria Masters, the 4NCL's Hull International GM norm tournament and the Caplin Hastings International Chess Tournament.
- Put in place detailed international key performance indicators which are now available on the website.

## **Office**

- Transformed the Yearbook into an annual news digest, a process which will be further developed in 2020 in partnership with Chess & Bridge. Contact information for clubs, leagues, counties, unions etc is now held where it should be on the ECF website and on local organisations' websites.
- Continued with our overhaul of the website to make the content and resources clearer and more easily available.

## **All Directorates**

- Appointed a new Development Officer to work with the Board to grow chess at all levels across the country. This is a remunerated role, and our thanks go to the Chess Trust for funding this (see above).
- Increased the level of engagement with ECF members through the monthly newsletter, mailshots, surveys on key issues including monthly grading, and a much improved social media presence.
- In partnership with the 4NCL, appointed a new Social Media Manager to oversee the ECF's and the 4NCL's social media activity.
- Reached out to territories under the aegis of the ECF from FIDE's point of view (the Falklands, Gibraltar and Isle of Man in particular) to develop a closer relationship between them and the ECF.

## **Conclusion**

As last year, the pace of change has continued to be rapid. Although a lot has been achieved, this has on occasion been at a slower pace than the Board might have hoped for – as is inevitable in an underfunded organisation with a high dependency on volunteers. Although there have been “a few bumps in the road”, as our new political masters like to put it, the Board has in the main been cohesive, stable and collegiate in its work to improve the state of English chess. The Board would again like to take this opportunity to thank the various Committees of the ECF for their support, and in particular the many unsung volunteers of the ECF who do so much for English chess, at times with precious little recognition.

The Board hopes that this report, together with the Strategy and Business Plan document, gives a good idea of what has been achieved in the past year, where we hope the ECF is heading and what we believe is needed to take us towards that aspiration.