



ECF/000

13 September 2019

ECF Management Team

ECF Membership

CREDO

INTRODUCTION

1. **Background.** I am delighted to have taken up the post of the **Development Officer** for the English Chess Federation. I believe it is important for people to learn a bit about what I think and why I think it. I want to put these thoughts in this paper. It is vital that other chess organisers, ECF members and chess fans are in my mind from the start.

2. Inevitably, this paper is very much a 'Round Robin' of my experience and the intellectual and workplace baggage I bring with me. I shall strive to be as logical yet succinct as possible. I provide a separate biographical to this paper to give some background to who I am, crucially including my chess background.

THE BROAD PICTURE

3. **Who does what?** The ECF does not have an automatic right to chess, nor to obtaining new members. It is for customers (chess players) to decide where they go to get their chess experiences. Naturally, we in the ECF want them to turn to us but I am always aware that perception is reality so we need to be providing what the customer wants in order to be first in the queue for their business. Set yourself on fire with enthusiasm they say, and people will come from miles around to watch you burn. We have to win hearts and minds, then business will follow.

4. **What is core?** This seems like an odd question but what is the ECF here for? Why does it exist? The answer is to foster chess in England and to promote the game. That is a very broad goal but in essence it is what we do. It is our stock-in-trade. This embraces tournaments, chess clubs, events, competitions and more. If there is an opportunity to promote the game to a person or a group, why should the ECF not be prepared to be the first in the queue to engage?

5. **Control.** The degree of control that the ECF has will depend upon the importance of the requirement. If it is to do with having an official chess grade for example then the ECF currently has a system to enable that to happen. It's what is widely used as the rating system in England, despite the fact that things might change in the future and convert solely to ELO. If the requirement relates to holding a chess event then that help might be available from any number of other sources. We should ask ourselves – 'What does the ECF give members that our competitors don't?'

6. Cost. A Roman writer once said if you want to make war you need money. If the ECF costs more to provide the same thing that competitors do then it cannot expect to thrive, let alone grow. We have to give value for money to the membership. To be fair, there are many benefits to be derived from competition and we should not be afraid. Sometimes, the human animal produces its best results on the back of healthy competition. The bottom line is, arguments about what we should or should not do in terms of core business or non-core don't count for much. What counts is what it costs us to deliver so we need to be as efficient as possible. That's clear to me.

MANAGING THE BUSINESS

7. The ECF Management Board. The ECF has a management board. It is the prime vehicle for decision making and I will be reporting into it via my line manager.

8. ECF Head Office. It's just that – the Head Office, It has a small team of people doing a great deal of work across many different chess related matters. They facilitate and enable others to do their jobs and they also keep the ECF web site up and running – and the site in my view is infinitely better than it has ever been.

9. Delegations and Empowerment. The ECF is too big to run top down. Resources and decision making can be delegated to the lowest possible levels to enable people to deliver. I would expect people to challenge me if they think that something that I am doing could be delegated to them or that they are not empowered to do something themselves.

10. Monitoring. Delegation does not mean abdication and there are clear audit or fiscal reasons why an activity might need to be monitored. Whilst I am sure that Head Office will do this, I know that excellence will be highlighted when they meet it too.

11. Business planning. I will draw up a plan with my Line Manager (LM) and own that plan.

12. Budget. Money is the fuel of any organisation. I shall work to my budget and look to do so in as efficient and reasonable way as I deem necessary.

Running the Business

13. Bilateral. What I mean is, running my own role as Development Officer. I shall continuously and robustly (bi-monthly) maintain a feel for the role and business by scrutinising...

- a. Overall performance
- b. Support to ECF members
- c. Budget Performance
- d. Staff Matters (Good or bad)

These are not some kind of 'trade test' but they are important to keep in focus.

14. Time. Time is precious and perhaps our most important resource. Once spent, it can never be recovered. I shall strive to be 'in office' (I work from home!) on

Mondays and Fridays (these are awful travel days) but be out and about working for the ECF in the DO role Tuesday to Thursday. Bear in mind that this is a part time position so my work will be undertaken with that in mind.

15. Benchmarking. We have to measure what we manage and manage what we measure. We need to compare. Who does what we do? Can we do it better? Can we exchange best practice? This does not just apply to our core business (fostering chess) but to people, practices and processes.

16. Communication. Communication is key, we all know that, yet so often it is simply ignored in an organisation. I for one need to be better at being on 'receive' rather than send' and I would expect others to do so as well. I believe we should share our ideas and thoughts but also find the most effective ways to put these across to internal and external stakeholders (members and potential members) When I discuss initiatives, I want part of that discussion to be about how best we communicate the net result. Different audiences might need a different approach.

17. Development Officer Hotline. I will set up a hotline whereby if anyone has any ideas or thoughts about how to take the ECF forward and recruit/retain members I should be very glad to hear. I want to be clear though that such a hotline will not be used just for a chat, but for ideas that have not been broached in the management chain (Directors/CEO etc) already. It is not my role to bypass the management chain but I do want to be sure that good ideas get the attention that they merit.

Development Officer Guidelines.

18. General. In priority order I would ask about any decisions:

- a. Does it benefit the Chess?
- b. Does it benefit the ECF membership?
- c. Does it benefit the ECF?

19. Attitude. Subconsciously most of us are resistant to change because of the 'not invented here' syndrome, or because it is new, or because it is outside of our comfort zone. I understand that. Simply put though, I believe the ECF and its membership has to find more ways to say 'yes' and fewer ways to say 'no'.

20. Risk Taking. I have always been clear that a risk is something that we believe has a probability of coming off but a gamble is something that we do not know will come off. I might take risks, I don't gamble.

21. The 80/20 rule. Many of us want a cast iron plan before we engage, that's understandable. Some things are so obvious it does not take Stephen Hawking to work them out. Other things require careful thought. I shall strive to keep my planning to a minimum (so as not to procrastinate, but hopefully to be just as effective) and get on with the job. Sometimes I would rather be roughly right than exactly wrong.

22. Fail Fast. I do not have all the answers! I have made mistakes; we have all done so. The key for me is that if I do fail, I shall do so fast, and move on. As with chess, we often learn more from our mistakes.

23. No blame culture. I have worked in such an environment in the past. I didn't like it one bit. I don't like 'secret agendas' and I don't like blame. If someone is resourced and trained to do something, it is fair to expect them to deliver on agreed issues but if not, we must not be afraid to try and I would expect people to be supportive. It's just a better way to do business.
24. Prioritisation. This is a big issue and I should be clear about my approach. There are 101 things that a Development Officer could be doing but one person on a part-time basis cannot and never will achieve 'perfection'. When I am presented with a prioritisation question I will look first at what money/effort/outcome might result and only then decide.
25. Evolution or Revolution? Organisations always have to change to survive. This is business evolution. The ECF has had many initiatives, many members of staff and indeed many subscribing members. I believe that in some areas we need evolution but in others we need a revolution. Specifically, I can think of the way we do (or do not) market the ECF when it comes to trying to sign up new members. The ECF recognises this and it is just one of the issues that need addressing quickly.
26. Income Generation. Let me be clear. I am no accountant. I am not your 'go to' money man – we have other very competent people doing that job but I am always on the lookout for a new revenue stream. What ECF business do we have? What ECF business can we win? What ECF business can we win back? Who can we work with to improve our financial situation, and promote chess? Those sorts of questions are key and I am sure everyone asks them. We are not robots, blindly following rules – we can think of new ways to do business.
27. My letters and emails. I write three types of letters and emails. 'I shall' which means I am going to do it. 'I intend' which means I am going to do it unless you tell me otherwise and 'I May' which means I want to do it but will not do so unless you tell me too.
28. Deadlines. I will be pro-active about deadlines but will avoid where possible giving prescriptive dates. I would not say for example 'on' 23 April 2020 but 'not later than' 23 April 2020 or 'not before'. Missing a deadline, and having to explain why is never a good thing so I will always tell people if I think a deadline will be missed and expect them to do the same with me.
29. ECF ethos. I truly believe that an organisation is very much a state of mind. As in chess we should celebrate success and learn from our mistakes but in any event we should always give our best as individuals and as a team.
30. Business-like. The best definition I ever heard about a business is 'Making a profit out of delighting the customer'. This is as relevant to the ECF as it is to a bank, a zoo, a car salesroom, a plumber or a theatre company. A healthy bank balance and happy customers – is that really so difficult to strive for?
31. Trust. Maybe I am naïve, but I expect as a default position that people will do their best and make decisions that are good for the organisation and good for chess. Life can be tough I know, but if things go wrong, I do not intend to hide them.

Openness and trust are key to building a great team and a brighter future. The ECF needs this – we need to raise our profile, increase our membership and look at more

ways to be attractive to current and potential members. I will challenge, and I will expect to be challenged but my stance in life is clear. No-one has to earn my trust – they have it already. People earn ‘distrust’.

ENVOI

32. I have put no privacy marking on this document. People can feel free to disseminate it as they wish. I stand by it. The key point is that people should know my thoughts and views in this new role.

33. Those who know me will know that I have a motto in life, and it is one that I should like to bring to this particular role. I believe it was an old Chinese proverb and it said:

“Don’t complain about the dark, light a few candles”

If an ECF manager or member has not moaned about the darkness, and tried to light a candle then they will not have done wrong.

Signed original

CS Portman

Development Officer
English Chess Federation

