



Carl S Portman

ECF Development Officer – An Open Letter

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I am delighted to have been appointed to the position of ECF Development Officer. This is a new position for the ECF and also a very challenging one. I believe in timely and clear communication, so I wanted to post a very brief explanation of my thoughts and where we are at the moment.

First of all, you can find my biography and ‘Credo’ on the ECF web site which will explain in more detail who I am and what I intend to do.

Some key points about my role:

- It is a 12-month appointment
- The role is part-time
- I am not on the ECF Payroll – I am contracted to the ECF via my consultancy. (Caissa Consulting Ltd)
- I am still to agree the start date but it will hopefully be from 21st October.
- I report directly to the CEO
- I am not a member of the ECF Management Board

The three key areas I have agreed with the CEO to work on are Social Chess, Junior Chess and Women’s chess.

I cannot afford to spread myself too thinly or get bogged down in the weeds. I need to operate where I can at national and senior local levels and encourage them to use their networks to disseminate information.

In simple terms I intend to begin work in four steps.

- Communicate
- Collate
- Communicate
- Implement

Communicate

Tell people who I am and what I and the ECF propose to do. Communication should be timely and relevant.

Collate

Collate information from the English Chess community seeking opinions on what is currently happening in Social, Women’s and Junior chess in their domains and understand if and how they might like help and support to promote chess and increase membership of the ECF.

Communicate

Tell people what the feedback was.

If we don’t know where we are, how can we know what issues to tackle?



Implement

The action plan will be drawn. The what, why, how, where, when and who.

I will be arranging meetings with Directors and other key players in the ECF and of course chess organisers and personalities around the grounds. These are the people already 'in' the chess world but I am going to explore the opportunities for those yet to discover the world of chess and its inherent benefits.

Please note. This isn't something that is going to be 'done' to people. I seek collaboration and involvement from all those who want to play a part – chess players and potential chess players/supporters in chess and public life. I am assuming that we all want the same thing – to promote the wonderful game of chess. It's a simple as that. Naturally I want to boost membership, but the ECF must first win hearts and minds!

I am not the font of all chess knowledge and I am not going to hide from that. I have found with my prisons work that **no single person can do everything but everyone can do something**. The wealth of experience is 'out there' and I already know that some people want to do their bit to promote chess. That's encouraging. I am personally very excited about the role. I see it as being largely ambassadorial, and I want to introduce new people and organisations to chess.

The question of how to increase membership in any organisation is a complex one. There are many factors that can influence it, politically and economically. Ask any political party trying to recruit more supporters. They can campaign and doorstep people, leaflet people and go on a media offensive and still not gain more members. They may actually lose some. It's not easy but doing nothing is just not an option.

We live in a computer age where it is just too easy to play chess online and not leave the house. I am determined to focus on the aspect of chess being a LIVE EVENT and encourage people to partake of it and enjoy all the intellectual and social benefits that it brings. Why do we not have more chess in libraries, cafes, care homes, public houses, youth groups, town squares and the like? We have pockets of these wonderful events (run by unsung heroes) around the country but much more can be done, with the will and desire. Life is criminally short – I want to make the best of it for chess.

Will the ECF be successful in this quest? Well it depends what 'success' looks like. Numerically, an increase in membership is certainly one measure but we want more than that. The ECF wants people to gauge success by what they see, feel and hear in the chess community. As with any organisation, not everyone agrees with certain people or policies but this should be a positive and enjoyable venture for everyone – selling chess is something we do in the course of our lives in one way or another. The role is part time but that will not diminish my commitment to the business or its customers.

Ultimately, fine words and intentions mean little. Iron Maiden wrote a song called 'The Trooper' which always stays with me. It basically says if you're gonna fight, fight with your boots on, if you're not (and just whinge) then step aside.

I am laced up and ready – how about you?



Carl Portman
ECF Development Officer

