

## Gradings for the British Chess Championships

### Ursula Wielgosz

I'm a chess mum whose chess priorities are improving the game for juniors and women. I attended the AGM and was delighted to see that hidden among the papers was a Strategy which prioritised juniors, women and casual chess.

On balance I was pleased that the meeting accepted the Strategy and look forward to it being published in an obvious place on the website. I look to the extended membership to keep up the pressure on the ECF to ensure it produces and follows an implementation plan and produces useful charts showing the demographics of the membership which it commits to update each year by a specified date and report back to the AGM and full membership annually.

In the AOB part of the meeting I raised a point that I had made to the ECF and Forums a month earlier – without receiving a reply. When the draft programme for the British Championships 2020 was published, I noticed the appearance of a couple of new categories that I found troubling. Rather than the U100 category that had been part of the 2019 programme, there was now only an U100 Over 16 category (there was also a new U110 Over 16 category). The point that I had tried making earlier was that creating such a category gave a strong, negative message to juniors and their parents. Bluntly it says “we're not interested in juniors, unless they are elite”. Now that I am aware of the Strategy, I would add that the existence of these two categories in the programmes goes against the ECF's new Strategy, and as such, they should be removed.

At the meeting the ECF confirmed that the new categories had been proposed in response to complaints received by the ECF from adults who had played in the 2019 U100 about the junior competitors. The ECF failed to disclose both how many complaints and their nature, and I failed to ask. Crucially, before making this proposed change to the section, the ECF did not consult competitors of the 2019 U100 about this proposed change, which would include those adults that enjoy playing against juniors. The statistics for the 2019 U100 section show that there were 56 competitors in the 2019 U100 section – approximately half adults, half juniors. Some of the adults were parents of juniors playing in the same / other sections. The winner was a junior and six players shared second place – four juniors, two adults.

The ECF did also state at the AGM that the published programme for 2020 is still a draft, so there is still time to influence it.

At the AGM I made the following points:

- 1. The existence of the U100 Over 16 category gives the completely wrong message to juniors and their parents. Further, it was a poor decision as the change was made in response to (an unspecified but, I suspect, low number of) complaints, and without consultation of those who played in the 2019 U100, so all views were not considered.**

Since the AGM I have had time to consider the issue further. One of the benefits /

selling points of chess I see is that, unlike many sports and activities, the age and physical size of players is irrelevant to there being a good game. The only consideration of note is that the players are well matched on grade. In relation to the Strategy I would like to add:

- 2. The existence of U100 Over 16 (and U110 Over 16) categories at the blue riband British chess event of the year goes completely against the new ECF Strategy. These two sections should be replaced with sections based on grading alone.**

I accept that the above proposal does not address the complaints the ECF received about adults playing juniors in lower sections. While I dislike sections based on both grade and age, a solution could be to introduce an U100 Over 50 section. Whereas U100 Over 16 says “we don’t want beginner juniors”, U100 Over 50 says “this is for seniors only”. However, I personally think that a section with double restrictions should not attract any prize money. Those that wish to win prize money, should play well in the U100 open (which should be reinstated).