

Greetings, fellow ECF members,

I am Arasu Ganesan and a bronze member of the ECF.

It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance! Right away, I will admit that I have no knowledge at all of the administration of county chess associations, let alone the ECF! However, I am happy to volunteer for this position as a token of gratitude and give something back to a hobby that has given me many hours of enjoyment. Perhaps my ignorance could even be an advantage, as I do not represent any particular group of members and have no hidden agenda other than to see chess increase in popularity and status in England.

In my day job as a university professor, I am used to sitting in committees and debating issues in an impartial manner before taking a course of action. Hopefully, this experience will be useful for this position. Furthermore, as universities are chronically underfunded, I am used to making the most out of limited resources - much like the ECF!

If I was elected, I would listen to the membership on what the key issues are and sound out opinions and advice before making any decisions. I do have some ideas, as I believe we are living in unique times that bring with them unique opportunities for the ECF.

1. Online chess

This is the elephant in the room: the majority of chess in England is played outside the ECF by people who are not members. Online chess is more popular than ever before and has attracted a diverse group of players at all levels. While OTB chess will continue to be important, we cannot ignore the online community and need to be part of it. I feel the time is right for the ECF to create its own online platform and that this will be vital to sustain long-term growth and ensure our future existence. Whether it is free or involve a modest subscription, an ECF online site will significantly increase our membership and attract many active chess players who have no interest in traditional OTB tournaments. Furthermore, a bespoke ECF site will be tailored to our own needs, rather than being forced to adopt existing sites like chess.com.

2. Online presence

Together with a forum to play chess, we need an increased online ECF presence with up to date news on English chess. Many of us tune in to online sites to watch tournaments live and listen to their commentary. However, this is necessarily focused on the elite grandmasters rather than English players. Instead, we need our own website to follow English juniors and GMs whenever they are playing in tournaments. Even better if this can be accompanied by live analysis, which could then be posted on our own YouTube channel and create more publicity for the ECF.

3. Sponsorship

To increase the ECF's online activities will require a major financial investment. Nevertheless, we have a window of opportunity to attract serious sponsorship to the game. While sporting activities ground to a halt during the lockdown, chess continued online at a decent level and corporations are now more aware of the potential of chess as a marketing tool. Chess has also become more respectable globally thanks to a more dynamic and improved FIDE leadership (we no longer have a president who believes in aliens!). The Magnus Carlsen online tournaments show there is serious money available for chess online and we need to attract our share in England.

4. Juniors

The future of chess depends solely on teaching the next generation and encouraging our junior players. More support is needed for both boys and girls and we need to increase the number of youth tournaments around the country, ranging from the lower level to prestige tournaments like the Oakham events for the strongest players. At the same time, it is impossible to support everyone- we need to focus on our brightest talents and give them the additional resources to improve and compete at a global level.

5. Is chess a sport?

Apparently not in England, and previous attempts to have it recognized as a sport did not meet with success. However, because recognition of chess as a sport would have such a positive impact for us, we should not give up and keep up the pressure on the government. Indeed, chess is considered a sport in many countries and it is no surprise that these same countries that dominate the chess world.