

Approved by the Board September 2020

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 2019/2020. The Board has reviewed the Strategy and Business Plan document, also included in the papers to Council, and has made a few changes, mainly to reflect the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and the increased focus on online chess. The Board is happy that that document sets out the Board’s proposed direction of travel over the coming years and the objectives that the Board has set itself for 2020/2021 and beyond.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

There can be no doubt that this year has been extremely difficult for the ECF. The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the ECF, both operationally and financially. As a result of the latest measures announced by HM Government the return of over the board chess in any significant way looks more remote than ever. We are keeping developments under close review, and publish regular updates – together with our best interpretation as to what HM Government’s pronouncements are intended to say. Our sincere thanks go to all our members who have shown such faith in the ECF by renewing their memberships even though over the board chess has ‘hit the buffers’; the Board is most grateful to them. Despite those members’ best efforts, however, we still face serious financial difficulties if the current crisis extends too far into 2021, and we exhort Council members to encourage their constituents who have not yet renewed their memberships to do so if at all possible, recognising of course that many people are facing financial difficulties in these unprecedented times. We believe it is vital that the ECF’s core infrastructure is protected so that when the Covid-19 pandemic abates the ECF will emerge all the stronger.

Despite our present troubles much has been achieved. Until the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic it was very much ‘business as usual’ for the ECF, and it was also good to see non-ECF over the board events such as the Hastings Congress, the UK Chess Challenge, the London Chess Classic the 4NCL continue to flourish – as they will again. If there has been a silver lining to the Covid-19 cloud, it has been the opportunity that the cessation of over the board chess has given many of our hard-working volunteers to turn their attention to developmental initiatives that will serve us well in the future, in particular in the online chess and grading/rating arenas. Highlights include the following:

- We have carried out a full review of our operations, with some difficult decisions having to be made. We have reduced Office staffing to two members of staff, reduced administration costs, given notice on our lease so that we can move to a smaller office, home working or a combination of both, brought much of our bookkeeping in-house, insourced the company secretarial function, successfully negotiated moving the contract for the 2020 British Championships at Torquay to next year and saved costs by moving Board and Council meetings onto Zoom. Despite our best efforts, the restoration of the ECF’s finances to a reserves level of £100k or so will have to be put on hold for the foreseeable future, and it may be that despite our best efforts we will need to call on external sources of funds such as the Permanent Invested Fund to see us through the current

crisis. Furlough funding and grants from HM Government and the local council respectively have been invaluable in helping us cover, at least in part, the shortfall in membership income.

- We have made good progress in relocating the library to De Montfort University Leicester – the collection has been valued, contracts have been signed, and we anticipate that the collection will be moved later this year. Should by some remote mischance the collection not be moved before our present lease expires the collection will be put into store until such time as the move can be made.
- The new monthly rating system has been successfully launched. Further developments are planned, but the lion's share of the work on the main system has been completed. The Board's sincere thanks go to the team of volunteers, ably steered by Dave Thomas, Nigel Towers and Brian Valentine, who have given so freely of their time and effort to bring the project home. If the main thing that people have found to complain about so far is the rating database's colour scheme, that is probably a good indication of a successful piece of work! The next significant piece of work is to integrate monthly online rating into the main system, and this work is scheduled for later this year and the early part of 2021.
- Much good work has gone into developing the ECF's online chess presence. The ECF Online Clubs facility is now well established on chess.com and lichess.org and continues to grow steadily with around 5,000 members across various platforms and regular club events on a daily basis, while the regular Junior and Women's Online Clubs competitions and events are supported by more than 500 members. The ECF Online area of the ECF website is now well established with information as to how to join clubs, details of events, online news and details of how to get events rated. The online rating system now well established with six months' worth of live ratings produced on a monthly basis at standard, rapid and blitz time controls. A series of very successful national competitions has been organised, including the English Online Blitz Championship, the English Online Chess Marathon to support the Red Cross, the National Clubs Championship, the Online Counties 2020 Season (with more than 1,000 players taking part), and the North v South rematch of the 1893 and 1894 competitions. Fair play and anti-cheating guidelines and rules have been developed and published in collaboration with the 4NCL. Players in ECF Online Clubs, including a number of titled players, have taken part in the chess.com Nations League and the lichess.org Nations Cup, Nations League and World Series events with some very creditable results. The ECF has worked closely with Team England Live to support and promote participation in the World and European daily leagues where England is on track to become world champions, and organised the first ECF daily chess championships on chess.com. Finally, the ECF is developing a programme that includes guidance to leagues and clubs on how to organise and rate online events; affiliated leagues include the 4NCL, West Midlands, Five Counties, Cornwall, Hull, Cumbria and various others.
- We participated in the Online Chess Olympiad organised by FIDE at short notice to replace the cancelled over the board Olympiad scheduled for August in Moscow. Private donations meant that we were able to field a full-strength squad at no cost to the ECF: GM Michael Adams GM Luke McShane GM Gawain Jones GM David Howell, IM/WGM Jovanka Houska, IM/WGM Harriet Hunt, IM/WGM Dagne Ciuksyte, WGM Katarzyna Toma, FM Akshaya Kalaiyalahan, IM Matthew Wadsworth, FM Jonah Willow and Nadia Jaufarally. Although the draw was unkind to us, we still had chances to qualify on the third and final day – but two winning games turned to losses in the

space of 30 seconds and we were eliminated. Nonetheless, in International Director Malcolm Pein's words, 'Overall, I was pleased not only that the English chess community came together to support the team, but also that a large amount of coaching for female and junior players was part of their tournament experience.' Our thanks go to all the individuals who donated, as well as the Chess Trust and the John Robinson Youth Chess Trust for providing funds so that the juniors in the team could receive grandmaster coaching. FIDE should be congratulated for devising and successfully running such an event which must have been an enormous logistical challenge, taking place across numerous time zones and in countries with poor internet access, and it was great to see Alex Holowczak appointed as Chief Arbiter for the Olympiad – a signal honour for him and for the ECF.

- Earlier in the year, in October/November 2019 our international Open team medalled again, taking bronze at the European Team Championships in Batumi. England finished behind Russia – with whom we drew 2-2 after Michael Adams defeated Dmitry Andreikin - and Ukraine, who inflicted England's only defeat. Since our fifth place at the Chess Olympiad in 2018 our team has experienced success the like of which we have not seen in twenty years.
- Mention should be made of the annual ECF awards, which recognise the achievements of many of our volunteers during the year. This year awards were made to Oxford University Chess club (Club of the Year), Bude Chess Club (Small Club of the Year), Scorch Chess and 4NCL Online (Online Contribution of the Year), Hull 4NCL International Congress (Congress of the Year), and Graham Bromley, Ian George, Alex Holowczak, Peter Hornsby, Harry Lamb and Nigel Towers (President's Award for Services to Chess). Our thanks go to them, and to all our other volunteers who work so hard in the cause of our great game.
- Finally, we welcome the following volunteers to the ECF:

Samantha Ali (Safeguarding Officer)

Andrew Caswell (Manager of Daily Chess)

Julian Clissold (Sports and Recreation Alliance Representative, Safeguarding Lead)

David Eustace (Platinum Members Representative)

Mark Hogarth (Member, Awards Committee)

Jo Hutchinson (Manager of Women's Online Chess)

Aga Milewska (Alternate Director of Women's Chess, Bronze Members Representative)

Chris Skulte (Bronze Members Representative)

Nigel Towers (Manager of Online Chess, Secretary to the Board, Minutes Secretary)

Tim Wall (Silver Members Representative)

..... and we say goodbye, with our sincere thanks for their dedicated service to the ECF, to the following:

Phill Beckett (Safeguarding Officer)

Francis Bowers (Platinum Members Representative)

Christine Carcas (Membership Secretary)

Julie Denning (Non-Executive Director)

Adrian Elwin (Director of Home Chess)

David Eustace (Finance Director)

Julian Farrand RIP (Member, Book of the Year Committee)

Angus French (Bronze Members Representative)

Mike Gunn (Sports and Recreation Alliance)

Charles Higgin (Bronze Members Representative)

Alex Holowczak (Safeguarding Lead)

Keith Jones (Silver Members Representative)

Andrew Leadbetter (Member, Governance Committee)

William Metcalfe (Member, Awards Committee)

Ian Reynolds (Member, Finance Committee)

John Swain (U19 National Schools Organiser)

Dave Thomas (Director of Membership)