

ECF Junior Director – Election Address

Chess CV

- ECF Director of Home Chess (2013 – 2018)
- ECF Director of Junior Chess (2018 –)
- 4NCL Board member (2011 –)
- International Arbiter (2012 –), acting as Chief Arbiter of the FIDE Grand Swiss (2019, 2021), and the Online Olympiad (2020, 2021)
- Coach at several schools in and around the West Midlands (2011 –)
- Warwickshire CA Junior Secretary/Director (2010 – 2012, 2016 –)

Reflections on 2018-21

In my 2018 election address, I set out four areas in which I was particularly keen to work on:

- Developing local junior activity
- Working with other junior organisations
- Improving the selection policy
- Introducing a coaching scheme

I worked with Kent and Sussex Junior Chess Association to provide information about how counties with no regular junior activity could establish their own junior tournaments and establish junior chess within their county. Unfortunately, this activity stalled at the start of the pandemic, as over-the-board junior activity ceased.

I have worked successfully with junior organisations such as the NYCA and UKCC, and am very keen to reach out further to other organisations. In particular, the relationship with the Chess Trust's Accelerator Programme has improved to the point where the ECF is now actively engaged with it, and has a seat on the Accelerator Selection Panel. Rob Willmoth and I had a number of conversations before he came to the Director of Membership role about the lack of representation from junior organisers in ECF decision making, such as on ECF Council, and that idea flourished into what is now the EJCOA. I am very keen to use them in a consultative role going forward.

The selection policy was deliberately changed to toughen eligibility requirements. While this was not universally popular, it had the desired effect of improving the standard of English representatives in our overseas tournaments. Quantification of the exact benefits of this will need further evidence from junior OTB tournaments, which virtually ceased during the pandemic.

The ECF introduced a new Coaches Scheme, for which Nigel Towers deserves a lot of the credit.

Intentions for 2021-24

Working with other junior organisations

While working relations with some junior organisations have improved over the last three years, relations with others remain frosty at best, and there is an apparent lack of appetite from some junior organisations to work with the ECF for the benefit of English chess – or indeed, even meet with it. Nevertheless, this is an area that should be persisted with, and I will continue to do so.

Selection Policy

The policy was previously based on ratings and tournament results. This is not suitable given the pandemic and the lack of reliability of ratings in the younger age groups, and the lack of tournament opportunities for people. When OTB Championships resume, the Selection Policy will be designed to be sympathetic to these issues.

Unified Pathway

The ECF and the Chess Trust have agreed to a pyramid system where the ECF Academy feeds into the Accelerator Scheme. I intend to implement this pathway, which consists of a unified system of progression from entry level, up through the Academy and Accelerator to the England national team. I think that this will build on the successes of the Accelerator and Academy over the last few years. To make sure this unified pathway is clear in the minds of parents, the **only** academy approved within the Unified Pathway will be the ECF Academy.

Chess Syllabus

Work has already begun on establishing a chess syllabus, which would be available for chess coaches to use to teach their pupils. It would not provide lesson plans or teaching materials, which already exists in plentiful supply. The idea is that this would give structure to coaches; there was comment that while material was in plentiful supply, coaches would benefit from a structured order. Drafts of this will be sent to coaches for consultation.

Alex Holowczak
6th September, 2021