



Report of the ECF Non-Executive Directors, Julian Clissold, Stephen Woodhouse and Natasha Regan

Report to Council October 2021

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 There has been a continuing difficult environment for chess in England in 2020-21 with a background of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and changing restrictions on people's activities with the associated knock-on effects on the ability to play over-the-board chess, and the ability to plan and organise in-person events.
- 1.2 In the last year there have been a number of significant advances, led by the Board, which have provided both frequent on-line events to members who wish to play chess regularly, and also several major on-line events that have fostered wider participation and enabled ECF championships to continue in an on-line environment. Over recent months it has been possible for some in-person chess to resume and some notable events have been held. These activities have been possible due to the exceptional efforts of individual Board members and we report further on Board Progress in section 3 below.
- 1.3 We have to report that in the latter part of this year Board relations have again deteriorated to the point that over the last few months the Board has not functioned in the manner to be expected for the ECF or any other national governing body. We expand on this in section 4, Board Behaviour and Relations.

2. Board Meetings

- 2.1 The Board has met eight times since the last report to Council. All those meetings were on Zoom. There was an average attendance approaching 90% with six of the current Board having 100% attendance.
- 2.2 There have been two additions to the Board. The ECF was pleased to welcome Shohreh Bayat as the Director for Events; Shohreh has already been much in evidence at a number of ECF events. We have also been pleased to welcome Danny Rosenbaum as the Secretary to the Board who has provided invaluable support to Board meetings.
- 2.3 The Board has moved away from including Directors Reports at every meeting, instead relying on Directors to keep the Board informed of activities within their Directorates. The Board has also scrutinised reports on Finance and Membership at every meeting in order to assure themselves of the health of the organisation.

3. Board Progress

3.1 The NEDs are happy to report that there have been a number of significant advances, led by the Board:

- In response to the Covid crisis, the Board has guided a number of initiatives. Including ongoing advice to Clubs, Leagues and Congresses on how to respond. This has been led by the CEO and the Director of Home Chess.
- Numerous regular online chess tournaments online have been established for both Juniors and Adults, offering members the chance to play in individual and team events. Some examples include:
 - Rapid and Blitz Grand Prix events which have been popular, and have been financially successful
 - Weekly individual events at various time controls
 - Team battles against other nations in an arena format
 - England has had an Open (organised by Nigel Towers) and Women's team (organised by Lawrence Cooper) in the Lichess Liga (sometimes known as "the Quarantine League". The English Chess Players team has played Thursday and Sunday evenings, often with live commentary, and reached the top Division
 - Regular junior events
- There have been several major events organised by the ECF. This includes:
 - Two highly successful British Online Chess Championships held in the last year (for 2020 and 2021), including championships events for Open, Women, Juniors and Seniors categories at a range of time controls.
 - The Chess for All event encouraging beginners to learn chess and culminating in simultaneous displays from master players.
 - The Checkmate Coronavirus marathon in aid of the British Red Cross. This included live commentary throughout the event from a range of commentators
 - These have been led by the CEO, and the Directors of Home Chess and Junior Chess, with significant contributions from the newly appointed Director of Events.
- A recent in person event ChessFest organised by the International Director saw in-person chess in Trafalgar Square and Liverpool.

- 3.2 The Board has agreed the revised operation of Safeguarding, establishing a team of colleagues with experience and appropriate qualifications in such matters. The Board welcomed the presence of Samantha Ali and Paul Sharratt.

4. Board Behaviour and Relations

- 4.1 In its October 2020 Report to Council, NEDs drew Council attention to concerns about the behaviour of some Board members and deteriorating Board relations.
- 4.2 The Board established a Code of Conduct in November 2020, but the writing and adoption of the Code created further disagreements and the terms of the Code have not always been respected by all Board members.
- 4.3 The conduct of Board meetings and related business has continued to be difficult this year. There have been multiple examples of poor board behaviour resulting in conflict on the Board and the disclosure of information in the public domain which should have been confidential to the Board. Some Board members have sought to resolve personal differences through the use of formal complaint procedures which are not designed for that purpose rather than discussion between Board members and at Board meetings. This in turn has created substantial amounts of work for other Board members which has distracted the Board from its main focus of managing and developing the ECF and contributed to a cycle of diminishing trust and confidence between Board members.
- 4.4 In July 2021, a report was noted on the English Chess Forum. The report included an account of a discussion at the Board and went on to identify how a number of Board members had voted, naming the members. This was a breach of confidentiality of Board matters.
- 4.5 Board decisions are taken and reported as collective decisions. The voting patterns of members are confidential and are not in the minutes in accordance with normal corporate governance practice.
- 4.6 It is unclear who was the source of the leak. The NEDs asked Members whether they had shared voting patterns of board members. Eight confirmed that they had not so shared, four declined to respond to the question. NEDs decided to take no further action.
- 4.7 There have been two complaints raised under Regulation 5 in respect of the conduct of Mike Truran (MT). The first was made on 6th August 2021 by Rob Willmoth. It was found that MT had given offence but that this was followed by a timely and unequivocal apology. The complaint was rejected with a finding that there was no serious maladministration and therefore no breach of Regulation 5 (see: [Regulation-5-Complaint.pdf \(englishchess.org.uk\)](#)). That finding is subject to an appeal.

- 4.8 The second complaint was made by Chris Fegan (CF) on 30th August 2021 and is ongoing at the date of this report.
- 4.9 In August 2021, a series of posts on the English Chess Forum initiated by CF, included a highly critical, and in places offensive, denigration of MT. The posts also referred to the Complaint reported above, despite the Board having previously agreed that the matter should not be discussed in public. This risked prejudicing the decision of the panel examining the complaint.
- 4.10 This resulted in the Governance Committee writing to the NEDs to suggest that action be taken in respect of the posts citing various breaches of the duties by CF. These included:
- (i) Breach of confidentiality as a director.
 - (ii) Breach of the agreed board policy on prohibiting the use of social media without the prior consent of the CEO.
 - (iii) Bringing the board into disrepute contrary to Paragraph 2.1 of Regulation 4.
 - (iv) Denigrating a colleague (in contravention of the Code of Conduct for Board members).
 - (v) Failing to act collegiately (also in contravention of the Code of Conduct).
- 4.11 The NEDs raised the matter with CF. At the time of writing there has been no adequate response.
- 4.12 Overall, the Board has not functioned in the manner to be expected of the ECF or any other national governing body. The NEDs hope and expect that following the elections, the Board will back whoever is Chief Executive, providing them with support to create an effective and functioning team to achieve the key strategic objectives for the ECF, maximise the value which members receive, increase membership and deliver an ECF which the Board and its members want to belong to and expand.

English Chess Federation Non-Executive Directors

ECF NEDs
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