

AGM 2021 Nomination

Election Address - Director of Women's Chess – Fenella Headlong

I am a female chess player originally from London, now having lived in Wiltshire for many years, applying for the role of ECF Director of Women's Chess. I feel that I can provide valuable insights and leadership from a combination of having played chess for many years, having undertaken a range of chess organisation roles, plus skills from my professional career. I have been playing school, club, junior county, league, county and tournament chess since the mid-1970s, and more recently have a parent's perspective from my teenage daughter's chess playing.

I am keen for girls to learn chess and to love playing chess, and to keep playing through the key dropout points of going to secondary school, peer pressure as a teenager, and moving into key exam years. I would like to build on and develop a range of opportunities for women to play OTB chess, reaching out to those who are geographically more remote, and those who online chess most suits. I am keen to ensure that events like the English Women's Championship and the 4NCL Women's League continue. I would be looking to ensure that the strongest players have suitable norm and other opportunities.

I feel that women's chess is at a pivotal point, and now is a golden opportunity to build on new enthusiasms from The Queen's Gambit. Additionally, whilst online chess is no substitute for OTB chess, I can see that there are some advantages and inclusivity aspects to online chess (for those juggling young families or with caring responsibilities where leaving the house might be difficult, or where participants face long journeys, or where there isn't the inclination or money to play in a weekend or week-long activity). Online chess also provides a great opportunity to coach juniors and novices of all ages in a way that is more accessible.

I understand the pressures and challenges that chess players, and in particular female chess players have, whilst juggling career and family, and I have had several breaks from playing in my 30s and early 40s. It would be fantastic to see more women, especially those who have been prominent juniors in the past, returning to chess.

Chess Playing:

- England Faber Cup Team (now the Gilbert Cup) 1985
- BUCA (inter university competition) 1986-1988. Out of 24 teams of 6 players each year I was the only female player.
- 3rd in the British Ladies Chess Championship Blackpool 1988
- Several times West of England Ladies' Champion
- Peak rating of 167
- Current joint English Women's Over 50 Champion
- 4NCL league player (Division 2)
- Online county chess – Western Counties 2021 online championship

Chess Organising:

- Wiltshire 1st Team Captain in the mid-1990s, taking the team to the final of the ECF Minor Counties competition in 1996 for the first time ever, where we narrowly lost to Sussex
- President of the West of England Chess Union 2003 - 2005
- Chair of Wiltshire Junior Chess 2015 to 2018
- Wiltshire Girls Team Captain for a number of years, including an amazing =2nd finish at the EPSCA Girls in 2017

Volunteering:

- School Governor for 6 years including Vice Chair of the overall governing body, and Chair of the Finance sub committee

Professional Life:

I am a Programme Manager working on business / IT projects, in a client (corporate pensions) environment. I have a degree, an MBA, and am a Member of the Chartered Management Institute (MCMI).

My business background means that I have experience of stakeholder management, working collaboratively with a range of people for mutual common goals, and pragmatism. I hope that these skills will enable me to work successfully with other members of the ECF Board and other key organisations. This, along with my chess organising experience, vision, “can do” attitude, and a genuine desire to represent the views of women’s chess and improve women’s chess, will be key strengths I would bring to the role.

Fenella Headlong

8th September 2021