

## Election Address from Malcolm Pein

Once or twice in a generation, an opportunity arises to develop the game of chess in this country. This feels like one of those moments. The success of *The Queens Gambit* and the explosion in online chess has inspired many new social players. The game's profile has been raised in the media and the female role model in the Netflix series appears to have inspired more women and girls to play. There were two more 'chess boom' articles in the press just today (Sept. 7).

The challenge for the ECF is to support and nurture this social chess boom and convert some of the social players to competitive players, to the general benefit of chess organisations, clubs and congresses. With that in mind, I have concluded we need a change in direction for the ECF.

Currently, the ECF is effectively an 'enabling' organisation that devotes itself, with limited resources to provide services to its membership base while effectively 'outsourcing' some areas of chess development and activity. Two obvious examples of successful 'outsourcing' are of course the *4NCL* and *Chess in Schools and Communities (CSC)*, which are both self-funded and have made a huge contribution.

The problem with this policy stance is that while the *4NCL* and *CSC* are very successful, it leaves a vacuum and associated opportunity cost in many other areas. I want the ECF to adopt a more ambitious forward-looking approach that befits a governing body. It should attempt to fund raise and actively engage with government while seeking to grow the game.

There is huge potential. While ECF membership fluctuates around 10,000, the number of English based players on the major chess servers is over a million. The recent *ChessFest* in Trafalgar Square on July 18 run by *CSC* attracted 6,000 people - despite Covid restrictions - of all ages and backgrounds. The vast majority were social players who had never seen the inside of a chess club before. See: [https://youtu.be/kB62-e\\_tOB4](https://youtu.be/kB62-e_tOB4)

What was particularly pleasing about ChessFest was engagement with the Department of Culture Media and Sport with words of welcome from the DCMS Minister Oliver Dowden, who described the game as both a '*sport and a cultural pursuit*'. This was something of a landmark on which I intend to try and capitalise. You can see the Minister's message here: <https://www.chessinschools.co.uk/dcms-congratulates-chessfest>

Chess's development has been stifled by a lack of government support due to the game having no official status. We now have an opportunity to engage with government and this requires the ECF to step up to its role as the governing body and be the initiator of ambitious plans to develop social chess and bring the game to a wider audience, both to increase the game's popularity and feed players into our traditional mainstays of clubs, congresses and leagues, both OTB and online.

The first prerequisite for this is leadership. It's important Council members understand I have tried to avoid a contested election. I wrote to Mike Truran to try and resolve our differences before standing.

**Strategic Approach:**

Mike has written to me that he believes in the 'enabling only' approach. I have outlined my vision above.

**BCF, Chess Centre Ltd, PIF:**

My second difference with Mike is on the future allocation of approximately £200,000 of investments, cash and other assets that remain in the BCF.

In my view, the BCF/ECF structure should be streamlined ASAP and BCF/PIF funds put into the ECF for the benefit of members:

- 1) To build the reserves to an amount specified by the Finance Committee, likely £100,000.
- 2) To limit or avoid entirely any possible increase in membership fees.
- 3) For the benefit of clubs, leagues and congresses to support Covid-recovery through assistance with the areas highlighted by clubs in the recent survey (see ECF Website).

This can be done partly by the engagement of Development Officers, one to assist clubs, leagues and congresses in the NCCU & MCCU and one for the SCCU, EACU and WECU. To assist congresses, we should relaunch the Weekend Grand Prix.

Mike's view, expressed in several board meetings and specified in the draft 21-22 ECF Strategy Statement and Business Plan, is that some or all of the BCF assets should be moved to the Chess Trust, a charity. **I am against these funds being moved anywhere other than the ECF** and I have tabled a motion for Council to consider.

The issues are clear, and I hope you will decide on the basis of them.



**Malcolm Pein**