

Rolling Membership Year Proposal

Proposal

Council is invited to consider and, the ECF Board hopes, approve the proposal to move from fixed membership years (1 September – 31 August) to rolling membership years (new/rejoining members receive a full year's membership regardless of (re)joining date). Memberships will be back-dated to the start of the month in which they are taken out.

If approved, it is intended that the new arrangements will be implemented at the start of July.

Rationale

Our current membership year arrangements mean that anybody wishing to join the ECF as a member receives progressively less value from the ECF's benefits package the later in the membership year they join, since at present membership benefits run only to 31 August regardless of the point at which a new member joins. There is accordingly a significant disincentive for new members to join the ECF unless they join at the start of the membership year. The 'sticking plaster' solution of offering up to 14 months' membership for people joining after 30 June is hardly in the nature of a long-term solution.

The ECF accordingly suffers from a significant disadvantage at present in its ability to market the various benefits it offers to potential new members at any point other than the start of each membership year. A case in point is the proposed new student membership scheme, which we would like to market as soon as possible after April's Council meeting to students but which would in the absence of a rolling membership year arrangement effectively need to be held over until the new membership year.

Other Observations

We considered two other approaches: (a) backdating the renewal of existing members to the expiry date of their previous membership; (b) pro-rating membership fees for new members based on the period between joining and 31 August. Both approaches would involve significant expense in IT development work and (as ECF Membership Support Officer Dave Thomas' supporting paper explains) significant extra complexity in the case of (a). The current proposal to Council involves no extra cost and is easy to administer.

The main risk we considered when preparing this proposal is of players trying to 'game' the system by deliberately delaying their membership renewal. We consider this risk to be small, and in any event, even if it occurred, more of a cash flow issue than a loss of profit issue for the following reasons:

- 1 Evidence from the Covid period tells us that members renewed in high numbers even when they were getting no benefit from one of our main membership benefits (monthly rating) – presumably because of the goodwill they felt towards the ECF and the value they placed on the overall benefits package (which we recognise is still work in progress). We are profoundly grateful to our members for their support during that hugely difficult time, and have no reason to believe on that basis that members would attempt to 'game' the system in any significant numbers.

- 2 In any event, even if local league players in particular did attempt to do, so their ability to defer renewal is limited by the requirement to get their memberships in order by 30 June (as now) if game fee is to be avoided (but see note below).
- 3 Players who play only congress chess in many cases probably renew just before the first congress for which they do not have membership status so as to avoid the congress pay to play fee. There is no reason to suppose that that would change under the proposed new arrangements.

The JustGo (formerly called Azolve) system is capable of producing the required management information to enable the necessary accrual/deferred income calculations to be carried out for management accounting and year end statutory reporting purposes.

No changes are required to the wording of the ECF's articles or bye-laws. Although that theoretically means that there is no requirement to bring this proposal before Council the ECF Board considered that not to do so would be entirely inappropriate for a proposal of this nature.

We would welcome Council's thoughts on whether the existing 14 month membership deal should be kept in place for this year only as an added incentive for new members to join in July and August, in particular to support the proposed new membership scheme.

Game Fee: Note

We understand that there are perfectly valid reasons why local league players may not be ECF members on the 30 June following a league season (e.g. giving up chess, emigration, illness, death). In such cases leagues/clubs may apply for the game fee liability to be waived if such players were ECF members for all the league games that they played in the season in question. Where waivers are granted the ECF Office will carry out retrospective checks on the playing status of the players concerned in the following season.