

ECF Counties Championship Rules 2021/22

Updated 19th March 2022

Reference in these rules to counties shall be construed as applying to Counties admitted to membership in accordance with Article 5.2 of the ECF Articles.

All references to rating below are to over-the-board rating unless stated otherwise.

Section A: The Competitions & Financial Arrangements

A1. Competition Structure

A1.1. The Championship shall have the following sections —

- (i) Open, having no upper rating limit
- (ii) Minor Counties, having a team maximum mean rating of 2050 (see C4)
- (iii) Players under 2050 rating
- (iv) Players under 1850 rating
- (v) Players under 1650 rating
- (vi) Players under 1450 rating.

The Championship shall be held each year under the direction of the Director of Home Chess who shall appoint a controller for the Final Stage, the “National Controller”.

A1.2. Each section of the Championship shall be divided into two stages: the Union Stage and the Final Stage. Entry to the Final Stage is by nomination from the Unions as provided by Section B.

A1.3. In the Union Stage, each team shall pay an entry fee, which shall be decided by the Board, to the ECF, and any games played will be charged according to the normal ECF regulations for leagues.

A1.4. The Final Stage is organised by the ECF. Each game played in all sections will be ECF rated. In addition, all games played in the Open section will be FIDE rated.

For this season, the entry fee for each team is £24 for A1.1.(i) to A1.1.(v) inclusive, and £18 otherwise.

A2. Membership Requirements & Fines

A2.1. In the Final Stage all players in all sections must be ECF members at bronze level or above. Counties will be levied the cost of bronze membership for each non-member in their team, and such players will be upgraded to bronze membership.

A2.2. All players with the exception of those who are FIDE registered to non-Eng countries must be ECF members at gold level or above if they play more than one game in the Final Stage of the Open section. Counties will be levied the difference between the player’s level of membership and the cost of gold membership, once a player has played a second game in the Final Stage of the Open section, and such players will be upgraded to gold membership.

Section B: The Union Stage

B1. The Union Stage shall be conducted by the Unions and shall be run by them according to their own rules. It may, but need not, include qualifying competitions for one or more sections of the Final Stage.

B2. Each Union may nominate two counties to the Final Stage of any section, whether or not it has conducted a qualifying competition for that section.

B3. If a Union conducts a qualifying competition for a section of the Championship, and in the qualifying competition five or more teams complete their fixtures without defaulting a match, the Union may nominate three counties for the Final Stage of that section. The National Controller may give a dispensation if the last round of fixtures could not be completed because of extenuating circumstances.

B4. Counties nominated for, or declining nomination for, the Final Stage of the Open section may not be nominated for the Minor section.

B5. The Secretary or County Match Controller of each Union shall, not later than 27th March, send to the National Controller the name(s) of the nominated team(s) of that Union in each section of the Championship, stating the order in which they are being nominated, and that the teams so named have accepted nomination.

For the covid-19 affected 2021/22 season for all Championships other than the U1850 (which is likely to require a preliminary round), a Union conducting a qualifying competition that has not concluded by 27th March may on giving notice to the Controller defer declaring the order of nominations until the conclusion of that competition and in any event by no later than 28 days before the default date for the quarter final of the Championship concerned.

Section C: Eligibility

C1. Competition Season and Rating Lists

C1.1. For the purposes of these rules, a season shall start on 1st September and shall end on the date of the Final Round of the current Championship.

C1.2.

(a) Rating limits shall be based on the published ECF standard chess monthly Official Original Rating List current at the start of the season (ie the September 2021 list).

(b) A player who has no rating in the list current at the start of the season may play in the Final Stage if:

(i) the player acquires a rating in the ECF standard chess monthly Official Original Rating List current on 1 April, in which case this rating will be used, or

(ii) permission has been previously obtained from the National Controller. Requests for permission must be submitted to the National Controller so as to arrive at least seven days before the player is due to play. The team captain must submit evidence from the local rating officer or master list or other source. Such a player shall be declared ineligible (or no longer eligible) if the National Controller is not (or has ceased to be) convinced that the player's strength is clearly below the relevant rating limits. The National Controller shall, as soon as practical, assign the player a rating for the purposes of the Championship only.

C1.3.

(a) For the purposes of board order in the Open section (see E4.2), the following FIDE standard chess rating Lists will be used for each round:

Preliminary Round – 31st March

Quarter Finals – 30th April

Semi Finals – 31st May

Final – 31st May

(b) A player who has no FIDE standard chess rating will be assigned a rating equal to his rating in the equivalent ECF standard monthly Official Original Rating List. For example, the 1st May list for the Quarter Finals.

(c) A player who has no current monthly Official rating will be assigned a rating equal to his last published rating.

(d) An unrated player will be assigned an estimated rating assigned according to the procedure of C1.2.

C1.4.

(a) For the purposes of board order in all other sections (see E4.2), the following ECF standard chess monthly Official Original Lists will be used for each round:

Preliminary Round – 1st April

Quarter Finals – 1st May

Semi Finals – 1st June

Final – 1st June

(b) An unrated player will be assigned an estimated rating according to the procedure of C1.2.

C2. Counties Entitled to Participate

All nominated Counties are eligible to compete in the Final Stage of the Championship provided that they have paid the entry fee and that neither they nor the nominating Union are in arrears with any other monies due to the ECF.

C3. Players Eligible to Participate

C3.1. A player is eligible to represent a County in the Championship if the player meets one of the following criteria:

(i) Birth in that county.

(ii) Five years' domicile in that county at any time.

- (iii) Two months' immediate previous and present membership of a club either in or affiliated to that County.
- (iv) One month's immediately previous and present domicile in that County.
- (v) Present attendance as a student at a school, college or university in that County.

and is neither FIDE registered for Russia nor Belarus. (*Players with a Russian or Belarusian registration can use FIDE's fast track procedure to change their FIDE affiliation to FID, which will need to be reviewed on 31 May 2022.*)

C3.2. In the course of a season no player may represent more than one County in over-the-board competition, and no player may represent more than one team in the same section of the Championship.

C3.3. The penalty for playing an ineligible player in any match shall be the loss of the game for that player and a win for the opponent, provided the opponent is present and eligible; plus a deduction of one penalty point for each ineligible player from the resulting total score made by the County in that match. The game will still be rated according to the result of the game as played. The National Controller may impose an additional penalty if he is satisfied that the inclusion of an ineligible player was deliberate or wilful.

C4. Eligibility of Minor Counties Teams

C4.1. Each team must have an average rating not exceeding 2050. For every 5 points, or part thereof, by which the average rating exceeds the limit, one penalty game point will be deducted from the team's total score in the match.

Section D: The Final Stage: Administrative Arrangements

D1. The Role of the National Controller

D1. The Final Stage of each section shall be conducted by the National Controller. Any decision made by the National Controller regarding the administration of the competition may be appealed to the Appeals Committee. The captain shall submit a written statement to the National Controller within 48 hours of the scheduled start time of the match and have paid a deposit of £50 which will be returned if the appeal succeeds. The Appeal will be heard in accordance with Rule F2.

D2. The Draw for the Final Stage

D2.1. If there are less than eight nominations in total for any championship, the National Controller may invite extra entries from eligible teams. If a Union is invited to field an extra team in a section in one year, it shall only be asked to fill a vacancy in the next season if all other Unions decline.

D2.2. Should there be more than eight nominations, a preliminary round shall be played before the Quarter Final. Teams placed in the preliminary round shall, where

possible, be the third nominees of Unions. They shall only be first nominees if there is no other legal way to do the draw.

D2.3. The draw for the preliminary round (if required), and for the Quarter Finals and Semi Finals, shall be made once all Unions have nominated their teams in accordance with B5. The draw will be made by a Committee consisting of the National Controller, the Director of Home Chess and the Chief Arbiter, and shall be published not later than 8th April for Championships with a preliminary round and for others no later than 28 days before the default date for the quarter final of the Championship concerned.

D2.4. The home teams in the Quarter Finals shall be drawn from the first nominees of the Unions. The National Controller has the right to adjust the Quarter Final draw or the preliminary round as he deems fit in the light of teams actually nominated by Unions and the need to fill any vacancies.

D2.5. The first and second nominees of a Union in a section will be kept apart in the draw until the Final. The third nominee of a Union in a section will be kept apart from other teams in that Union until the Semi Finals. This shall not apply in respect of any extra nominations accepted by the National Controller under rule D2.1.

D3. Arrangements for Final Stage Matches

D3.1. Matches shall be played on, or by mutual agreement before, or on the Sunday immediately following, the dates here listed –

Preliminary Round – Fourth Saturday in April
Quarter Finals (Open, Minor, U1850 and U1450) – Second Saturday in May
Quarter Finals (U2050 and U1650) – Third Saturday in May
Semi-Finals – Second Saturday in June
Finals – First Saturday in July

These dates may be varied by the Director of Home Chess not later than 31st October in each season and shall be notified within 7 days to Union Controllers.

This season, the default dates are — 23rd April, 14th May, 21st May, 11th June, and the Finals will be played on 2nd July

D3.2. In the Final of the Championship, the Director of Home Chess may at his discretion nominate a central venue. With this exception, all matches shall be arranged by the Counties concerned. The County drawn away may insist on an intermediate venue provided they notify the home county of their decision at least a fortnight before the scheduled date and provided it is prepared to make all the arrangements and that all expenses are shared by the teams concerned. It is the responsibility of the County drawn at home to provide refreshments for the away County, except that where a match is played at an intermediate venue, refreshments should be provided for both teams, expenses to be shared. An intermediate venue should not disadvantage either team and as far as possible should be of comparable distance from their respective County towns as listed in the Appendix.

For the 2021/22 season the Finals are expected to be played together at a venue in the midlands (the Holiday Inn at Birmingham International Airport is currently under consideration) subject to any prevailing covid-19 conditions. The Home Director will take a final decision as to location of the Finals in May 2022.

D3.3. The match captain of the team arranging the venue shall be responsible for advising the other team's match captain in writing of the venue arrangements and conditions of use so they are received seven days before the date of the match and shall also be responsible for setting up boards, sets and clocks and providing scoresheets.

D3.4. At the request of either match captain, made not less than seven days before the match takes place, a neutral arbiter shall be appointed. Upon receiving such a request, the National Controller will make a suitable appointment, which may not be appealed against. Both counties will be charged £20 at the conclusion of the Championship, and the ECF will pay the arbiter's expenses. It is strongly recommended that counties arrange for arbiters to be present at each match.

D3.5 Any match other than at a central venue may be played as a hybrid match by agreement between the team captains provided that:

- (a) the ECF guidelines for hybrid matches at Section F of the ECF Tournament Rules are followed;
- (b) a neutral arbiter is present at each venue; and
- (c) the National Controller is notified and provided with details of the arrangements at least 7 days before the match.

D3.6 Where applicable government legislation and/or guidance allows people to meet but sets a limit on how close they can be Section E of the ECF Tournament Rules permitting any game to be played using two boards shall apply and any requested variation thereof approved by the National Controller.

D3.7 Venues and playing conditions must be compliant with any HMG or local government covid-19 regulations in force at the time of the match. Organisers of venues are strongly advised to undertake a covid-19 risk assessment in conjunction with the venue as appropriate and to follow any government and ECF guidance as to covid mitigations to reduce the risk of spread of infection.

D4. Defaults

D4.1. Any County which fails to pay entry fees or any other monies due as provided by these rules shall, unless the Director of Home Chess decides otherwise, not be accepted for nomination to the Final Stage of that Championship in the following season.

D4.2. Should any County, having been nominated by its Union for the Final Stage of any of the Championships and having accepted such nomination in accordance with Section B, default any match, or any game in a match, it shall be required to reimburse such of its opponent's reasonable expenses incurred as the National Controller shall determine in the absence of agreement; and unless the National Controller decides

otherwise shall also pay compensation to the ECF of £20 per game defaulted or £100 per match defaulted, whichever is less; such compensation levied and received by the ECF shall be passed on by the ECF to the innocent county defaulted against.

D5. Reporting of Results

D5.1. The arbiter will report the result of a match to the National Controller. If an arbiter is not present, results must be reported by both teams on the results server not later than 48 hours after the match was played. If a result is not reported or confirmed within the due time, the National Controller may impose a fine of £10 on the offending County or Counties. If neither team reports the result, the National Controller may eliminate both teams.

D6. Return of Trophies

It is the responsibility of trophy winners to take all reasonable steps to look after the trophies and to return them in a clean condition. The trophy winner shall have the trophy engraved and may claim the cost from the Director of Home Chess. Trophies must be returned in a secure manner to the National Controller or his nominee at least three weeks before the next season's Finals Day. By prior agreement of the National Controller, at least one month beforehand, trophies may be returned on Finals Day itself.

Section E: The Final Stage: General Rules

E1. Pre-Match Arrangements

E1.1. Any matter affecting the arrangement of a match on which officials of the Counties concerned cannot agree shall be referred to the National Controller whose decision shall be final on all points, whether arising under these rules or otherwise.

E2. Number of Boards

E2.1. In any match in the Final Stage of the Championship, each County shall be represented by 16 players except in the Under 1450 section, where the number of players shall be 12.

E2.2. The number of players in any match may be varied by the National Controller or by agreement between the team captains and the National Controller, having regard to applicable government legislation and/or guidance on indoor gatherings and social distancing.

E2.3. One game shall be played between each pair of players. No player may play more than one board in any one match.

E3. Time Limit

E3.1. The time limit shall be all moves in 135 minutes, plus a 15 second increment per move from move 1 (G135'/15").

E3.2. Where suitable digital clocks are not available for an entire match to be played with this time limit, then the time limit shall be 40 moves in 2 hours, plus a 30 minute quickplay finish (40/120' + G30').

E3.3. The time limit of any match may be varied by agreement between the captains with the permission of the National Controller.

E4. Responsibilities of the Captains

E4.1. At least 15 minutes before the time fixed for the start of play, the captains shall exchange team lists, with players arranged in board order. Any known defaults shall be placed on the lowest boards. It is the responsibility of the captain to provide the names of the players, their ECF rating reference numbers and their ratings on the result sheet. Where an opponent's team list is not available to a captain by this deadline, then the captain may insist that: (i) the start be delayed until at least 15 minutes after the completed result sheet has been provided to him, and (ii) the amount of time lost by starting late is deducted from the opposing team's clocks.

E4.2.

In all sections a player cannot be listed on a board below another who is rated (or deemed to be rated) lower than the player. Offending board orders must be corrected before the toss for colours.

E4.3. Upon completion of E4.1 and E4.2, the captains shall toss for colour. The home captain shall toss the coin, and the away captain should call. The captain winning the toss shall choose to take white on either the odd- or the even-numbered boards.

E4.4. At the time fixed for the start of play, the captains shall start the clocks of the players having the move. If this cannot happen on any game of a match because the team responsible for setting up boards, sets and clocks and providing scoresheets in accordance with D3.3 has not done so by the time fixed for start of play, then the amount of time lost due to the delayed start must be deducted from the clock of each player from that team whose game is late starting.

E4.5. If a player is absent, a substitute may be put in up to one hour from the start of the clock, and the original game shall be annulled. A new game shall be started between the substitute and his opponent, with the clock of the substitute adjusted such that the elapsed time since the start of clocks shall be deducted from his thinking time. If no substitute is available, then his opponent, if present, shall score the game a win. If neither player is present nor can be substituted, then the game shall be scored as lost by both players. (For clarification, because a substitution is made after the coin toss, the substitute does not need to comply with the requirements of E4.2.)

E4.6. A player may only ask the arbiter or his captain for the match score at any time. A captain when providing the match score may also state the tie break position. No other information may be provided to any player. Players must not ask their captain or anyone else about whether or not they should offer, or accept the offer of, a draw. If

a captain or anyone else communicates with a player in his team contrary to the provisions of this rule, then the arbiter may decide to declare the game lost for that player. If no arbiter is present, then the incident may be reported to the National Controller after the match, who will decide the result of any affected games.

E4.7. The National Controller may impose a penalty if he is satisfied that the board order did not meet the requirements of E4.2 because a captain deliberately or wilfully provided incorrect ratings of players to the opposing captain.

E4.8. In the Open section, the captain should make sure that all players have a FIDE ID (other than of a Russian or Belarusian affiliation) before the player plays the game. For all players without a FIDE ID, the captain must either:

(a) In the case of a player who wishes to appear as English on the FIDE-rating list, inform the National Controller of the player's date of birth and a FIDE ID will be created for the player, or

(b) In the case of a player who wishes to appear as something other than England, Russia or Belarus on the FIDE-rating list, instruct the player to contact the appropriate Federation in order to acquire a FIDE ID or FIDE in the case of a former Russian or Belarusian affiliate seeking to transfer to FID. Should the player not have a FIDE ID seven days before the match, the player may only play in the match with the permission of the National Controller.

E5. Result of the Match

E5.1. The match shall be won by the team which has scored more game points. Where game points are equal, the result shall be decided by:

(i) Board Count: the numbers of the boards won by each team shall be added, and the team with the lower total shall win. If the tie is not thereby resolved;

(ii) Elimination: the lowest board shall be eliminated from the match score. This operation shall be repeated until the scores are unequal. If the tie is not thereby resolved;

(iii) Colour: the match will be won by the team which had black on board 1.

E6. Mobile Phones and Electronic Communication Devices

E6.1. During play, a player must not have any access to mobile phones, electronic means of communication or devices capable of suggesting chess moves. Such devices, if brought into the playing venue, must be completely switched off and placed in a bag on or under the player's table before play starts. A player, when still in play, is forbidden to leave the playing area with such a bag, unless an arbiter gives permission. If it is evident that a player has such a device on their person in the playing venue, the player shall lose the game. The opponent shall win. Dispensation from this rule may be sought from the National Controller.

Section F: The Appeals Process

F1. Resolution on the Day

(a) If there is a dispute between two players in a game, it shall be resolved by the arbiter present at the venue.

(b) If there is no arbiter present at the venue, then a player who has finished their game – ideally the captains – shall attempt to phone one of the arbiters provided by the National Controller at the start of the competition, who shall make a ruling to resolve the dispute.

(c) If it is impossible to contact one of the arbiters in (b), then the captains may attempt to resolve the dispute until such time as an arbiter can be reached.

Any final decision made by an arbiter may be appealed to the Appeals Committee. The captain shall submit a written statement to the National Controller and Director of Home Chess within 48 hours of the scheduled start time of the match and have paid a deposit of £50 which will be returned if the appeal succeeds.

F2. Appeals Committee

The appeal will be heard by the Appeals Committee, which shall be composed of three members of the Appeals Panel appointed by the Director of Home Chess. The Committee shall be Chaired by an International Arbiter; the other two members shall not be International Arbiters. The people on the Panel will be published before the start of the Final Stage, and it will have at least five members plus the Chief Arbiter.

F3. Appeals Process – Director of Home Chess

Upon receipt of an Appeal by the Director of Home Chess, he shall go through the following process:

1. Inform the opposing team of the receipt of the appeal.
2. Appoint an Appeals Committee
3. Ask the National Controller, or the arbiter who made the decision, to provide a written statement about the incident within 48 hours of being invited to do so by the Director of Home Chess.
4. Ask the opposing team to provide a written statement about the incident within 48 hours of being invited to do so by the Director of Home Chess.
5. Send these statements to the Appeals Committee.

F4. Appeals Process – Appeals Committee

1. The Committee shall receive all statements provided to them by the Director of Home Chess and invite all parties to comment on each statement. The Committee may put specific questions to each of the respondents about their statements, or their responses to each statement.
2. The Committee shall meet and make any decision necessary.
3. The Committee shall write a report of the incident, including any explanations and

recommendations going forward, and send it to the Director of Home Chess. This report should be received by the Director of Home Chess within 72 hours of the statements being sent to them by the Director of Home Chess.

F5. Appeals Process – Notification to all Parties

1. The Director of Home Chess shall then distribute the report of the Committee to both teams, the arbiter who made the decision, and the National Controller.
2. The Director of Home Chess will, if the appeal is successful, instruct the Office to refund the £50 deposit.

Section G: The Final Stage: Arrangements for Finals Day

G1. Venue and Timing Rules

G1.1. The Director of Home Chess may arrange a Finals Day, on which all Finals are played at a central venue (see Rule D3.2). The start time for the Finals shall be 1:30pm. The time control will be as specified in Rule E3.1, which will not be varied.

G1.2. In the event that the central venue is more than a drive of 3.5 hours from its County town, a county may opt to play all of its Finals at intermediate venues, at its own cost.

G.1.2.1 County towns are listed in the Appendix. The time taken will be calculated by reference to the AA's route planner.

G.1.2.2 The county must find a venue acceptable to the National Controller for each of its Finals.

G.1.2.3 Notice that the county wishes to play at intermediate venues must be given to the National Controller by no later than the close of nominations under rule B5.

G.1.2.4 The National Controller shall publish a list of approved Counties who have elected to opt out of the central venue for Finals Day with the Final Stage draws (see Rule D2.3).

G1.3. A County listed as opted out from playing its Finals at the central venue may only play at a different venue on Finals day if it meets all venue and arbiter costs and within 7 days of notice of its opponent(s) in the Finals has for each of its teams in the Finals:

(a) provided the National Controller with a copy of the hire agreement for a suitable intermediate venue which must not be closer to the opting out County than the opposing County determined by reference to their respective County towns listed in the Appendix; and

(b) given notice to the opposing team captain of the name and address of the venue.

G1.4. The team responsible for an intermediate venue under rule G1.3 shall be responsible for the arbiter fee of £40, supplying the equipment for the match and organising refreshments, the cost of refreshments being shared between the two teams concerned.

G1.5 In the event that both teams' County opted out of Finals Day, the away team shall be the team responsible for the venue, arbiter and match arrangements under Rules G1.3 and 1.4 above, save that all costs shall be shared between the two teams. The away team is the team drawn in the lower half of the published draw.

G2. Captains' Responsibility before Finals Day

G2.1. The captain must submit his team using the form provided, in board order, by e-mail to the National Controller or his nominee before 6pm on the day preceding the Final. If a captain fails to submit his team, a £10 fine will be imposed unless the National Controller decides otherwise. Captains will still be able to make changes to their team after this point.

G3. Captains' Responsibilities on Finals Day

G3.1. The captain must report to the National Controller or his nominee not less than 30 minutes before the start of play. Where the captain is unavailable, one of the players in his team list submitted in G2.1 may instead represent the captain.

G3.2. The captain or his representative will be asked for confirmation of their team list submitted as in G2.1. After this point, the team list may not be altered, subject to the provisions of E4.5.

G3.3. The coin toss will be carried out in accordance with Rule E4.3, under supervision of the National Controller or his nominee.

G3.4. During play, the captain may act in accordance with Rule E4.6.

G3.5. At the conclusion of the match, both captains should sign the match card and submit it to an arbiter.

G4. Disputes during play

G4.1. Any decision of an arbiter may be appealed to the chief arbiter appointed for Finals Day provided the appeal is made:

- (a) before resumption of play in the event of a dispute during the game
- (b) before submitting the match card under rule G3.5 in respect of all other disputes.

G4.2 An appeal under Section F.1 above from a final decision of the chief arbiter shall only apply if notice of intention to appeal is given to the chief arbiter prior to submitting the match card under Rule G3.5.

Appendix – County Towns for the purposes of Rules D3.2 and G1

County	County Town
Bedfordshire	Bedford
Berkshire	Reading
Buckinghamshire	Aylesbury
Cambridgeshire	Cambridge
Cheshire	Chester
Cornwall	Truro
Cumbria	Carlisle
Derbyshire	Derby
Devon	Exeter
Dorset	Dorchester
Essex	Chelmsford
Gloucestershire	Gloucester
Greater Manchester	Manchester
Hampshire	Winchester
Herefordshire	Hereford
Hertfordshire	Hertford
Kent	Maidstone
Lancashire	Lancaster
Leicestershire	Leicester
Lincolnshire	Lincoln
Merseyside	Liverpool
Middlesex	Westminster
Norfolk	Norwich
Northamptonshire	Northampton
Northumberland	Alnwick
Nottinghamshire	Nottingham
Oxfordshire	Oxford
Rutland	Oakham
Shropshire	Shrewsbury
Somerset	Taunton
Staffordshire	Stafford
Suffolk	Ipswich
Surrey	Guildford
Sussex	Lewes
Warwickshire	Warwick
Wiltshire	Trowbridge
Worcestershire	Worcester
Yorkshire	York