



REPORT OF THE BOARD TO COUNCIL: OCTOBER 2022

Approved by the Board September 2022

INTRODUCTION

This report has, as in previous years, been prepared in accordance with the recommendation of the Independent Constitutional and Governance Review Commission that “instead of individual Directors reporting to Council, there should be a single report of the Board, approved by it beforehand”. The report focuses on what has been achieved during 2021/2022. The Board has reviewed and updated the Strategy and Business Plan document, and is happy that it sets out the Board’s proposed direction of travel over the coming years and the objectives that the Board has set itself for 2022/2023 and beyond.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

It’s very pleasing to be able to report that the ECF’s finances and operations have recovered remarkably well from the ravages of the pandemic, thanks in the main to the support of our members and supporters and of our tireless volunteers who do so much hard work (often unsung) on behalf of the ECF. Membership numbers as at the end of August 2022 stood at record levels, with 14,146 members in total (11,411 paying members) compared with 9,391 (8,301) as at the end of August last year.

In general 2021-2022 has been a year of solid progress. Highlights include the following:

- We have continued to support the return of over the board chess, with the full return of the Chessable British Chess Championships in August undoubtedly the highlight of the ECF’s over the board events calendar.
- Our online chess presence remains strong, with weekly ECF Club tournaments, national online championships and teams in a number of international leagues.
- We have worked hard on improving our benefits package, with our monthly magazine *ChessMoves*, the ECF yearbook, JustGo Rewards, and Chess & Bridge discounts worthy of particular mention.
- Rolling membership went live in September, offering members a full year’s worth of benefits in return for a full annual membership, thereby at last ending the frankly ridiculous arrangement whereby players could in some cases receive as little as only three months’ benefits for a full annual subscription.

- Monthly ECF blitz ratings are now being produced, complementing our standard and rapid play rating offerings.
- Last April's Finance Council meeting at last saw approval for the Permanent Invested Fund (PIF) to be donated to the Chess Trust, and work to complete the transfer has continued since then. The Chess Trust has agreed to hold £100,000 of PIF assets as a 'rainy day' reserve should the ECF fall on hard times, and we have accordingly taken the opportunity to reduce our reserves target from £100,000 to a more realistic £50,000.
- The ECF and the Chess Trust have worked together more closely than ever before to provide financial support to strategic and developmental initiatives.
- We have carried out a fundamental review of our junior strategy, with a Junior Development Pathway launched, a National Curriculum in development, and a rethink of our Academy approach such that individual junior organisations will be able to apply for Academy status on an 'open market' basis.
- We have strengthened our arrangements for ensuring that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place, with a new Safeguarding Lead appointment and the presence of a Board member on the team.
- And last, but very much not least... it was a golden year for our English silver surfers as we had one of our greatest ever international successes, with no fewer than three team gold medals at the World Senior Chess Teams Championships in Acqui Terme.

A more detailed review of some of the above topics follows:

- **Over the Board Chess**

This year has seen a return to an expanded programme of ECF national events together with a number of new championship events which we look forward to running on an annual basis. We benefitted from a generous sponsorship agreement with Chessable (for the 2022 English Championships, British Championships and Grand Prix events) and grants from the Chess Trust and John Robinson Youth Chess Trust (for the British Championships). A summary of our over the board activity follows:

- (a) As lockdown restrictions started to reduce the ECF ran the 107th British Championships in October 2021 at locations in Hull and Milton Keynes with a full set of championships (although no supporting events). This was the first over the board British since the pre-lockdown Championships in 2019 and re-established the competition ready for a full return in 2022.
- (b) We organised and ran the main 2022 Chessable English Championships, English Women's Championships and English Seniors Championships at the Kenilworth Holiday Inn in May. The events were extremely well received and have established a set of English Championship events which we are now planning to run annually in the run-up to the British Championships.

- (c) The regional stages of the Counties Championships started up in autumn 2021, with the final stages starting in April 2022 and leading to the English Counties Championships finals which took place at four different locations across England on 2 July. These were the first finals to be run post-pandemic.
- (d) We ran the 2022 Chessable British Championships in Torquay over two weeks from 8 – 21 August. Entry levels were above pre-pandemic 2019 levels for the 108th British Championships, with a full set of events which were all well attended and very successful.
- (e) This year has also seen a welcome return for the Chessable ECF Grand Prix. As in previous years since the original events of the 1970s, this offers for prizes for players based on their results in ECF rated events from July 2022 to June 2023.
- (f) Finally, we have restarted the UK Open Blitz Championships with a very successful set of eight qualifying events in August and September and finals to be played in December. As with other ECF events these were ECF and FIDE rated, and coincided with the introduction of an ECF national blitz rating list which went live in September 2022.

We have also put considerable effort into supporting our clubs during the return to over the board chess including sharing of best practice, support for clubs wanting to set up their own websites and social media presence, provision of sets and clocks at discounted prices, and a number of related initiatives.

- **Online Chess**

Participation in online chess has continued to increase during the year despite the return to over the board chess. Our online clubs have reached record membership levels with over 3,000 ECF members in ECF Online Clubs, and more than 5,000 members in the ECF Open Club. We are amongst the largest national clubs on the chess.com and lichess platforms and have one of the fullest programmes of competitive club events, together with participation in numerous online international leagues.

Other online activities have included the following:

- (a) Our weekly online rated club tournaments which continue to be well attended, with seven blitz and rapid tournaments each week on chess.com and lichess. We also now run a fortnightly standardplay competition on alternate Sundays in response to user requests.
- (b) An online marathon in support of Ukraine on 2 and 3 April.
- (c) Participation in various online internationals.
- (d) The annual online blitz and rapid Grand Prix, with events on the first and third Sunday of each month over ten months.

- (e) A number of instructional Endgame Challenge online events supported by GM Keith Arkell and IM Lorin d'Costa consisting of Zoom coaching events over one or two days and regular thematic endgame tournaments.

- **Junior**

The Junior Development Pathway will have been launched by time of the ECF Council Meeting, with the prospect for further expansion into other exciting areas such as the National Curriculum. The Pathway will provide an opportunity for clubs to have ECF recognition at no cost, and we intend to develop an extensive series of benefits for them during 2022-23. It will also enable the expansion of the Academy concept to more than one provider.

English juniors have been very successful in international tournaments in 2022 so far. At the time of writing, we have seen:

- (a) English teams winning all four sections of the Glorney Cup;
- (b) Three European and four World gold medals;
- (c) Two European and one World silver medals;
- (d) Two European and five World gold medals;
- (e) English juniors at number 1 in the world rankings for Under 7 Boys and Under 7 Girls and two eight-year olds ranked second and fourth respectively in the September 2022 FIDE rating list.

- **Women**

Women's chess received a significant boost this year, with FIDE announcing 2022 as 'Year of the Woman in Chess'. In February our Director of Women's Chess participated in the European Chess Gala in Monaco, the theme of which was 'supporting women in chess', and which brought together many leading lights of women's chess in Europe. Two women's norm events were held in London in April, the 'She Plays To Win' international and an ECF women's norm event, both supported by a very strong team: GM Danny Gormally, WIM Natasha Regan, GM Peter Wells, GM Matthew Sadler, Rayelynn Posadas and Ellie Gamal. At the same time the first of four 'Women in Chess - Global Exchange Forums' was held, led by GM David Smerdon and organised by FIDE's Women's Commission in partnership with the ECF. June saw the Caplin Menchik Memorial tournament, streamed live on Chess24 and with WIM Natasha Regan, IM Harriet Hunt and National Instructor Matt Ball commentating.

We are extremely grateful for the support we have received from sponsors and supporters, in particular Caplin Systems, The Chess Trust, The Friends of Chess, FIDE's Women's Commission, Chess & Bridge and the MindSports Centre.

- **International**

2021-2022 was a busy year for International Chess because of the timing of two international team events in the same period: The European Team Championships in Slovenia in November 2021, and the Chess Olympiad in Chennai in July-August 2022. At the former event both the Open and the Women's teams performed creditably; although the Open team's final standing was diminished by a 1.5-2.5 last round defeat by Russia, Ravi Haria's GM title and Gawain Jones' individual silver medal on board 3 were stand-out performances, as described in more detail by Director of International Chess Malcolm Pein at the end of this report. At the Olympiad both the Open and Women's teams again performed creditably, with this time David Howell securing an individual gold medal on board 3. David's 7/11 and 2764 performance at the FIDE Grand Prix in Riga will also live long in the memory.

Nearer to home it was good to see a revival of closed international tournaments with more norm opportunities than in previous years, and the ECF is proud to have provided financial and operational support wherever possible to these events. It's very pleasing to see the success that many of our juniors are now achieving, and again Malcolm's detailed report highlights some of these. Our long-term weakness has been the lack of emerging junior talent, so (as noted in the Junior section above) England having two world number 1 ranked seven-year-olds and two eight-year olds ranked second and 4th respectively is particularly noteworthy.

At the other end of the age scale we should celebrate the triple gold success of our Open 50+, Open 65+ and Women's 50+ teams at the World Senior Teams held at Acqui Terme, Italy in July, as well as further success at the European Senior 65+ Championship in Lublin with Terry Chapman and Tony Stebbings claiming the silver and bronze medal respectively.

- **Membership Benefits**

We continue to work hard to developing our benefits package for members so that joining the ECF is an attractive proposition regardless of whether rated games are played or not. For example:

- (a) Our monthly online magazine *ChessMoves* goes from strength to strength, with Michael Adams, Keith Arkell, Danny Gormally, Paul Littlewood, Andrew Martin, John Nunn and Peter Wells now all regular contributors. Our thanks go to our recently retired editor Danny Rosenbaum, an absolutely key player in the magazine's development.
- (b) Our new format yearbook is also an excellent read, comprising as it does a selection of the very best *ChessMoves* articles from the previous year.
- (c) So far 881 members have already signed up to JustGo Rewards, which offers our members thousands of discounts from a wide range of online and high street retailers; we

encourage Council members to promote JustGo Rewards with their constituencies, as both members and the ECF itself benefit financially from the scheme.

(d) Chess & Bridge offer all members 50% off CHESS Magazine for the first year, and staggered discounts off online purchases according to your membership level.

(e) Finally, we have introduced a rolling membership arrangement as from the start of September so that new members get a full twelve months' benefits for their subscription, so moving away from the antiquated arrangement whereby new members would in many cases receive only part of a year's benefits in return for a full annual subscription.

Annual Awards

Finally, annual ECF awards recognise the achievements of many of our volunteers during the year. This year awards were made to Jimmy Adams, Richard Freeman, Colin Green, Ray Pomeroy and Mick Riding (President's Award for Services to Chess), Lorin D'Costa (Contribution to Women's Chess), Dale James (Contribution to Women's Chess), Gosforth Chess Club (Club of the Year), Holmfirth Chess Club (Small Club of the Year), Durham (Congress of the Year), and John White, Chris Skulte and Warwick University Chess Club (Contribution to Community Chess). Our thanks go to them and as always to all our other volunteers who work so hard in the cause of our great game.

Appendix: Report by Director of International Chess Malcolm Pein

2021-2022 was a busy year for International Chess because of the timing of two international team events in the same period. In November 2021, with international chess still heavily affected by Covid and many players out of practice, England played in the European Team Championships in Slovenia. Although the Open team's final standing was diminished by a 1.5-2.5 last round defeat by Russia, there were two notable successes. Ravi Haria became our latest GM by inching over 2500 at the event and Gawain Jones had a storming tournament, scoring an unbeaten 5.5/7 for a 2782 performance and securing the silver medal on Board 3.

Lack of player availability left our Women's team depleted and all were completely out of practice - one hadn't played for years ! - and it wasn't a complete surprise when they lost the first six matches and only won an individual game in round five.

I want to put on record my gratitude to our Director of Events Shohreh Bayat for agreeing to play after a long break from chess and she scored a creditable 3.5/7, with Zoe Varney also making her debut with 3.5/6. On top board, Katarzyna Toma was out of practice, and this was reflected in her losing her first four games and then winning four in a row. After winning the last three matches, the team ended almost exactly in line with their seeding.

The Chess Olympiad, moved at short notice from Moscow to Chennai, was a logistical nightmare with visas and flights. Huge thanks are due to the Director of Women's Chess Aga Milewska for volunteering to stand for many hours at Indian visa offices.

After weeks of frantic activity, nearly everyone made it to Chennai on time, but we had to do without our board 3 Lan Yao for a couple of rounds due to the delays. Lan made a tremendous debut and I hope our new British Women's Champion is a fixture of the team for many years to come. It was nice to have a Women's team that was very competitive and started with a high seeding, which meant relatively easy early pairings. The team's final result does not reflect the fact that England came quite close to defeating India, and the Armenian captain had some anxious moments too. Despite only being a part time player, Jovanka Houska made a positive score on board one.

I was delighted with the performance of the Open team, who it should be remembered have only two full time players out of five. The standout performance was that of David Howell who scored 7.5/8 and won a gold medal for individual performance on board three. The team also has a relatively high average age, and it was youth that dominated the 11-round event with the Uzbek teenagers and Indian prodigies finishing in gold and bronze medal positions respectively. I must pay tribute to Mickey Adams who went through undefeated on top board and played 10 games.

England started with four straight match wins which included a drubbing of a strong Serbian team 3.5-0.5, and it could easily have been 4-0. In round five we were outplayed by a superb Armenian team who still took silver despite the migration of Levon Aronian to the USA. After some ups and downs, a last round victory over Moldova would have seen us finish fifth ahead of the top seeds USA or a 2-2 draw would have placed us seventh or eighth.

In the end Luke McShane's big advantage disappeared in the time scramble and we lost the match but still finished in line with seeding. Arriving a couple of days early clearly helped the performance of the team and I'm indebted to the generosity of our performance coach Benjamin Portheault who assisted us gratis and who was able to help many of our players in a variety of ways. Many of the extra costs were covered by individual sponsors, to whom I would like to record my thanks.

Nearer to home it was good to see a revival of closed international tournaments and thanks to the efforts of the 4NCL, Lawrence Cooper, Adam Raof and particularly Tim Wall there more norm opportunities than in previous years. In August Harry Grieve secured a GM norm by winning the British. Earlier in the summer Brandon Clark won an open tournament in Spain having earlier won an all-play-all tournament in Hamburg and I hope that Brandon and Marcus Harvey too can push on and swell the ranks of English GMs.

I managed to run a scaled-down London Chess Classic in December and it was an honour to be able to have Boris Gelfand with us, but it was a shame that the shadow of Covid hung

over the event and affected attendance. England's Michael Adams, Luke McShane and Gawain Jones lost narrowly to the Rest of the World team of Gelfand, Nikita Vitiugov and Maxime Lagarde in the main event which unusually was a Scheveningen tournament (we haven't had one of those for some time).

David Howell wasn't at the Classic, but did play at the FIDE Grand Swiss in Riga at the end of the autumn - and how well he did. While Alireza Firouzja and Fabiano Caruana qualified for the Candidates, David was right up there, sharing the lead with those two superstars with two to play. He was defeated by Caruana in round 5, then won four games in a row, a staggering performance in such a strong tournament. Those wins were over Nodirbek Yakubboev, Ruslan Ponomariov, Andrey Esipenko and Anton Korobov. David was then outplayed by Firouzja and held by Vincent Keymer, but his 7/11 and 2764 performance will live long in the memory.

As our enduring weakness has been the lack of talent coming through, I'm delighted to report that at the very end of August, Shreyas Royal got over 2400 for the first time at the age of 14. In addition, as I'm sure my colleague Alex Holowczak has written elsewhere, England now has two world #1 ranked seven-year-olds and two eight-year olds ranked second and 4th respectively. It's essential that these talents and others we have at the younger age groups are all nurtured and that the money be found to support them and their development. The John Robinson Youth Trust and Chess Trust will be essential in that regard. The taps should be opened wide while we have this almost unprecedented opportunity.

At the other end of the age scale we should celebrate the triple gold success of our Open 50+, Open 65+ and Women's 50+ teams at the World Senior Teams held at Acqui Terme, Italy in July. I was delighted to be able to pop in and watch the very competitive match between England 1 and England 2 when Glenn Flear took Mickey to the brink of defeat. England had by far the biggest delegation and this unprecedented success is due largely to the initiative and huge amount of work - including fund-raising - put in by the acting Manager of Senior Chess IM Nigel Povah, who worked in tandem with Stewart Reuben. We look forward to more success at Dresden in November for the European Championships and indeed there has already been further success with Terry Chapman finishing second in the European Senior 65+ Championship in Lublin, where Tony Stebbings claimed bronze. We have started a roll of honour section on the ECF website, and look forward to more entries in 2022-23.

Malcolm Pein
2 September 2022