

ECF Council Meeting 14 October 2023

Membership Options Paper

Introduction

The Finance Council Meeting held in April 2023 requested that the ECF Board develop proposals on potential changes to the membership system for consideration at the October 2023 Annual General Meeting.

The following proposals do not reiterate in detail the content of the paper presented at April's Finance Council Meeting paper (which set out the advantages and disadvantages of the various membership options that might be considered) on the basis that Council delegates will have reread that paper before the AGM. The link to the April Finance Council Meeting paper can be found [here](#).

Summary of Proposals

Option 1: Single membership

1. Single adult membership combining Gold, Silver and Bronze, allowing players to take part in all rated club, league and congress events with free ECF rating;
2. Existing Bronze members are grandfathered (see below), so stay on existing Bronze membership terms, allowing Bronze members to take part in rated club/league chess with free ECF rating;
3. First year half price for new members;
4. Reduced rate for Junior and Student memberships (first year free);
5. No change to Platinum and Supporter memberships.

'Grandfathering': A grandfather clause is a provision in which an old rule continues to apply to some existing situations, while a new rule will apply to all future cases. Those exempt from the new rule are said to have grandfather rights or acquired rights, or to have been grandfathered in.

Option 2: Combined Gold/Silver membership fee

1. Combined Gold/Silver adult membership, allowing players to take part in all rated club, league and congress events with free ECF rating;
2. No change to current Bronze membership arrangements, allowing Bronze members to take part in club/league chess with free ECF rating;
3. Reduced rate for Junior and Student memberships (first year free);
4. No change to Platinum and Supporter memberships.

Note: The single membership fee for Option 1 starts at the same amount as the combined Gold/Silver membership fee for Option 2 (see below), but will diverge over time as new members/upgrading Bronze members under Option 1 join/upgrade at the single rate, while new Bronze members under Option 2 will continue to join at the Bronze membership rate. All other things being equal, that should mean that the single membership rate under Option 1 will increase more slowly over time than under Option 2 to raise the same overall level of revenue.

The Board's Position

The Board presents two options for consideration. Both options remove the barriers to entry for congress players who want to play in FIDE-rated congresses, and enable non-FIDE rated congresses to change to FIDE-rated status at no extra cost.

The Board's majority preference is for Option 1 on the grounds that: (a) it more fairly reflects the fact that the cost of providing ECF membership benefits is broadly the same per member regardless of the amount of chess that a member plays (while grandfathering existing Bronze members, as noted above, so that they avoid the significant one-off fee increase that Option 1 would entail); (b) it allows new members to play in congresses as well as in local leagues at no extra cost.

However, the Board acknowledges the concerns that have been raised about Option 1 potentially being a barrier to entry for players new to club/local league chess who do not intend, at least in the short/medium term, to play in congresses (and that the first year half price membership proposal under Option 1 may not entirely remove this barrier). Option 2 is therefore also being put forward for Council's consideration.

Other Comments

1. The Board notes that a decision to make no change to the present system represents a perfectly viable option for Council to consider.
2. Grandfathered Bronze members under Option 1 will remain on the existing Bronze membership rate (increased from time to time of course, in line with the ECF's annual review of membership rates). Grandfathered Bronze members will lose grandfather rights if, for example, their membership lapses, or if they upgrade to the new single rate to play congress chess. Council should note that in practice Bronze members would therefore be in a similar position under Option 1 as under present arrangements, under which

they can either upgrade to Silver/Gold or pay a £9/£12 pay to play fee to play in a congress.

3. Platinum membership and Supporter arrangements will remain unchanged. Life Memberships are awarded by acclamation and so are not affected by these recommendations.
4. The Board discounted a single fee for all categories as resulting in an unacceptable one-off increase in membership fees for existing Bronze members.
5. Should either Option 1 or Option 2 be approved by Council the Board's intention would be to: (a) put in hand the work necessary to implement the changes between this October's AGM and next April's Finance Council meeting; and (b) have Council sign off on the single membership fee or combined Gold/Silver membership fee as appropriate, uplifted if required to take account of the usual membership fee review as part of the annual budget process.

Costings

Adam Ashton, the ECF's Finance Director, has signed off on the following costings, based on conservative future membership growth assumptions and designed to generate similar income levels to those produced under the present arrangements. **Please note that the figures below have been produced so as to be directly comparable with current membership rates:**

1. Single membership fee plus grandfathering existing Bronze members: **£33**;
2. Combined Gold/Silver membership fee plus no change to existing Bronze arrangements: **£33**;
3. Single membership fee instead of existing membership categories (rejected as an option): **£26**;
4. Flat junior/student membership fee under both Option 1 and Option 2: **£10** (free for first year);
5. **No change** to Supporter or Platinum membership fees under both Option 1 and Option 2;
6. New local league players: **½ x single rate for first year** (for Option 1 only);
7. Future membership fee % increases to be consistent across all classes.

Systems issues

We have reviewed the systems implications of Option 1 and can confirm that:

1. Grandfathered Bronze members can be ring-fenced as a stand-alone category in JustGo;

2. Simplifying future membership upgrade paths would considerably simplify future system configuration work.

Running off the existing Bronze membership installed base under the Option 1 will take a number of years. We can confirm that this is not a problem from a technical point of view, and also note that grandfathered Bronze members moving onto the unified rate as they e.g. upgrade for congresses etc will also help with increasing the speed of transition.

The Board can also confirm that there are also no significant systems issues with Option 2.