

ECF Support for Grassroots Chess Development

Introduction and Background

The recently announced funding for developing English chess by HM Government gives us the opportunity to apply some of the funds previously earmarked for international and other directorates to other initiatives.

This paper is an updated version of the paper prepared for the October 2023 AGM and suggests some programmes that in the Board's view would benefit grassroots chess in particular.

As yet they have not been costed pending the finalisation of discussions with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport about the scope and extent of government funding. The Board welcomes input from Council delegates. All the proposals are based on the principle that funds made available from international and other directorates should be used for developmental initiatives and not to subsidise reduced ECF membership fees. Furthermore the Board believes very strongly that using the funds made available from international and other directorates (which are by their nature non-recurring) rather than membership fees to fund the ECF's year-on-year core expenditure is a dangerous path to follow; the difficulties that arose from the loss of the DCMS grant many years ago are a lesson in that regard.

We need to bear in mind that we have over 500 active clubs across England, and we should target any funding/grants towards areas/clubs which need most support and/or where there is the most value for average players in the demographic we are trying to reach.

Outline Proposals

Grass roots support will be provided by way of a 'strategic grassroots fund' as set out in the Finance Director's report for April Council. This will be administered by way of a number of development areas where potential grant recipients may be invited to apply for support. Applications will be evaluated in conjunction with regional coordinators so that funding can be released on the basis of need and value provided to the chess playing community. Potential areas for development support will include: Clubs, Congresses and Other Events, Equipment, Education, and Online Chess and Content.

Potential Areas for Development Support

Clubs

1. *Start-up Support* - Support packages for new/ startup clubs, for example:
 - Templates/ guides for setting up a new club;
 - ECF publicity, and funding for new clubs with financial support in exceptional cases;
 - New club support could be targeted in areas where we know the number of over the board clubs is low in proportion to the population.
2. *Safeguarding* - Grants to clubs for safeguarding training.
3. *Publicity* - Grants to clubs for a costed PR campaign to increase interest and attract new members.
4. *Website and Social Media* - Grants to clubs for costed plans to develop their websites.
5. *Education* - Two clubs in each union to get an annual GM simul and lecture.
6. *Social Chess Support* - Financial support for clubs to run social/community chess events using non-club venues. This could have a big effect on making over the board chess more visible and mainstream and on attracting more players to join clubs and play in leagues and congresses. This could be linked to the Tables in Parks initiative in partnership with local authorities and Chess in Schools and Communities. The funding could go either direct to the clubs or via leagues/associations to help run the events and maybe pay for some top level players to appear.
7. *Junior Development Pathway* - There is a big demand for more junior clubs run on days and times that work for younger players and their parents. We need to publicise the Development Pathway more effectively, but we should also target more practical/hands-on support for those wishing to setup a junior club, for example by providing funding for coaching support, help with safeguarding, and advice/guidance on finding venues, maybe working with local authorities and with libraries, which generally work extremely well for junior clubs.
8. *Chess Centres* – There is a small but increasing number of ‘Chess Centres’ in England providing chess facilities in dedicated venues open throughout the week. Additional support could be provided to existing facilities and for setting up new facilities in areas which would benefit the most in this regard.

Congresses and Other Events

- *New Congresses* - Support packages for new/ startup congresses (along the same lines as club startups), for example:
 - Updated guidance on ‘how to organise a chess congress’;
 - ECF publicity, and funding for new congresses and events with financial support in exceptional cases;
 - New congress support could be targeted in areas where we know the number of congresses is low in proportion to the population;
- *Equipment* - Support to new and existing congresses by provision of equipment on a discounted sale or loan basis – see ‘Equipment’ below.
- *Top Level Player Participation* - Attracting more of our top level players to ECF-organised and third party events, and also improve their visibility, in order to attract more grassroots players to engage with them, whether by playing or by watching.
- *County Chess* - Support for Unions and Associations in encouraging the recovery of county chess.

Equipment

The ECF is able to source equipment at preferential rates and could make kit available for discounted purchase by member organisations and clubs.

An expression of interest form has been provided to gauge level of interest in DGT 2010 and 2500 clocks.

Other equipment could be brought within the scope of the scheme depending on interest from clubs, congresses and member organisations.

Education

This is an area with big potential, and there is a real demand for affordable/top level coaching and education for club players.

This could maybe include a fund for clubs to engage ECF registered coaches at club evenings.

We will also look at further funding for the ECF’s Certificate of Excellence scheme and National Curriculum, which are getting increasing levels of interest from coaches, schools and clubs.

Online Chess and Content

Online/streaming. This could include a weekly online question and answer lecture for ECF members with a grandmaster, and more financial support for the online commentary for ECF events that we already do well.

Regular online masterclasses for ECF members could also be considered; Lorin D'Costa's, Keith Arkell's and Danny Gormally's masterclasses have gone down very well, and there seems to be a big market amongst grassroots players for more of the same.

As well as more funding for online commentary, we also need to build up our base of content on YouTube, as well as perhaps having some exclusive educational/ coaching content for ECF members linked to the National Curriculum.