

Chessington Chess Club, Surrey

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We think having free membership this year has been key in allowing us to welcome a much wider range of audience than we otherwise would have – particularly of players of all ability and background. We may be the only club in Surrey offering this. Furthermore, we have been proactively looking to get more women, children and young people interested in joining.

www.englishchess.org.uk

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To date we have had more women join our team, and even more fantastic, at our recent blitz tournament last Wednesday, we had a great turn out with female winners, which adds emphasis that more should be done to allow women to participate and showcase their (perhaps unrealised) strengths in the game.

Chessington First Blitz prize winners

We recently launched our junior chess clubs on Mondays, and we have so far, with no advertising, had eight children join on our first day, three girls and five boys. I think the key here is to not just attract children but having the right dialogues with parents to make them understand the merits of chess and have appreciation for it. This can be quite tricky when they have been brought up to think chess is boring or not helpful. So for me, that's where a lot of focus should be as well. We charge £5.00 a session, but currently that is used to cover venue hiring costs, and whatever is left is to claw back the expenses on our equipment. We don't pay ourselves for the teaching or time.

In terms of inclusivity is where I think we have succeeded the most.

Our club has opened the doors to all players from walks of life, from members who have been strong players all their lives, to inexperienced players willing to give it a go. We've even had members who have sought out our club as an outlet/haven to escape from their daily stresses in their busy lives – from doctors, musicians and college students to first-time parents. Elsewhere, we have members who are on the spectrum and have found our club a friendly environment to be themselves in.

Our success to date is down to three things, I think –

1) our unwavering efforts, enthusiasm and passion to help put chess on the map and grow our club.

Every day we set out on working on an initiative to get closer to our goal

2) the guidance and support our peers at Epsom Chess club have provided us

3) Our chess teacher, IM Michael Basman, who is a fellow Chessington resident and has given us huge amount of support, showing us the ropes to make our club a success.