

Subject: Consultation - Do you care how much ECF membership costs?

Dear Surrey Chess Participants,

The title of this communication is intended to attract attention. We would really like to hear from you. At the end of this letter is a link to a very short survey in order to make it easy for you to respond.

When consulting about ECF matters in the past the SCCA Board has received little feedback (1 or 2 responses from clubs or individuals at the most for each request). The reason for that may be because items for ECF meeting agendas appear quite late in the day (2-3 weeks' notice at best) and perhaps that has not left enough time for club officials to consult their members and then feed back to the SCCA Board.

In an attempt to break out of the usual tight time cycle, we would like to consult now on a matter that we already know will be on the ECF Finance Council agenda on 27 April 2019, viz. a proposal to increase membership rates, which might be a topic of interest to you.

Assuming that the ECF proposals remain unchanged from the information provided at the ECF AGM in October 2018 the expected membership rates will be as follows:

Membership Fees £ per annum	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Platinum	70.00	75.00	80.00
Gold	34.00	38.00	41.00
Silver	23.50	27.00	30.00
Bronze	16.00	18.00	20.00
Junior	5.00	6.00	6.00

As an example, this would mean that Gold Membership Fees will have increased by 46% from the introduction of the membership scheme in 2012/2013 to 2020/2021. Allowing for inflation alone, the increase would have been approximately 21%. Other membership categories would also see significant increases, with the exception of juniors. So what's behind the increases proposed over the next two years?

If you want a full description then please refer to the Council Papers for the October 2018 ECF AGM. <https://www.englishchess.org.uk/about/ecf-council-and-board/> items C29.11 to C29.13. The papers deal with increased financial demands on both the ECF membership and two chess-related Trusts, and explain the rationale behind ECF's future plans. This SCCA consultation document is focussed solely on the elements impacting the membership fees.

On the basis of the ECF figures, 19% of the membership fees increase represents additional money allocated to encourage women's chess. The SCCA Board supports the principle of trying to increase female participation. However at the October AGM there was no stated target describing how many additional female players would be brought in by this initiative. This begs the question: how will we know if this initiative has been successful without a quantified target?

A further 46% of the increase is due to higher administrative costs. Half of that relates to an additional administrative burden requiring more resources and half to a statement that current staff salaries need to be adjusted because they had fallen behind the local market. However, the report on the local salary market comparison was unavailable at the October AGM as it was due "at the end of the year". This begs the question: how did ECF know what the appropriate adjustment to the staff wages should be for the budget without that report being available?

The remaining 35% of the increase is attributed to International Chess. Prima facie, this seems to be largely driven by the inability to get stable commercial sponsorship for English elite-level players to play in Olympiads, World and European team championships, etc. It is fair to say that ECF membership fees have always included an element of support for International Chess. The increase begs the questions: Should the entire cost burden for English International Chess fall upon the ordinary membership? If commercial sponsorship is not forthcoming, should ECF not cut its cloth accordingly? Is there a significant causal link between success at the elite England international level and increased participation at grass roots that might justify extra expenditure?

Primarily due to the lack of supporting targets and information related to Women's Chess and administrative costs, the SCCA Board felt unable to support the ECF proposals in a vote "in principle" in the AGM, which nevertheless was passed. However it is at the ECF Finance Council on April 27th 2019 that the membership fees will formally be determined.

It's worth noting that ECF officers are mainly volunteers. Their efforts to support English chess are genuinely appreciated. We know through our own experiences how much effort chess volunteers put into their roles. However, the SCCA Board does have a duty to represent its members and believes the questions raised in this document are legitimate. It may be that answers to all of the questions can be provided in a satisfactory manner but, in any case, we would like to know what you think to complete the picture.

In summary, we would like to know:

- a) Are you content for the SCCA Board to represent your interests in ECF forums?
- b) Do you care how much you pay for your ECF membership?
- c) Do you agree that extra costs for new initiatives should be accompanied by quantified targets so that the extra spend can be judged a success or otherwise in the future?
- d) Do you agree that extra costs that rely on analysis should be committed only once that analysis is available and reviewed?
- e) Do you agree that the ECF membership should support International Chess financially without limit?
- f) Have we fairly characterised the ECF proposals?
- g) Are there any other considerations we should include in the Membership Fees debate or any other comments you wish to make?

The SCCA Board would really appreciate it if you could give this matter some thought and respond either on behalf of a club or as an individual, making clear in which capacity you are doing so. Please go to <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/G3D6KP7> and complete the survey by 31 March 2019 at the latest.

Many thanks for your time.

Yours faithfully

Paul Shepherd (signature on file)

SCCA President (On behalf of the SCCA Board)