

ECF AGM – 17 October 2020 Summary Highlights

The following notes cover the key decisions made by ECF Council as well as matters that were raised in advance of the meeting either by the SCCA Board and/or SCCA constituents

Strategy Papers

A SCCA Board question: The Director of Women's Chess declined to consider changing the 15% target for female participation to an absolute number figure, citing the difficulties caused by the large drop off in overall membership numbers this season due to no OTB chess. On reflection I have some sympathy with his stance, at least in the near term while COVID-19 impacts overall numbers.

A SCCA constituent question: The Director of Junior Chess stated that in effect, ECF relied on CSC to run schools' chess initiatives and that ECF does not have a mirror activity. *[SCCA effectively rely on the Briant Poulter league, CSC and fee-paying school clubs/coaches to support schools' chess in Surrey. SCCA does not directly engage with schools and so has a similar model to ECF. The reality for many umbrella organisations is that junior chess is delivered by many organisations, some of whom have commercial interests. That makes it very difficult to coordinate junior chess by a central organisation even if that were seen to be a desirable model.]*

Finance

At the outset of the meeting the ECF CEO thanked all of those people and organisations that had contributed by renewing their ECF memberships despite not being able to play OTB chess. He said that was much appreciated.

A SCCA constituent comment: The Director of Finance (outgoing) confirmed that ECF Board strategy was to keep in reserve any unexpected additional membership income in the near term as part of "survival mode". Membership renewals have now reached 45% of last seasons' numbers and there are still a steady 100 or so per week renewing. Things may be a little more positive than the AGM papers suggested but not in a game-changing way yet. The current projection is that ECF funds will last until May/June 2021 and so further cost reductions are being considered as well as looking for additional funding sources.

I would like to make a further plea to SCCA club members and chess participants; if you can afford to pay it and have not done so already, please renew your ECF membership to support English chess as soon as possible please.

Elections

All candidates for uncontested posts were voted in by large majorities. Surrey votes went in favour of them all.

The only issue in the above was that Rob Willmoth, the new Director of Membership, stated ahead of the vote that he would not be relinquishing his role as one of the two Gold Members reps if he was elected, despite the apparent conflict of interest. He said that he could handle both roles impartially. I don't agree with that approach. Lorin D'Costa, the other Gold Members rep, said he would be able to ensure Gold Members views were reflected impartially. Faced with the choice of no Director of Membership in what is a current membership crisis and one with an apparent conflict, that at least has 3rd party oversight, I cast the Surrey votes in favour of the sole candidate.

The one contested election for Director of Home Chess saw Nigel Towers elected with 168 card votes to Tim Wall's 92. Surrey cast its votes for Nigel Towers in light of his recent good track record of

achievement and existing strong relationship with the majority of the ECF Board, which will no doubt be put to the test in this time of financial crisis.

Specific Resolutions

A resolution to amend the Articles to hardwire in a limit of two terms for Board officers was defeated with 68 For and 182 Against on a card vote*. Surrey voted against the motion in order that the Governance Committee can come forward with a better proposal on this matter next year. Otherwise, what is the point of having a Governance Committee?

A resolution to confine Membership Reps to be members of the category of Members they are representing was defeated with 99 For and 127 Against on a card vote*. Surrey voted against on the basis that a) the merits of the candidates to represent their constituents is what is most important and b) in elections where there is a choice of candidates, some of whom may not be in the same membership category as the electors, the Members can be the ones to decide who they prefer from the widest available choice of candidate.

A resolution to instruct the ECF Board to form a working group of a very specific composition to produce guidelines and advice to member organisations to facilitate the restart of OTB chess was defeated on a hand vote with 13 For and 30 Against. Surrey voted against on the basis that it was inappropriate for Council to make such a prescriptive instruction as to how the ECF Board should operate. The ECF Board has provided risk assessment guidelines as well as a legal opinion on the impact of the current restrictions ("rule of six") on chess gatherings. It is absolutely legitimate to engage with ECF and challenge them on these matters but that doesn't require a prescribed working group to be formed.

*Both the asterisked card votes are subject to final ratification due to one of the Tellers being unreachable towards the end of the AGM

Paul Shepherd – SCCA and SCC representative on ECF Council – 19 Oct 2020