

Alex Holowczak,
ECF Director of Home Chess

2 February 2018

Subject: County Championships Consultation - Round 2

Dear Alex,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Surrey County Chess Association ("SCCA") in response to the second round of consultation, referenced above, that was launched by your email dated 3rd January 2018.

Thank you for asking our views on your detailed proposals as well as for your clarifications in our subsequent email exchange on 11 January.

1. Proposal 1 - We support the retention of 16 board Open teams. However, much as we are concerned about a possible "slippery slope", we cannot deny that getting sufficient players out for the U180/160/140 teams is a real, current, issue for Surrey. This was reflected in the feedback from all of our captains of those teams. Hence we are minded to support a lowering of the board numbers. However our belief is that other counties will feel that a reduction from 16 to 12 boards is too drastic. We suggest you present the alternatives of status quo, 14 boards or 12 boards as a way to try to find common ground, if that is indeed possible.

2. Proposal 2 - you have clarified that the proposal on venues only applies to ECF stages and not to Union stages. With this in mind it would seem acceptable to support the proposal with the provisos that the venues be public transport accessible and cost effective, and that their use not be compulsory. There should also be a carve out that, for ties involving counties from the same Union, they should generally be played at the "home" county's venue.

3. Proposal 3 - There is zero support for average grades from any Surrey quarter we have heard from, it just makes the task of captains that much harder, e.g. if late drop outs occur that push the average up. There is also the increased possibility of mismatches on some boards and likely excessive demands from many teams on a limited group of players. Surrey would not support Motion A. Motion B looks like the status quo. If that is what it is then we would support it.

4. Proposal 4 - What you report the survey told you was that captains are struggling to fill teams and counties are struggling to find captains. Surrey appears, currently, to be typical in that regard. Our captains have said that they don't want the added difficulty of having to populate boards with special category players and we believe their concerns should over-ride other

considerations. We don't accept your assertion, in your 11 January email, that because you can find people of these categories on the grading list in most counties, that they will be willing to play reliably for the county teams.

The issues of junior and adult female participation needs to be separated.

There simply are very few adult women playing in our clubs and leagues and so the pool to pick from is very small.

Junior participation in chess in Surrey is actually pretty good at young ages but tails off significantly as juniors get to exam age and above. Juniors are also not available year round because of exams and holiday schedules. They have also got plenty of competing chess events to participate in, which they may find more attractive than county matches.

Surrey already has an equality policy that precludes discrimination and our captains pick from the entire available and willing pool of players, regardless of their age or gender. We believe ECF should try to better understand the root causes of low female participation and the drop off in juniors as they get older. Your focus ought to be on building up their grass-roots participation levels at clubs. That would increase the available pool for selection in county matches. Placing artificial constraints on county competitions does not address the root causes of low participation numbers in clubs of these groups. Hence Surrey would not support either motion in proposal 4.

5. Proposal 5 - We have heard no-one in Surrey complaining that the lower sections are not FIDE rated. Requiring Gold members for teams increases the burden on captains who either have to track the number of games non-Gold members are playing, to avoid extra cost to the county, and/or are denied the use of them. Hence we do not support the motion.

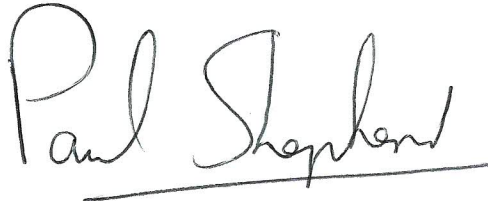
6. Proposal 6 - The proposals appear to envisage Union competitions and ECF competitions running alongside each other as opposed to sequentially as today. Although that gives more time to complete the Union competition there would likely be significant scheduling difficulties to avoid clashes. I had previously told you, in my letter of 23 November 2017, that Surrey's key issue was ensuring that the SCCU stage competition was not adversely impacted, given that the vast majority of our county chess is provided by SCCU. For the above reason alone we do not feel able to support your proposals.

Aside from the above, fundamental, point there is the question as to whether counties want a league or knock-out format. The traditional knock-out produces an ECF champion each year as a result of the best of the Unions and elsewhere coming together to compete in the final stages. The league format has a lag effect in that the best Union teams will be entered into the next year's ECF league competition. A knock out match is, by definition,

critical to a county's chances of being national champion and so should generate significant interest. There might well end up being some "dead rubbers" in a national league format with teams already out of the running not being very interested in playing each other in the final matches, especially if travelling distances were onerous. In our opinion players are much more likely to be prepared to travel longer distances for a knock-out match.

In our email exchange of 11 January you indicated that you were working on providing a full output of the round one questions and responses and that you would also look to see if you could provide a consolidated dataset of the Surrey feedback you had received. Although we have had to produce this feedback without sight of that data, in order to meet your February 5th deadline, we would still appreciate seeing it please, in advance of any ECF General Meeting wherein you intend to present motions to be voted on in relation to changes to the county championships.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Shepherd". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Paul Shepherd,
acting SCCA President

cc.
SCCA Board
SCCU Executive Committee
ECF CEO - Mike Truran