

Report on the ECF Finance Council – Saturday 26th April 2025

What follows is a report on the ECF Finance Council that was held on Saturday on Zoom. The full agenda and papers can be found at <https://www.englishchess.org.uk/about/ecf-council-and-board/>

Grassroots Fund

The meeting started with an update on the ECF's grassroots fund. The fund has offered 3 tranches of funding and to date received 91 applications of which around 2/3 were successful. The ECF have supplied 260 sets and 250 clocks to organisations along with supporting a whole host of initiatives. The regional funds started with 90k and still have 60k left to distribute and so the ECF is in a strong position to support grassroots chess for the next year or two. The minimum grant to date has been £67 and the maximum grant was £1,000.

DCMS Grant

The grassroots fund was made possible by the governments Department of Media, Culture and Sport grant. This grant is targeted at elite levels chess which then freed up ECF resources to create the grassroots fund.

The DCMS grant has produced results with England producing 3 new GM's in the past year (Shreyas Royal, Matthew Wadsworth and Ameet Ghazi) and multiple other titled players. At this stage there is no sign of the grant being renewed. With the change in government the ECF board are having to rebuild their relations with new ministers although they are slightly further ahead than last time as they now know the right people to ask and have a proven track record. As part of these efforts the first meeting of the cross parliamentary chess club is taking place this week and 32 individuals have signed up. The ECF believe any new funding will originate from the backbenches of parliament and so encourage every ECF member to lobby any MP they come into contact with.

As always the idea of campaigning for chess to be recognised as a sport was raised by council. However Sport England remain wholly opposed to chess being classed as a sport and the ECF have their doubts as well given the strings attached to any Sport England funding. It is hoped however that chess will be featured at the inaugural 2027 e-sport Olympics in Riyadh.

The Chess Trust and John Robinson Youth Chess Trust

The council heard an update from the chairs of The Chess Trust and John Robinson Youth Chess Trust. The trustees confirmed that both trusts have healthy investments.

The Chess Trust are still supporting the Junior Accelerator Programme, identifying the top 10 junior players in the country as chosen at the beginning of each year and then funding them. A few Birmingham Juniors have been the recipients of this support. 50% of the Trust's income is spent on this programme.

Parents should be aware that the John Robinson Youth Chess Trust grant bursaries to allow junior players of any ability to access events and so grants are not just available to elite players.

Annual Accounts

The 2023-24 annual accounts were passed by the council without much comment. Inflated by the

ECF grant the ECF income was £969k and a healthy surplus of £13,008 was made.

ECF Budget

The directors put forward another ambitious budget as the ECF continues to expand year-on-year. A few points of the budget were discussed in more detail:

- The ECF are targeting 'savings' of 15k across their events. These savings include sponsorship the ECF are hoping to secure going forwards. The new interim directors have apparently raised this as something they want to prioritise. Any sponsorship will of course be welcome to both raise the quality and profile of events whilst keeping members subs lower.
- The Junior directorate now has a new 5k discretionary pot. One assumes this will be for use by the new Junior Development Officer Role.
- The ECF confirmed they are seeing a 6.4% growth in membership numbers year after year and at last count they had 19,233 members. It was a relief to hear that the merging of silver and gold hasn't seen a drop in ECF members or income. A major limitation of the ECF membership software was highlighted however as within the overall numbers the ECF do not know how many members have renewed or how many are new members. This is surely an area for potential future development.
- The ECF board confirmed they will not now be carrying out a total re-write of their IT software, primarily on the grounds that it was too high a risk for systems that continue to work well. Instead they are working with a software company to move their rating system to a framework that is easier to support. 7k is set aside in the budget each year to support this.
- By far the most controversial element of the budget is a new paid position within the finance team. The current finance director is working 2 days a week, unpaid, to perform his role. This is felt to be unsustainable and the budget proposes a new part-time role paid 18k per year should be inserted between the bookkeeper and the finance director, with that role responsible for monitoring and producing the accounts. The unpaid finance director role will then have time to set the strategic direction of the organisation alongside the rest of the board. Alex Longson, the existing finance director, will step down as a director to be appointed to this new finance controller role. The chair of the finance committee was very vocal in his opposition to the creation of this new role and made the argument this role should also be unpaid. However his comment that the ECF is no more complex than a corner shop did not go down too well with the existing directors ('bloody insulting')! Whilst it may be possible to find a volunteer to fill this role, is it morally right to use the goodwill of a volunteer for 2 days a week? After much discussion the council did support the board in the creation of this new role. One hopes by giving the new director much more time this frees them up to, among other things, seek sponsorship which might more than cover the costs of the new role.

I personally came away with the view that the ECF continue to be really ambitious with further plans to expand, but they can't continue to rely on the goodwill of the existing unpaid directors if they want to do this. The organisation is just getting too big, hence the creation of new director roles alongside the creation of new paid positions to support the growth longer term. The alternative model is the ECF is stripped right back to just running a rating system and little more. As someone who supports the expansion of chess nationally and recognises this does have a cost, I voted in support of the budget, along with the vast majority of council (card vote: 195-16).

Membership Fees

Council supported the 5% increase in membership fees although there was discussion of the congress pay-to-play fee. Set at £15 it was felt by some that this fee potentially discouraged new players signing up to congresses. A proposal was made to lower this to £10. The strong argument against doing this is that members who play in a congress would no longer automatically be upgraded from bronze to gold. They would have to keep paying the £10 each time. Whether this is important possibly depends on how many tournaments your area runs and so this was a rare example where I split the votes I carry with Shropshire voting in favour of £10 whilst Birmingham voted against. The amendment was defeated and the membership fees passed (hand vote: 20-3).

	Current 2024/25	2025/26 Budget	2026/27 forecast	2027/28 forecast
	£	£	£	£
Junior Bronze	6.00	7.50	9.00	11.00
Junior Gold	12.00	14.00	16.00	19.50
Junior Platinum	77.00	80.00	82.00	84.00
Bronze	20.00	21.00	21.50	22.00
Gold	35.00	37.00	38.00	39.00
Platinum	77.00	80.00	82.00	84.00
Supporter	12.00	13.00	13.50	14.00
Effective junior discount	66%	62%	58%	50%
Congress P2P	15.00	16.00	16.50	17.00
Junior only events P2P	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
FIDE admin fee (non-Eng)	1.50 (waived)	1.50 (waived)	1.50 (waived)	1.50 (waived)
Non-members game fee	20.00	21.00	21.50	22.00
Non-members game fee (junior)	6.00	7.50	9.00	11.00

New Interim Directors

The appointment process by which the board have stepped down and appointed new interim directors was explained. The names of the new directors will be released in the next couple of weeks although Mike Truran has confirmed he will become the new interim finance director, a very welcome development.

Following an email to all members inviting applications, the board have recently interviewed prospective candidates and it was encouraging to hear all roles received plenty of high-quality applicants meaning all posts will be filled.

Some members of council questioned if the ECF are circumventing council and democracy by

exercising their power to appoint interim directors themselves. This power was surely envisioned for the appointment of one director who stands down mid-term, not the majority of the board. The ECF are of the view these appointments are only temporary and the ordinary voting procedures will take place at the AGM with candidates giving election addresses. However some members felt (although the board disagreed) that any candidate who has the support of the current board will surely be at an enormous advantage.

The relevant paragraph from the ECF articles:

57. The Board shall have power at any time, and from time to time, to appoint any person to a Board Position, but so that the total number of Directors shall not at any time exceed any maximum number fixed in accordance with these Articles. Any Director so appointed shall hold office only until the next following Annual General Meeting, and shall then be eligible for re-election.

When questioned why the board decided against holding a special meeting to allow for the full election process to take place, the board explained there was insufficient notice by the directors stepping down, and also that they didn't want to hold an elections in April, only for the elections to need to be re-run at the AGM in October.

In either case, the new interim directors will be announced very soon and at the AGM any member will be invited to step forward to become the new permanent director.

Position	Stepping Down	New Position	Interim
Chief Executive	Mike Truran	Chief Executive	??
Director of Home Chess	Nigel Towers	Operations Director	??
		Events Director	??
		Home Development Director	??
Finance Director	Alex Longson	Finance Director	Mike Truran
		Finance Controller	Alex Longson
Director of Junior Chess	Alex Holowczak	Junior Development Director	??
Director of Membership	Rob Wilmoth	<i>Post Abolished</i>	

Other

The council nodded through the amendments to the articles to temporarily increase the number of directors and other minor changes.

The directors have heard that according to the BBC the renewal of Chess Masters is 'in the balance'.

Life Membership Positions

Lastly congratulations to Nigel Towers and Dave Thomas (both Warwickshire players) who were awarded the titles of Honorary Life Vice President and Honorary Life Member respectively after their work for the ECF over many years.

Christopher Lewis
ECF Rep