

Report on ECF AGM – Sunday 27th October 2024

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

Quick Explainer of the ECF

I will start this by explaining for the benefit of our newer members what the ECF does and how it works. The English Chess Federation holds a number of key responsibilities for chess in England but primarily they:

- Maintain the national rating system
- Maintain the League Management System (LMS)
- Select and organise international teams
- Organise the British and English national chess championships along with other national events
- Send out the monthly newsletter (ChessMoves)

The ECF board is made up of paid directorships although most members of the board provide an enormous amount of voluntary time to the organisation far over and above their remuneration.

The ECF is funded through your membership fees.

Each association/league/congress is represented at the AGM by their ECF representatives, nominated by those member organisations. Each representative carries a number of votes based on how many games of rated chess is carried out by their organisation. It's perhaps a strange system but it's what we have.

Report on the 2024 ECF AGM

All existing post holders were elected with no serious opposition. Mike Truran received a vote of 203-0 which is a major vote of confidence in the CEO. Sadly this will be Mike's last year at the helm as he has indicated he will stand down at the end of this year and a number of other long-serving directors may also stand down at that point. This succession planning is one of a number of challenges the ECF faces this year although to me this seems like their biggest challenge. If they can't find those willing to volunteer their time in future they will need to look at more paid positions which will have a knock-on effect on all members subs.

Voting Results

President – Dominic Lawson	201-16
Chair of Council – David Eustace	205-9
Chief Executive – Mike Truran	203-0
Director of Finance – Alex Longson	217-0
Director of Women's Chess	218-0

Director of Junior Chess	202-16
Non-Executive Director – Danny Rosenbaum	191-19
FIDE Delegate – Malcolm Pein	208-7
Chair of Governance – Robert Stern	200-16
Member of Finance Committee – Zoe Varney	212-3
Member of Governance Committee – Mark Murrell	200+

All proposed changes to the articles and regulations were passed Nem Con.

Current year budget pressures

Also of particular note to members is the current year budgetary pressures the ECF are clearly under. The director of finance indicated the ECF faces a shortfall of 35k in this year's finances due to higher than anticipated costs and the requirement to retain a member of staff not budgeted for. The board have a challenge to plug the budget gap this year.

For those interested the ECF budget is available on their website.

<https://www.englishchess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2025-budget-final-V2.xlsx>

ICT Investment Required

The ECF also face significant challenges in the future due to the key person dependency risks they face with their IT systems. The key systems (membership/grading/LMS) were developed by volunteers on separate platforms (this is why you have a different rating and membership ID). To ensure these systems are fit for the future the ECF would like to merge these systems onto a single platform and modernise the programming language. The ECF are estimating this will require an investment of at least 100k spread over a number of years. The board are in active discussions as to the best path forwards and will bring forward proposals to finance council in April. This investment will likely have to be funded through an increase in members subs.

The ECF also provided short updates on other areas of operations:

Grassroots Fund and Government Funding

The ECF reported they had received 30-40 applications to the ECF grassroots fund in the first round and expect a similar number in the current round. In total about 10% of the funds were allocated in the first quarter. About 50% of applicants were rejected, primarily because they didn't read the prospectus on the ECF site. The ECF will in due course publish a full record of all spending requests on the ECF website. The ECF are operating under the prudent assumption there will no new government spending this year. This is based on notable resistance within government to the idea (including leaks to the press), the state of government finances, and the loss of many supportive members from the all-parliamentary chess club.

Board Restructure

The ECF are currently reviewing the existing structure of the board to see if it is fit for purpose. In

particular the home director's role is too large and needs to be split out and potentially a director will become responsible for ICT.

FIDE Council Meeting

Malcolm Pein (ECF FIDE Delegate) provided an interesting behind-the-scenes view of the FIDE Council meeting. The main item on the agenda was lifting of sanctions against Russia and for the first time in living memory the British Government became interested in chess politics with active lobbying by our embassies around the world. The Ukrainian government also took the issue seriously and they appointed their procurement minister as the president of the Ukraine Chess Federation. A more important person for the Ukraine war effort at the moment it is hard to imagine!

Through his own efforts, Malcolm was the one to obtain a statement from the IOC coming out against the lifting of sanctions and the threat of a withdrawal of IOC support from chess (and the subsequent loss of money for these countries where chess is recognised as a sport) was a key factor in getting many countries to vote against the lifting of sanctions.

Russia also made a play to extend their influence through the nomination of a Romanian as chair of the FIDE Ethics committee. Again it was through Malcolm's efforts that this person was exposed as a member of an extreme right-wing party with links to Russia and subsequently defeated.

The international politics of chess sound absolutely mad but I'm sure for most members they feel a million miles away from our local leagues!

Format of future meetings

It perhaps should have come as less of a surprise that the most passionate debate was around how future meetings should be held. Those in person wanted them to continue as hybrid or wholly in-person whilst those attending virtually wanted virtual only meetings to continue. It was eventually agreed that the meetings would continue with their current hybrid format, although at £1,200 the hire of the hotel conference suite seemed overpriced to this representative.

Christopher Lewis
ECF Rep