

Report on the ECF AGM – Saturday 25th October 2025

The ECF AGM was held last Saturday in Birmingham. The full agenda and papers can be found at <https://www.englishchess.org.uk/council-papers/>

The primary purpose of the meeting was to elect the new ECF board. In the previous meeting most of the existing board indicated they wished to step down after serving long tenures. All executive positions for the board were uncontested and consequently officers were voted in with large majorities.

By far the key position was that of CEO and congratulations to Richard Walsh for taking on this role. Richard clearly has extensive experience in local leagues and congresses and I believe he understands that the backbone of British chess continues to be local clubs and leagues. He also very clearly wants to bring the ECF closer to its members with suggestions such as a member's day as an opportunity for members to quiz the ECF officers plus more regular consultations with members. His suggestion of real ale at these days may yet prove to be a popular one!

Voting Results

Chair of Council – David Eustace	222-0
Chair of the Board – Stephen Woodhouse	211-3
Chief Executive – Richard Walsh	205-16
Director of Finance – Eugene Kornilovich	192-15
International Director – Malcolm Pein	218-0
FIDE Delegate – Malcolm Pein	209-1
Director of Junior Chess – Tim Wall	218-1
Home Development Director – Yuri Krylov	204-0
Events Director – Alex Holowczak	207-4
Finance Committee Member – Daniel Lindner	215-1

The role of Operations & Administration Director remains vacant. Hopefully someone will step forward to take up this important role.

There was also a contested election for the non-executive director posts. 4 candidates stood. Derek Lloyd gave an extremely impressive pitch with ideas how to grow the game through his past and present e-sports advisory roles and was decisively voted in for a 3-year term (153 votes vs 33 for the next candidate). JC Le Saux was elected for a 1-year post.

ECF Strategy and Business Plan

The latest ECF strategy and business plan was presented. ECF membership is at an all-time high recently surpassing 20,000 paying and non-paying (junior gold) members. There continues to be significant financial support (250k for 3 years) announced by the government although they have not yet signed on the dotted line.

I would observe there has been some shift in strategy by the ECF as they are now much more actively running events and not just facilitating them. This includes adding an English Rapid, an English Blitz

and an English Junior Standardplay Championships into an already congested calendar. I raised the point that the ECF need to be very careful with how they approach this as when an ECF event clashes with a local congress that could break the finances of that local event. The Events Director responded that their aim is to get events into the calendar long in advance. I feel this could still knock some local events off their preferred and historic slot in the calendar. On the flip side chess players have never had such a large choice of excellent events to choose from and there are more players than ever and so maybe there are enough players to sustain two tournaments on the same weekend.

It was also revealed that the ECF are about to start 2 new weekly YouTube shows fronted by Michael Green with a main show and a junior show. These are exciting new steps in a bid to reach a wider audience and hopefully just the beginning. Commentary will be provided on the last round of the Coventry International and the UK blitz final. However a new series of Chess Masters does not appear to be on the horizon with the BBC said to be “underwhelmed”.

The business plan is an ambitious document and well worth reading for any member interested in the future direction of English Chess.

Minor Constitutional Changes

The minor constitutional changes were nodded through with no significant dissent. By this stage we were approaching hour 5 of the meeting and most members were more than ready to finish and go home.

The proposal by Coventry League didn't have enough nominations to be voted on and the chair admitted his mistake in including it on the agenda. The proposal concerned deficiencies in the rolling membership system, in particular how some players can be members for all games played but if their membership lapses by 30th June the leagues would still be charged game fees. Speaking from my own experience, I have no doubt this can be resolved via a simple correspondence with the incredibly helpful staff at the ECF office. It is however an inefficient system and one that can hopefully be improved over time but not something I view as a major issue. Mike Truran will take on responsibility for these membership issues in the short term (unfinished business for him I believe) and so I have great confidence a solution will be found.

Finance Committee Report

Lively debate was had regarding the content of the report of the outgoing chair of the finance committee. Some members of the board were clearly unimpressed by the report which summarised the past 5 years of ECF finances as only negative when the ECF successfully navigated COVID (not referenced in the report) and is now in a very healthy financial position. Instead the report focused on an overspend during the 2022 Olympiad. This was an exceptional year where the Russian invasion caused the Olympiad to move location with minimal notice. The report referred to an overspend of 30k and this figure was disputed by the financial controller (public accounts suggest the overspend was 26.5k). Whatever the case I don't believe there was any reason to drag it up all over again and yet I hope the board heed the warning that this year's Olympiad will be in a similar part of the world with potential for visa/flight difficulties.

The report also brought up issues with the rolling membership (discussed earlier) and suggested the implementation should have been delayed until all complications resolved. However, rarely can you identify and fix every issue with a major change. Sometimes you just have to get on with it, even though it's not perfect. The implementation overall has been a major success for the ECF, a boost to

their finances and it is disappointing the report did not reflect this.

Council were asked to approve the report. Although from my brief time on council I welcome the contributions of Nick as someone always unafraid to speak his mind and give a different opinion, I felt that the report of an outgoing post holder should look at both the positives and negatives. The quoting of inaccurate figures and the fact that the other committee members had minimal input writing the report led me to vote against approving it. It was a shame that the idea of noting it was not put to a vote as I would have been fully in favour of this.

I fear some personal animosity between the finance committee chair and the outgoing director of finance were on full display at the AGM and it can only be hoped the new committee chair will have better relations.

A controversial Non-Executive Director Post

The ECF has created a new non-executive director post for Mike Truran, the outgoing chief executive. This post is so Mike can continue to assist the board during a time of considerable transition. The proposed creation of this post led to push back from some council members including those who felt it was improper that it will be a voting post. Others felt that the new CEO would not benefit from having their predecessor hanging around. Some members felt there were substantial governance concerns through the proposed creation of a new post but this member could not see any problem as the issue had been brought before council to vote and if council are not the ultimate decision makers in such matters who is? Richard indicated he welcomed Mike's support and I believe this ultimately swung the council vote to approve the creation of the post 128-75.

ICT Systems Update

The modernisation of ECF systems appears to be proceeding at a steady pace. The bespoke code behind the rating system has now almost been fully re-platformed onto a standard framework to reduce the custom code. There has been no noticeable change to the front-end which can only mean the upgrade is going well.

FIDE Update

As always Malcolm Pein (ECF FIDE Delegate) gave some interesting insights into the current state of FIDE. The "supreme leader" Arkady Dvorkovich will be up for re-election next year and seems likely to win. Dvorkovich apparently continues to ignore FIDE commissions and rewrite the constitution, the latest example being the awarding of candidate spots via a non-classical chess tournament (the Total Chess World Championship) without consultation.

It was also suggested the tragic demise of Daniel Naroditsky was collateral damage of Russian domination of FIDE. If the president wasn't Russian, would the baseless accusations have been properly investigated? Possibly one day there will be a full disclosure of all correspondence between Kramnik and senior FIDE officials which might make for interesting reading to say the least.

Depressingly the direction of travel in FIDE is to lift all sanctions on Russia. If this happens, Malcolm has indicated he might stand against Dvorkovich although given the block voting he didn't sound very hopeful of his, or anyone else's, chances. Malcolm was recently pilloried on Russian state TV for his campaign to keep the sanctions in place.

Format of future meetings

The last thing to say about the meeting is that, in my view, hybrid meetings do not work. The technology failed right from the start meaning the boardroom speakers and microphones were not active. At least half the meeting was people saying they couldn't hear or that there were echoes with members constantly having to repeat their questions. This has been the case in both ECF AGM's I have attended and was the reason this meeting lasted a full 5 hours. It is the council members themselves who decide the format of the meeting and in the past they opted for hybrid. However my wish is that council members come off the fence and vote either to hold the meeting either fully in person or fully online.

Christopher Lewis
ECF Rep