Report on the ECF Finance Council – Wednesday 10th April 2026

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

The Chess Trust and John Robinson Youth Chess Trust
The meeting began with a verbal update from the chair of The Chess Trust and a written update from the chair of The John Robinson Youth Chess Trust.

The trustees confirmed that both trusts have healthy investments. There has been no major changes in the past year with funding allocated in a very similar manner to last year with 50% of the Chess Trust continuing to be allocated to the accelerator fund. One particularly interesting initiative highlighted by the Trust is its support for IM Balaji in his pursuit of the Grandmaster title. Funding is linked directly to progress, with additional grants available for each GM norm achieved.

The John Robinson Youth Trust also didn't have much new to report but welcomed well-known local IM Lawrence Cooper as a new trustee. One ECF board member restated their view the John Robinson Youth Chess Trust does not disburse anywhere near enough funds each year.

Annual Accounts
The ECF annual accounts were passed Nem con without much notable comment. Last year the ECF income was £762k and a healthy surplus of £20,249 was made. The income did fall from last year's total of £969k but this just represents lower amount of the DCMS grant being recognised in last year's accounts. Against a budgeted profit of 6k the ECF has had another successful financial year.

An update was made on the ECF grassroots fund and it should be noted there is still 85k left in the fund. With 90% of funding applications approved the fund's biggest problem seems to be finding sufficient qualifying projects that meet the funds criteria to support, rather than any lack of funds. One board member put forward their view that the fund should be more proactive with national projects rather than waiting for applications. Reading between the lines, this points to a new challenge in English grassroots chess: financing is plentiful, volunteers rather less so.

ECF Budget
Every year I convince myself that discussion of the ECF budget will be brief and uneventful. Every year Council proves me wrong. This year the majority of the time was dedicated to a discussion of the IT budget. At the ECF AGM last year the board proposed that certain critical positions become salaried to enable the organisation to grow, one of these positions being that of the IT manager. The board feel the ECF is too large an organisation to rely on volunteers and last months wobble with the rating database reminds us how critical the ECF IT infrastructure is. The finance directors report (excellent by the way) laid out exactly what is core IT spend and what the investment budget will be (budget figures are 48k core spend, 24k development budget and an undisclosed figure for the IT manager salary). However without an IT manager appointed the fine detail of the 12k investment budget was not available for council. Somehow what followed was a lengthy debate with confusion about what budget figures were being proposed (250k was repeatedly mentioned but this is a totally inaccurate figure) and if Council should or should not be approving the strategy before a budget was

set. A proposal was put forward that council should sign off the IT strategy at a separate meeting but this was rejected 15-8, with myself voting against as I don't feel it's for council to run ECF operational matters. There was also the question if 12k is a sufficient budget for new IT development given the ambitions of the ECF. One member suggested we might be in the worst of both worlds, allocating insufficient money to IT but at the same time not enough. I do think this is a question that we might return to next year when the IT manager is in post and the full strategy worked out.

Previously announced is that the ECF have secured another round of DCMS (Department of Culture, Media and Sport) funding that will run until 2026. With £750,000 available to support elite chess this means that the ECF can release budgets to do other things (last time they created the grassroots budget). All very welcome news and credit due to Malcom Pein who led the effort to secure this funding and who maintains responsibility for the onerous reporting of multiple KPI's (new titled players/new tournaments etc) to the government on a quarterly basis.

In recent meetings council have agreed the ECF would lower their reserves from 100k to 50k. With the Chess Trust available as a funder of last resort and so a potential 100k to draw on if needed the ECF don't feel they need to hold reserves higher than 50k. That said, agreeing in principle to reduce reserves is one thing; watching the budget project losses over the next two years is another. Some members will inevitably feel uneasy whenever the numbers move into the red, even when doing so forms part of a consciously adopted financial strategy.

One member expressed disappointment the ECF junior development budget hasn't been increased but it must not be forgotten that our elite juniors now benefit from The Chess Trust Accelerator programme which is separate to the ECF.

The biggest unknown and risk for the ECF finances is membership numbers and it was pleasing to hear the ECF have hit a new record membership figure with over 15k paying members. The ECF continue to believe they will experience healthy membership growth year on year and so far the numbers support this. The other risk faced by the ECF is inflation. The ECF is assuming 3% as per government guidance but we've seen before how world events can see inflation shooting up. The board are confident there are levers to be pulled in this eventuality.

2025/26 sounds like it is on course to be another financially successful year for the ECF with membership growing, government funding secured, and the British Championships approaching record entry numbers although this won't help the ECF with their strategy of lowering their reserves.

Membership Fees

The board proposed their usual inflationary increase in membership fees. Gold and Bronze membership both increase by £1 but next year gold will increase by another £1 whilst Bronze will remain static so that over the 2 years they both inflate at the same rate. To pre-emptively divert complaints of unfairness one member proposed that Gold should increase £2 this year and then both should be frozen next year. In the third hour of the meeting tempers often flair and certain members of the board pushed back against this proposal in the strongest possible terms with comments such as "absurd, tinkering for the sake of it" and "wasting everyone's time". I thought this was a bit harsh as the proposal is logical, won't negatively impact finances (it will improve them) and the ECF may

come to regret this next year when they have to explain to gold members why bronze membership is frozen but gold is not. In the face of such a fierce push back the proposal was withdrawn before going to a vote. The episode does raise a broader question. Should council be able to amend proposed membership numbers, on the fly, without any modelling done on the impact? The membership rates are carefully thought through by the finance team and so proposed amendments by council should have to pass through a more rigorous process in my view.

The membership rates for next year and potential rates for the following year are:

10. Proposed Membership Fees for 2026-27

	Current	Proposed Rates for 2026/27
	£	£
Junior Bronze	7.50	9.00
Junior Gold	14.00	16.00
Junior Platinum	80.00	82.00
Bronze	21.00	22.00
Gold	37.00	38.00
Platinum	80.00	82.00
Supporter	9.99	10.00
Congress Pay to Play	16.00	16.00
Congress Pay to Play (junior)	6.50	7.00
Congress Pay to Play (junior only events)	3.00	3.00
FIDE Admin fee (non-England)	1.50 (waived)	n/a
Non-Members Game fee	21.00	22.00
Non-Members Game Fee (Junior)	7.50	9.00

It should be noted the increases in Junior Membership fees are higher than the adults as part of the previously agreed strategy to reach a point where Junior memberships are 50% of adult memberships.

The membership and budget were approved 27-2 with some objectors driven by wanting more detail on the IT budgets.

Other

The council nodded through the amendments to the articles to change the role of Chair of Council in relation to committees plus other minor amends.

New ECF AGM attendees

In a surprise development all ECF members are invited to attend the ECF AGM in person as an observer. The AGM will be held on Saturday 17th November 2026 in Leeds. There will also be the ECF awards ceremony straight after the AGM, opportunity for breakout discussions with the ECF directors and a 960 rapidplay tournament running in parallel to the meeting. This is all part of our new CEO's effort to bring the board closer to the membership as promised when he was elected. I look forward to seeing many of you in Leeds (or not)!

Conclusion

In conclusion the ECF is in a strong financial position with a growing membership and 750k of government grant funding lasting until 2029. The ECF will continue to expand over the next few years whilst maintaining and investing in the IT infrastructure all of our leagues rely on.

Christopher Lewis
ECF Rep