

Email to English Chess Federation Bronze members re the 2015 ECF Finance Council Meeting

Dear ECF Bronze member,

The ECF Board recently appointed me as a representative for Bronze members and I am writing to you to tell you about the Finance Council meeting to be held on 18 April and to seek your input on how I should vote.

I'd like to begin by giving some background of the workings of the ECF (forgive me if this is already known): Most ECF decisions are taken by the Board and Officers but the more important decisions are taken by ECF Council. ECF Council meets twice year:

- in October for its AGM, to receive reports from Board members and senior officers, to consider proposals and to elect a new Board and senior officers; and,
- In April for its Finance meeting, to approve the previous year's accounts, to set a Budget for the following year and to consider (typically finance related) proposals.

For the most part, Council is made up of representatives of the leagues, tournaments, unions and other groups which organise the playing of graded chess. Each membership category also has up to two representatives. Board members and senior officers are also members of Council. Council meetings are usually attended by forty to fifty individuals (some of them acting as proxies for other representatives) with, in theory, over 300 votes at their disposal. Bronze members' representatives have a single vote each to cast.

I put myself forward to be your representative as I thought Bronze members – who at 1 March numbered just over 4,003 of a total membership of 9,251 – deserve representation and a voice. (There have been no bronze member representatives since 2012 when the ECF switched to membership scheme funding.) I also represent the Croydon & District Chess League and have attended the last seven Council meetings. I was briefly, from May until October 2014, a Board member of the ECF - as a Non-executive Director - though by no means am I an ECF insider.

There a number of decisions for Council to make at this month's Finance meeting. Please see <http://www.englishchess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/C22-April-2015-Finance-Council-Agenda-final.pdf> for the agenda and <http://www.englishchess.org.uk/about/ecf-council-and-board/> for supporting documents. I imagine the following will be of particular interest for Bronze members:

- A proposal to narrow the gap between Bronze and Silver membership fees with a view to merging the two categories (item 11 on the agenda). I understand the idea is to give a better deal: a) to silver members who play tournament chess but not league chess; and b) to avoid the situation where a player first pays the pay-to-play fee to play in a tournament and then, second, becomes a Bronze membership but doesn't get an automatic upgrade to Silver membership (as would happen if the sequence was reversed)... I understand the inequities the proposal is seeking to address but I'm sceptical about the suggested solution. For one thing, Bronze members would have to pay more to gain a benefit - playing in tournaments at no further ECF charge - in which many may not be interested. I'm also not keen on the transition suggestion: during the transition period, Bronze members would pay more for no extra benefit. I wonder: can better remedies be found?

- A proposal increase membership fees for 2015/16 (item 12 on the agenda). For Bronze members this would mean an increase from £13 to £15 (from £9 to £11 for juniors). This would be the first increase since 2012/13. So far as I can make out (from the Finance Report and from the Detailed Forecast and Budget documents), the increase is mostly attributable to:
 - o an increase in international costs due to an anticipated reduction in sponsorship and donation income
 - o New costs for accommodating the Chess Library
 - o New costs for the Commercial Directorate
 - o The Board's wish to run at a surplus and build up reserves from £89K to £100K

Please let me know your views on the above - and anything else on the agenda - so that I cast my vote as your representative accordingly and possibly ask questions at the meeting.

In addition to the meeting papers linked to above, there is discussion on both the official ECF Forum (<http://www.englishchess.org.uk/Forum/> - see the 'ECF Matters' section) and on the unofficial EC Forum (<http://www.ecforum.org.uk/> - see the 'ECF Matters' section) which may be of interest.

Finally, there is a vacancy for a second Bronze member representative. If you are interested in applying for this position, please write to the ECF Company Secretary, John Philpott at company.secretary@englishchess.org.uk. Having two representatives and two votes rather than one of each would give Bronze members a bigger voice.

Regards,
Angus French