**ECF back to over-the-board chess**

**Pre-Season Regional County Challenge**

In devising the format, the following factors have been taken into consideration:

- The counties who qualified for the 2019/20 abandoned ECF finals stage and wished to compete
- Avoiding clashes with the 2021/22 Counties Championship
- Providing OTB county chess for all counties and players of all abilities who wish to compete whilst conditions for indoor OTB chess might be said to be at their optimum in the event that the nation moves to Stage 4 and the vaccination programme continues apace.
- Recognition that some county chess players will be reticent about travelling any significant distance and venues they are not familiar with
- A desire by the ECF to test its hybrid[1] arrangements in the expectation that the 2021/22 season may face disruption as a consequence of Covid-19 in its many guises and as a means to assist leagues to reform by providing a tested means that may waylay some of the understandable reticence
- A desire by the ECF to encourage through its own competitions confidence for a return to OTB chess in a safe and flexible way
- Personal feedback from the attendees at the 2021/22 Counties Championship meeting

**Format**

- A regional three round team Swiss played on Saturdays 14 August, 4 September and 25 September 2021 (scheduling of the Second Online County Championships will avoid direct clashes), with the option by agreement to play on the following Sunday or earlier
- An option for Spring 2022 finals
- Subject to entry, provisional regions of North, Midlands, South & West and South & East
- Two sections with an average rating limit for the team
  a) MAJOR AVTR 2000 - no upper limit, players below 1600 deemed to be 1600 for purposes of averaging
  b) MINOR AVTR1600 - upper limit 2000, players rated below 1200 deemed to be 1200 for purposes of averaging
- 8 board matches at the venue of the home team (away teams may elect to play at an intermediate venue acceptable to the Controller and the teams by agreement may hold either a hybrid match or Article 20 Hybrid[2]) with additional boards by agreement

[1] Hybrid is a form of OTB rated chess providing for a team located at one venue to play a team at a different venue with moves relayed through the medium of the internet on an online platform which provides the chess clock with a supervising arbiter at each venue.

[2] Article 20 Hybrid requires the moves to be played on a physical board and visible to the supervising arbiter before being replicated / transmitted on the online platform.

- ECF bronze membership required (noting that an ECF 2021/22 membership taken out after 30 June 2021 will include membership for the remaining part of the 2020/21 season)
- Playing areas and playing venues to be compatible with ECF prescribed minimum Covid-19 safety precautions (details to follow HMG's review of social distancing ahead of any move to Stage 4 of the Spring Road Map)
- Where socially distanced chess is engaged under the ECF Tournament Rules the use of a single chess clock is permitted where social distancing can be maintained
- Entry fee £20 per team.

**Technical**

- Time control: G105/15 (4 hour session) or where Article 20 Hybrid in use G90/30. Any core time can be reduced by agreement subject to meeting the criteria for standard rating
- Standings determined by Match Points followed by Game Points scored on boards 1 to 8
- For the purposes of team average and board orders in rating list order a team may use for any match either the Standard OTB 1st July official monthly list or the current official month list at time played
- Players without an ECF OTB standard rated will be assigned a rating by the Controller, which may be updated as the competition progresses
- Second teams from the same county may be permitted
- No player can play for more than 1 team in the competition
- The Counties Championship Rules shall apply as to a player's county eligibility

The Government is currently reviewing Social Distancing measures. The outcome of that review is expected towards the end of May which will determine what residual precautionary measures are imposed on indoor venues and activities under Stage 4 of the Spring Road Map when venue limits are expected to be removed. Once update guidance has been published, the Covid-19 precautions applicable to this ECF competition will be specified ahead of entry.

Mark Murrell, ECF Controller, Counties Championship

Nigel Towers, Director of Home Chess