

Intention to Allow Direct Entry to the Final Stage of the County Championship from 2016-17

This is a consultation paper. Please provide your thoughts to this either on the ECF Forum, or directly to Alex Holowczak at director.homechess@englishchess.org.uk before 1st June. A second document, outlining a more specific implementation plan, will be published soon thereafter. After a period of consultation on that document, a final document, outlining the intentions for the competition, will be produced.

The Problems with the Existing Format

The Problem(s) we are trying to Solve

Various people have made various comments in various public and private fora from time-to-time about the County Championship:

(1) At present, each Union receives two nominations for a section, regardless of the number of teams that enter the section. There is no obligation to run a qualifying competition, but if you do, because it is nomination based, there is also no obligation to nominate qualifiers in a particular order, or even to nominate a county from your own Union. Therefore, in the South or Midlands, you may have 4 counties enter a qualifier for the Under 180 section, and 2 of these counties qualify in accordance with the rules. However, in the North, 2 counties enter a qualifier for the Under 180 section, and 2 of these counties qualify. In the West, there is no qualifying event, 1 team is nominated. In the East, the 1 nomination is sometimes the team that finishes last in a qualifying event for a different section – the Open. The comments made are of the nature that this is unfair: Why should teams in the South and Midlands have to qualify to get into the Final Stage, whereas teams in the rest of the country can be nominated without having to play any matches?

(2) In order to qualify for the Final Stage, a county must be nominated by a Union. There are some counties that are affiliated to two Unions. There are some counties that are affiliated to no Unions. There is one county that is in one Union almost by default, because the Union it wants to be in has yet to let it join. Therefore, some county teams therefore get two bites at the qualification cherry, while others get zero.

(3) The entry fees have, traditionally, been paid by all teams that enter the qualifying stage; regardless of qualification for the Final Stage or not.

(4) The skeleton draw is usually made in January/February, and then if the requested nominations at this point aren't taken up, the draw has to be re-made. While the teams scheduling matches before they have been notified officially are at fault, this is a problem I would rather not cause in the first place. There were problems this year because some Unions responded so close to the draw being made, that there was no opportunity to invite additional nominations to bring the total up to 8 as mandated by the rules, until after the skeleton draw had been made.

(5) The Final is played, out of necessity, in July; and the Final Stage is played starting in April. This is a poor time for juniors to play, and some have expressed the opinion that July is too late in the year to hold the Final. This is a poor time for some adults to play, who have perhaps gone on holiday, or moved on to their summer pastime.

How would allowing direct entry to the Final Stage help solve these problems?

Taking each of the five points above:

(1) All counties have the ability to enter the ECF Stage on an equal footing with one another. Unions can still run their existing league competitions alongside it, where such competitions exist.

(2) Same as (1) above.

- (3) The ECF can collect entry fees only from teams that enter its competition, rather than teams that only enter the Union stage.
- (4) The ECF can be directly responsible for the draws it produces, without relying on information from third parties.
- (5) The schedule of the tournament can be brought forwards.

(1) to (4) above can be solved by allowing direct entry to the Final Stage, without Union qualifiers. (5) can be solved by bringing the rounds forward to earlier in the season.

Questions to Respond To

At this stage, there are two questions of principle that the ECF would like feedback on:

- (1) Should the ECF change the rules of the County Championship from 2016-17 from a competition where Unions nominate counties to play in the ECF stage, to a competition where counties directly enter the ECF stage?
- (2) If your answer to (1) is "Yes", should the default dates of the competition be brought forward from April – July, to earlier in the season?

Depending on the responses received, a further document may be published in accordance with the timetable outlined at the top of this document.

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Alex Holowczak
Director of Home Chess
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