

MCCU Junior Director's report 2025

Tim Walker

General

Like last year I have tried to make my report more concise than past times, which I hope increases readability.

A section on counties junior successes and activities follows in the last section.

Firstly, thank-you to everyone who gives their time and effort to help and encourage young chess players across in the MCCU region: these players are the future of our game. Some of you received highlighted praise and recognition, and many others are quietly giving time and effort to encourage young players across the Midlands. Whilst some midland counties are busier than others in junior chess especially with the online vs OTB landscape, the region is active. There is a reasonable mix of competition and counties working together to encourage young players, and we have been able to introduce a couple of new things this year to hopefully make this even better.

It looks like the British championships will be back in the Midlands this coming season and several of our juniors can compete. When the Championships were in Leicester last time I was able to attend a couple of the junior coaching sessions with juniors from our region.

Looking forwards, we have several junior activities planned for 2025-26. Amongst others:

- Team tournament and/or quadrangular for Under-18's.
- Team tournament for the Under-12's. Probably with East Midlands hosting, venue tbc shortly.
- Junior team matches for all age groups against other adjacent Unions or within the British Isles; see below for dates.

If your county is interested in playing, please feel free to get in touch!

We have a big event coming up in the Midlands for juniors to look forward to next month with the

The National Youth Junior finals on July 11th-13th returning to Nottingham with 5 rounds of top competition in various age sections, and inter-round coaching included from a string of titled coaches.

There were of returning events this year, as well as the existing favourites.

In November 2024 we re-launched a Midlands Under-12 teams which we last played just after Covid. We entrants from 7 counties and a couple of counties entered two teams into the were , so nine teams in totals.

The event was won by Oxfordshire (guest), followed immediately by the top MCCU counties Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire (hosting), Leicestershire followed by Northamptonshire, Shropshire, and Worcestershire. The Midlands teams all scored between 11 – 26 points, so the event was closely fought and all counties gave a good account of themselves. The event ran smoothly with all counties having their own team rooms.

On 26th January this year, a Midlands Junior team of 24 players took a Wales junior team over two matches in the West Midlands. Wales brought a strong team with players coming from North and South Wales and as far as the South-West coast. The Midlands team narrowly won the closely-fought and very competitive event. A further report is later in the document. As well as thanking Peter Purland and the Wales' management, I would like to thank and acknowledge Ed Jones and Chris Lewis for all their help with running and organisation of the event. The next event is planned for later this year – the return match planned for November 29th.

For a personal point of view, I've helped at numerous events through the year and done free of charge coaching for juniors in the East Midlands. Most recently I ran sections as a volunteer of the Nottinghamshire UKCC Megafinal (which also featured Leicester, Lincolnshire, and Derbyshire (and well as London and Yorkshire) players in attendance). There were Midlands National Youth Qualifiers in Leicestershire and Staffordshire - set up by Alan Agnew and Jonathan Blackburn - which is a further expansion on previous years and had a good attendance. All these events lasting in a day are quite accessible to juniors.

Midlands junior players have entered the ECF Accelerator programme and more than dozen of players into the ECF Chess Academy.

Counties' activities

In the EPSCA Under-11 County championships, in the national final, Warwickshire were the highest placed Midlands county in 7th, with Nottinghamshire 10th, both higher placings than last year. Note the number of qualifying for the final has been reduced by EPSCA so less qualifying places for counties are given.

The Midlands Under-11 zonal was hosted at Bosworth, thanks to Leicestershire for hosting a smooth which they ran very smoothly – thanks to them. This was won by Warwickshire closely from Nottinghamshire (2nd) and Leicestershire (3rd). Players from Shropshire and Derbyshire also competed commendably and decided some of those higher placings.

The MCCU junior county team have been very active in the ECF monthly online tournaments with teams from Worcestershire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Manchester, Notts and Staffordshire participating regular and scoring well. Several teams have each recorded a top six finish in national online Monday night tournament over the past year.

Last season, Eldars Gulijevs (Nottinghamshire) won the National Youth Under-14's with 4.5/5, with Elis Dicen (Warwickshire), Daniel Pitts (Nottinghamshire) and Amanthika Anbalagan (Lincolnshire) equal 2nd.

In the combined Under-16 section of National Youth hosted at Nottingham, Sebastian Griffin-Young (Nottinghamshire) finished equal 3rd. The highest placed Midlands under-16 was fifteen year old Furkan Bahtiyar (Nottinghamshire) in 5th. 40 played in the combined Under-20, Under-18 and Under-16 section.

Jude Shearsby of Kenilworth has a set of excellent results in tournaments over 2024-25 finished high in the Grand Prix.

Midlands v Wales Juniors at Church Stretton, January 2025:

A close win for the Midlands. 24 Midlands players from 5 counties in the three age-category England Midlands teams took on Wales at Church Stretton over two rounds on January 25th.

The Midlands teams were managed by Ed Jones and Tim Walker.

Wales picked a strong and well resourced team pulling juniors from North, South and mid Wales with players travelling from as far as Pembrokeshire.

The Mayfair centre made a pleasant venue, set in the middle of the pretty village and countryside which players and parents could enjoy during and between rounds. All players enjoyed closely fought matches, against strong opposition. Thanks to Peter Purland for arbiting and Ian for managing the Wales team.

Midlands won a well-fought match by a score 25-16.

Robin Sykes and Joshua Phoah of Midlands both scored 100% in their games.

Summary of in-counties activities:-

Derbyshire

Derbyshire entered a team in to the Under-11 Midlands Zonal for the first time in several years.

No major update on chess clubs so based largely on last season. It has been a strong year of growth for junior chess in Derbyshire with several clubs having success starting new junior sections. This has led to an increase in the number of active junior players in the county and resulted in Derbyshire being able to enter a young team in the East Midlands Junior Jamboree. For many of the players this was their first experience of tournament play. The growing number of junior players also allowed for a couple of junior tournaments to be held within the county, with a junior section being added to the end of season Derbyshire jamboree and a rapidplay tournament being held at Rolls-Royce Chess Club. With growing interest seen from both clubs and schools in the area, it's an exciting time for junior chess in Derbyshire. Derbyshire Chess Association are hoping to build on this interest with an increased number of local junior tournaments and participation in county events next season.

Derbyshire Primary Schools chess association was reformed and for the first time since 2005 training sessions were held for the fledging county under 11 squad. This has continued into 2025.

To my knowledge there are about four primary and three secondary schools who are running chess clubs and have started to play matches.

Alan Kennedy is the Junior Coordinator.

Leicestershire

Leicestershire held an agreed sole East Midlands qualifier for the second year running for the National Youth final in February, which was a successful event.

Leicestershire team won a division of junior 4ncl, and hosted the well-run EPSCA Under-11 Midlands Zonal at Bosworth in March. The results of this are earlier in the report.

Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire juniors performed well in last month's Megafinals and National Youth East Midlands qualifiers. Amanthika Anbalagan's has continued to achieve good results, including in the National Youth final in July.

There are regular junior chess sessions being organised in Scunthorpe and Grantham, and Junior Organiser hopes to get a county team together later this year.

Northamptonshire

Entered a team into the Midlands Under-11 teams for the first time in a few years. Wolf Sharp, Aaryhan Ragham and Lewis Curran all scored 2 points from their matches.

Nottinghamshire

Juniors and teams achievements are described in the general section of this report.

The Under-11 team successfully made into and played in the National finals.

Senith Gunarathne has qualified for the British Championship next month in Liverpool.

The National Youth Finals (EJCOA national finals) will again take place in Nottingham this year. Please see the MCCU website or ECF website for more details of this 5 round Junior Swiss. Sections are Under-20 down to Under-8, with free Master coaching in between rounds. This is from 11th - 13th July, with many competitors from the Midland counties.

Staffordshire

A lot of successes in Staffordshire on the junior front with participation increasing. Jonathan Blackburn has 4 schools competing with 36 - 70+ students. The estimate is of 20+ high schools with chess clubs in just North Staffordshire alone.

'Midweek half day' junior rapidplay tournaments in the school holidays has been a huge success, and Jonathan hopes to revive and increase now he has more time in 2025-26.

Shropshire

Shropshire supplied 7 Juniors into the Midlands team v Wales earlier this year, the second highest of any county.

Junior chess is on the up with juniors in clubs, school competitions and individual events hitting record numbers. The Shropshire Megafinal ran successfully earlier this month, and have taken Haberdashers' Adams to the national Junior Team Chess Challenge where they came 2nd, and ran the inaugural secondary school championships. There are now 4 dedicated junior clubs in the county and Newport Junior A won division 2 this season and so will be competing in division 1 next year.

- The Shropshire Primary Schools Chess Championships has continued into a second year, and Shropshire fielded a team in the Midlands Under-11 Championships with Rudi Bedford scored 3.5/4.

- The Shrops association has continued to reach out to local schools and charities. Chris Lewis has ran chess tournaments for South Shropshire District Scouts, provided 1-off coaching in a few schools, and is running a first school tournament at Broseley next month

- Through CSC Shropshire is now able to offer tutoring in schools for the first time. A number of schools have already taken up this offer.

Chris Lewis has expanded the junior activity in Shropshire majorly in the last couple of years.

Warwickshire

Warwickshire team and junior achievements are described in the earlier sections of this report.

The Under-11 and Under-9 teams both made the National finals.

Worcestershire

Worcestershire Junior Chess Academy (WJCA) continues to grow, as at the turn of the year there were 27 young players on the books (aged between 8 and 16) and about 18 attending each session.

Worcestershire entered the Under-11 Midlands team tournament – first entry in an Under-11 team event for the few years. Tayisia Eaton top scored with 3 out of 4 from her games.

The Worcestershire junior MegaFlnal is taking place today at University of Worcester, a change of venue to last year's Malvern College.

Worcestershire Juniors currently compete regularly in the monthly inter-county Team Battles and we are looking to increase the number of players taking part in these events.

Forwards...

We wish all our juniors well in the UKCC Giga-finals in July, and the National Youth Championships Final in the Midlands in a fortnight.

We plan to run again the new events introduced this season, detailed on the first page of this report.

I am happy to stand for another year, though to give notice, I would plan (after many years) to step back from junior director role next year.

For anyone in the longer term is interested in Junior roles I would be happy, if elected, for anyone to shadow me over the next year if they want to find out about the role for a future year or future years.

Tim Walker