

ECF: Outline proposal for a new 'Copper' membership category – DRAFT for discussion

Angus French, 29 June 2016. Last updated 31 August 2016

Background

A few years ago (at its Finance meeting in April 2011), Chief Executive Andrew Farthing [asked](#) Council how it wished the ECF to be funded: through a pure membership scheme without game fee or through a simplified membership/game fee scheme. Council expressed a preference for a pure membership scheme.

Subsequently (at its AGM in October 2011) Council [approved](#) the implementation of a membership scheme albeit not a pure membership scheme. As a transitional measure and to reduce the risk of a reduction in income, game fee was retained for non-members.

More recently Council representative Ben Edgell had a [motion](#) to Council (at the 2014 AGM) to encourage stakeholders to discuss a change to a pure membership scheme. No discussion took place as the meeting ran out of time.

In recent years, to encourage membership take up, Finance Director David Eustace has proposed increases in game fee which in proportion are higher than those for membership fees.

The current draft [Strategy Statement](#) states: *"Investigate the possibility of eliminating the remnant of game fee and moving to a universal membership system."*

The obvious motivation for a pure membership scheme is to simplify and make more manageable what we currently have. The challenge is to produce a solution which works and which is equitable.

But, if game fee is abolished, what would happen to those who are not members? In recent years, the number of members at the end of a membership year has been about 10,000. While the number of people who play at least one graded game in a year is circa 15,000 (source: <http://www.sccu.ndo.co.uk/grad.htm>). What happens to the 5,000 non-members?

Dealing with game fee is an administrative burden for clubs and this can impact on players when a club insists its players become members. Players can be resentful if they play a small number of games (the author is told this in correspondence he's received as a Bronze members' representative). The cost of Bronze membership can also be a barrier to entry into competitive OTB chess (again, the author is told this as a Bronze members' representative and it's true of his own club; others have said it too).

Some stats.

- (i) Game fee payers pay significantly more than members to have their results graded. Using actual figures for 2014/15 (the most recent available), the game fee charge for standard play games was £2 while the calculated average cost per game paid by members and non-members combined was £0.76. [Income from membership fees + game fees + Pay-to-play fees = £196,642 pre VAT (source: C24.6-201516-Detailed-forecast-and-201617-budget-version-A.xls). Number of standard play half-games played + their equivalent in rapidplay half-games = 256,923 (source: <http://www.sccu.ndo.co.uk/grad.htm>)]

- (ii) Game fee income since the introduction of the membership scheme has increased while the membership count has remained static. Income from game fees (not including Pay-to-play fee income) was £5,187 in 2013/14 and £10,278 in 2014/15. The forecast for 2015/16 is £11,850. Membership counts were: 9,903 in 2013/14; 10,100 in 2014/15; and 10,123 in 2015/16.

Proposal

1. Add a new entry level category of membership – call it ‘Copper’ – for new or infrequent players.
2. Allow Copper members to play up to ‘x’ games in any league (‘x’ might be 5; it would be permissible to play ‘x’ games in one league and another ‘x’ games in another league etc.), any number of games in internal club competitions and (if the member is a junior) any number of games in junior-only events.
3. The price of Copper membership would be low – set at something like the pay-to-play fee applicable to non-members and Bronze members who enter non-FIDE-rated tournaments (currently £7 for adults; £5 for juniors).
4. Copper memberships would be acquired: either online or en bloc through completion (by clubs or tournament organisers as appropriate) of a membership details spreadsheet (like the current Membership Organisation spreadsheet - but with better automation). It would not be possible to sign up through the ECF Office (to avoid extra work at the Office).
5. Game fee would be scrapped. Note: Pay-to-play fees would remain.
6. The Copper membership fee would be billed to leagues, tournaments and clubs (as appropriate) for each non-member who played no more than the prescribed ‘x’ number of games in the league, who played in a junior-only tournament or who played in an internal club tournament. Note: this could result in multiple billings for the same player as each event organiser would be invoiced – a situation which would be avoided through signing-up in advance (see point 4).
7. Copper members would be able to upgrade to Bronze membership for the difference in price between the Copper and Bronze membership fees. Such upgrades would only be possible online to save Office administration. [Note: *For Copper memberships acquired through junior-only tournaments this might be difficult.*]
8. Leagues would be billed the difference between the Copper and Bronze membership fees for each Copper member who played more than the prescribed ‘x’ number of games (this could apply to multiple leagues and each would be liable). (Similarly, leagues would also be billed the Bronze membership fee for each non-member who played more than the prescribed ‘x’ number of games.) Note: The ECF’s billing process will be similar to the current process for game fee billing.

9. Financial implications. Some players would get membership for less than they currently do – by paying for Copper membership rather than Bronze - resulting in a loss in revenue for the ECF. So be it – this is fair to the players. Others could pay a little more than they would as game fee payers (for example, players in junior-only tournaments where the game fee is set low – currently 60p for standard play games and 30p for rapidplay games). **** It would be useful to try to gauge the impacts. Many more players would be members. It is hoped that, on experiencing the benefits of membership, players would be inclined to play more and to upgrade their membership.
10. A stipulation could be added to make Copper membership only available to those who played, say, 10 or less graded games (standard play and rapidplay counts combined) the previous season.
11. A timing issue: There is a risk that club players would leave it until late in the membership year to acquire their membership. They would do this to be better placed to know how many games they are likely to play in a season and therefore the minimum category of membership required. Does this matter? A counterpoint is that by delaying signup, players would miss out on membership benefits... On reflection there probably wouldn't be that many people who, towards the end of a league season, will be on the border of requiring Copper or Bronze membership. A greater concern might be the volume of upgrades from Copper membership to Bronze, resulting in greater bank fees than would be the case if Bronze membership was acquired in the first place.
12. Note: For cross-border leagues, members of clubs who are also members of the appropriate other national federation are exempt from game fee payments. The same is true for players in internal competitions arranged by the Braille Chess Association and English Deaf Chess Association.
13. An alternative to Copper membership could be Registration. This would help differentiate between the different methods of signup and upgrade. Registered players wouldn't be members and wouldn't have membership benefits such as representation at Council. Perhaps for Registration the number of allowable league games and the fee could both be lower than the figures suggested above.
14. The membership system supporting the membership scheme. How well does this work (see bug reports on the EC Forum; previously, the author's analysis of the membership list has shown inconsistencies, suggesting, for example, that the system didn't cope well with three-year memberships)? Ideally the membership details spreadsheet referenced in (4) would be submitted online with automatic verification (providing immediate feedback) and with payment taken at the same time (and therefore no involvement of the ECF Office).

Updates

26 August 2016. Corrected typos, reworded some text and added clarifications especially to points 6 and 8. Added points 12, 13 and 14.

27 August. Further clarifications and comments after discussion with Dave Thomas.

31 August. Clarification to point 8. Minor rewordings.