

ORGANISING A SCHOOL CHESS CLUB

FOREWORD

This booklet is available in hard copy and can also be downloaded from the Welsh Chess Union website (see Appendix 2). It is also available in Welsh.

The Welsh Chess Union would like to thank Chess Scotland for permission to base much of the material in this booklet on Chess Scotland's publication *How to Organise a School Chess Club* and also for permitting the Welsh Chess Union to distribute the teachers' notes and exercises mentioned on page 5.

INTRODUCTION

Why chess?

Chess has fascinated people all over the world for more than a millennium and continues to do so. It has spawned a vast literature – thousands of books about chess are published each year. Those who are introduced to chess in childhood acquire one of a limited number of interests which can be pursued right through, with or without a break, until old age. Nearly all keen adult chessplayers learned the game in their youth.

Research has found that playing chess, apart from being very exciting,

- enhances communication skills
- improves complex cognitive tasks
- teaches the value of hard work, concentration and commitment
- provides a valuable intellectual competitive forum
- instils a sense of intellectual success
- provides many bright youngsters with their first opportunity to use their intelligence in an exciting, rewarding and continuing way
- allows girls to compete with boys on a non-threatening socially acceptable plane
- allows disabled children to compete with others.

All of the above are powerful arguments for having a chess club. Do not be put off if you are not a good chess player – or even a chess player at all. Many teachers have in the past been deterred from starting a school club because they themselves were unable to play chess. The experience of many successful clubs has shown that this need not be a stumbling block (see page 3).

The prime factor will always be the quality of the adult in charge, be this a teacher, another member of staff, or a parent. It is this person's enthusiasm, patience, tact and ingenuity that will overcome apparently insurmountable difficulties, and will far outweigh in value to the chess club any personal expertise at chess.

Organising Chess In Schools

This booklet provides a general background to the organisation of a school club, with details of the basic equipment, organisational and tournament needs. It represents the experience of several people in running clubs over many years, but equally it must be emphasised that it is only a guide. Our advice and suggestions should be modified by the advantages and difficulties peculiar to your own school. We are pointing out one route, but certainly not the only route, to a successful school chess club.

SETTING UP

Permission

You must first get the approval of your head-teacher. If at the same time you can get his or her enthusiastic support, so much the better. Some of the benefits of chess are listed in the introduction to this booklet but the specific arguments which will convince depend on the individual and local circumstances, which you know better than we do.

Accommodation

The room in which the chess club is to meet should ideally be quiet, well lit, and spacious. You need to be able to move about without disturbing the players. Tables are better than school desks because they allow players to sit comfortably opposite each other. A school library is often very suitable, and if you have the co-operation of the librarian you can have available a selection of the many books suitable for young chess players.

Equipment

Setting up a chess club costs very little. It may be possible in the initial stages to rely on sets brought by the pupils. You may be surprised to find how many have sets at home, often unused since they were acquired. But they are often undesirable because of small size or peculiar design. It should be possible to purchase about a dozen standard plastic sets (Staunton pattern: kings 9cm) and plastic roll-up boards (best stored flat) for about £100. Sets and boards are your only immediate requirements. Later you may need scoresheets (to record games) and chess clocks, devices for recording the thinking time taken by each player when it is his or her turn to move. These may be needed for example for some inter-school matches. Chess clocks are quite expensive, costing £20-£30 for a standard clock and £50-£60 for the more modern digital.

Equipment is best purchased from a specialist chess supplier many of whom offer special deals to schools. Some possible sources are listed in Appendix 2. They all have web-sites to browse. Initial funding could come from school funds, a Parent-Teacher Association, or from fund-raising by the club members. And the Welsh Chess Union has a small pool of sets and boards which new school chess clubs may borrow. Contact Kevin Staveley (see Appendix 2) who may also be able to help as regards chess clocks.

Organising Chess In Schools

Members

The initial meetings of a new club are very important, and must be thought about beforehand. You must find out how many are likely to attend, and you must have enough equipment available to cope with the expected numbers. Obviously if sixty turn up and there are only five sets, many prospective members will be disappointed and may not come back. Even if you have enough sets, the proportion of players and beginners will affect your plans, and you must have thought carefully about how to cater for the different needs of the two groups.

First, you should bear in mind that most children under the age of about seven or eight will find chess difficult. Conversely, if membership of a primary school chess club is restricted to the final year, you will lose all your members at the end of the session, and you will be starting again from scratch the next year. That said, you should open membership to at least two year-groups. In a secondary school, if chess club membership is restricted younger pupils you are encouraging the idea that chess is “kids’ stuff” unsuited to older pupils.

If you would like to discuss starting a school chess club further before taking the plunge then any of the three Welsh Chess Union people listed in Appendix 2 would be happy to talk to you.

RUNNING

Time of Meetings

Before opening the club you will need to think about the time of meetings, and to choose the day which suits best. Both lunchtime and immediately after school have advantages and drawbacks. The more frequently the club meets, the more practice the members will have, which is a point in favour of lunchtime meetings. On the other hand, as the standard of the players improves they may find it difficult to finish a game in, say, a half an hour lunch-time session.

Pupil Participation

At secondary school level much of the organisation can be put in the hands of a pupils’ committee. Control of the issue and return of sets, recording results and any fund-raising activities can all, given the right pupils and the continuing supervision of the organising adult, be attended to partly or wholly by pupils. The benefits of this involvement will be obvious to any teacher.

Instruction

Members will want to play chess, rather than be taught. If instruction is to be given the nature, timing and amount require careful consideration and are very much influenced by the circumstances of the individual club. But if there are a number of beginners then at least the rudiments of the game must be taught. If this can be achieved as part of the curriculum – and the strong educational

Organising Chess In Schools

arguments for doing so are outlined at the beginning of this booklet – then so much the better.

Resources are available for this purpose, for example the set of teachers' notes and exercises provided by Chess Scotland which are very good for starter classes. A copy of these on CD can be obtained from the Welsh Chess Union. It may also be possible to invite an experienced chessplayer into the school to give lessons under the supervision of a teacher. Again the Welsh Chess Union may be able to help.

Thereafter, many clubs leave members to teach themselves from the experience of playing, confining instruction to casual comments on games or positions as observed. Something more than this will produce better players, but must be carefully planned. If the resources are available it may be possible to start each session with a talk of no longer than about ten minutes on some aspect of the game.

Large 'demonstration boards' (to be hung on a wall or other vertical surface) and pieces to match are available from about £40.

Once the players know how to record their games it can be beneficial for their scoresheets to be commented on by a competent player. Chess software is also available which will annotate games, showing errors and indicating improvements.

Passing the English Chess Federation's Certificate of Excellence, bronze level, will ensure that players have mastered the rules of the game and can be attempted by many of them at the end of the first term.

Competitions

Some members will want to play only their own friends, or people they think they can beat easily. Most will welcome some form of competition, so provide it as soon as circumstances allow. Various types are described in the next section. Do not make the mistake of having too many, too soon, and for too long. Whichever type or types you choose, make sure you know how to run it before you start.

COMPETITIONS

Ladder

As the least formal type of competition, the ladder has many advantages, among which are the facts that it can be run for as many or as few as wished and that it does not require the presence of all the competitors at the same time.

The ladder itself is some device which holds the players' name in order and in such a way that the order can be easily changed. It can be a strip of plywood with hooks on which to hang labels bearing the name of a pupil. A less elaborate, but perfectly satisfactory, form of ladder can be made from a piece of A4 card folded in half with slots for names cut every one and a half centimetres.

Organising Chess In Schools

At first the players' names are placed in an arbitrary order on the ladder, and players are allowed to challenge those above them on the ladder. If the challenger wins, he or she moves above the player challenged, and the others, including the loser, move one place down. If the challenger loses, no change is made.

Restrictions can be introduced as necessary – e.g. players may only challenge others not more than four places above themselves, they may challenge the same person only once in a given period, they may not refuse a challenge, and so on. A routine for reporting results and clear instructions about who is permitted to change the positions of the names on the ladder will be required.

A ladder competition is very easy to run, does not depend on the presence of particular players, and is very flexible. It can be kept very simple or made more elaborate to suit the club's requirements. It is probably the best type of competition to introduce members of a new club to competitive chess.

All-play-all (league system)

In this each player plays every other player at least once. The number of rounds required will be one less than the number of competitors. If there are more than 10 entrants it is more manageable to divide them into two or more sections (5 or 6 is usually an ideal number for a section).

If the intention is to determine an overall chess club champion then obviously some form of play-off is needed, The two winners can simply play each other or, for example, the winner and runner-up in each section play in a final four-player all-play-all tournament. In forming the sections, steps should be taken to avoid having all the best players in the same section; otherwise they would in effect be playing the final in the first stage.

If on the other hand the intention is primarily to give pupils the opportunity to enjoy and improve their chess, avoiding very one-sided games, then each section needs to contain as far as possible players of roughly the same strength.

Knock-out

This has the advantage of being a well-known, and easily understood, format and is the simplest way of finding a club champion. A subsidiary, 'plate', competition can be organised for those knocked out early on.

But there can be difficulties if players do not play their games by the time specified, or if some withdraw half way through. The trouble can be reduced by clear rules stating a fixed timetable for all the games, and what happens should they not be completed on time.

If the playing strength of pupils is clear then some form of seeding may be desirable.

Swiss System

The competitions listed above are common to many sports, but the Swiss is virtually confined to chess, and is the most popular form of chess tournament. It has advantages over both the all-play-all and the knock-out.

Organising Chess In Schools

It can produce a winner quickly from a large number of entrants. The participants all take part in every round whether or not they won their previous game, play a different opponent in each round, and quickly find themselves playing opponents of a similar playing strength.

The basic principle is that in each round after the first the players with the same number of points are, as far as possible, paired together (normally 1 point is given for a win and $\frac{1}{2}$ for a draw). After a few rounds the pairings should be of people of nearly equal strength. A tournament of five rounds is enough for up to 32 players and six rounds for 64 players.

A Swiss System tournament can be run with varying degrees of sophistication but for school chess club purposes the points to note are these:

- the draw for the first round is done at random;
- thereafter, ensure as far as possible that players on the same score meet each other;
- after the second round it is easier to pair off players with the best and worst scores first before pairing players in the middle;
- if a player can't be paired against somebody on the same score, pair the player against somebody with a score as close as possible; for example a sole leader with three points from three games should be paired down to somebody on $2\frac{1}{2}$ points (or failing that 2);
- have the players toss for who plays white or black;
- keep track (particularly to ensure players don't meet each other more than once) by writing up a pairing card for each player and displaying all the results round by round on a wall-chart. See examples in Appendix 3.

BEHAVIOUR

General

During the progress of a game players should not

- consult chess notes or publications
- try out moves on another chessboard (or on a computer!)
- discuss their game with or take advice from a third party
- distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever.

The 'touched piece' rules

The rules set out below apply to serious games but, to avoid falling into bad habits, it is as well to apply them from the outset. In essence:

- a player can 'adjust' a piece (to put it in the middle of its square) so long as he makes clear beforehand that is his intention; but otherwise
 - **if a player touches one of his/her own pieces that piece must be moved if possible;**

Organising Chess In Schools

- **if a player touches an opponent's piece that must be captured if possible.**

EXTERNAL COMPETITIONS

General

Once the club is established, consideration should be given to entering external competitions. A useful preliminary step is to play friendly matches against neighbouring schools. These may be over whatever number of boards (i.e. players per side) is convenient. This is valuable as a guide to the standard reached by the players. Those with a real talent for the game may well improve with remarkable rapidity.

Next the club should join a local league, if it exists, and members can also take part in Welsh Chess Union junior individual tournaments. As well as those organised by the Welsh Chess Union and its members schools can enter the 'UK Chess Challenge', a splendid event which attracts 70,000 children a year. The first stage takes place in the individual school. The children who do well in their school go forward to the regional stage, the Megafinal. See Appendix 2 for contact details.

Some adult chess clubs run junior sections (contact the Welsh Chess Union for details). Club junior chess is particularly valuable for stronger pupils and for those moving on to, say, a secondary school with no chess club.

It is also possible nowadays to play chess on the internet – see Appendix 2 – and buy chess courses on CD and DVD.

It is advisable that as games are taken more seriously players should be encouraged to record their games move by move on scoresheets, and begin to use chess clocks.

Organisation of matches

As soon as you start playing matches you will be responsible for the arrangements for your home games. You should ensure that everything is ready before the scheduled time for starting play.

Playing Conditions

- Ensure that each player has sufficient space on his/her table, not only for the board, but for his scoresheet if he/she is using one.
- Tables should be placed in such a way that players have no difficulty in leaving their boards.
- The boards should be placed far enough apart as to avoid distraction and discourage comment.
- Any conversation should not be audible to players seated at the board.
- If it is a player's turn to move that player should not normally leave the playing area (though it is perfectly in order for players to leave their seats to look at the other games).
- Staunton pattern chess pieces should be used at each board, ideally sets of the same size on each board

Organising Chess In Schools

- If possible players who have finished their games should be given access to another room where they can discuss the game with their opponent without disturbing those in play.
- Teams must be arranged in descending order of ability. If for some reason a team is short of players, the lowest boards should be conceded.
- It is normal for the opposing players to shake hands at the beginning and end of play.
- The time of the end of the playing session should be agreed before commencement together with the procedure to deal with games which are still unfinished at that time.
- A copy of the Laws of Chess should be available to resolve any dispute which may arise, as should a copy of the tournament rules, if available.

Organising Chess In Schools

WELSH CHESS UNION

The Welsh Chess Union is the national organisation responsible for the promotion of chess in Wales and an independent member of the World Chess Federation. It is committed to working with the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage more chess to be played in schools, especially in socially disadvantaged areas and among socially disadvantaged children.

The Welsh Chess Union organises a variety of competitions for all ages and abilities. For school age players there are a variety of team and individual events.

The Welsh Chess Union also organises training for the top players and selects youngsters to represent Wales in international events such as the World Youth Championships and international team events.

A yearbook is produced (free to members) which includes a calendar of chess events, including junior events, and reports on the previous year's competitions.

For further information on the Welsh Chess Union please consult the website (see Appendix 2) or contact:

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Development Director
4 Rushbrook Close
Whitchurch
Cardiff
CF14 2BN
029 2061 3870
kettsarah@yahoo.co.uk

Organising Chess In Schools

Appendix 1

THE LAWS

Any problems that arise during chess games occur mainly as the result of ignorance of the Laws of Chess drawn up by the World Chess Federation (see Appendix 2 for how to access a copy). The questions and answers below are designed as a guide for those relatively unfamiliar with these laws.

1. Must a player say “check” when attacking the king?

No, it is not necessary to announce check.

2. Can a king be captured if it is left in check?

No. The player leaving his king in check must take his/her move back and play a legal move instead, if possible with the piece touched (for example by interposing it between the opponent’s checking piece and the king) but if not with another piece.

3. When is a player prevented from castling?

Castling is impossible (i) if the king has already moved, or (ii) with a rook that has already moved.

Castling is temporarily prevented if (i) there are pieces between the king and the rook, or (ii) the king would move out of, through, or into check.

Castling is permitted if the rook is threatened with capture.

4. Is a player allowed to castle if he touches the rook first?

No; the player must move the rook if possible.

5. A player touches his king and rook at the same time only to discover that castling is illegal – what happens?

The player has to move his king. If this is not possible the player is free to make any move.

6. Can a player move a piece to one square, change his mind before releasing it and move it to another?

Yes

7. What happens if a player discovers that he cannot move a piece that has been touched?

The player is free to move another piece.

8. If a player has no legal move which he can make, does he lose?

If the king is in check the player loses. Otherwise it is stalemate i.e. a draw.

9. During a game it is discovered that an illegal move was made some time earlier. What should be done?

If it is the third illegal move by that player then he forfeits the game.

Otherwise the position which existed immediately before the illegal move was played should be established and the pieces reset. The piece moved

Organising Chess In Schools

illegally counts as a touched piece, and must be moved legally if possible. If the position immediately before the irregularity cannot be established the game shall continue from the last identifiable position prior to the irregularity.

10. If pieces are accidentally displaced should the game be restarted?
The position before the displacement should be reinstated. If this cannot be done the last identifiable position prior to the irregularity should be identified and set up.

11. If the position of the pieces at the beginning of a game was incorrect should the game continue?
No; the game should be replayed.

12. If the game is started with the pieces in the right order but the board the wrong way round (i.e. with a black square at each player's right hand corner) should the game be replayed?
All the pieces should be transferred to a correctly placed board and the game continued.

13. Can a player withdraw the offer of a draw?
No. A draw should be offered only immediately after making a move. If the draw is offered before making a move the opponent can ask to see the move before deciding. In either case, once made the offer cannot be withdrawn. The offer can be accepted or refused either verbally or by making a move.

Organising Chess In Schools

Appendix 2: useful contacts and sources of information

Welsh Chess Union

1) Website: www.welshchessunion.org.uk

2) Useful contacts:

- Sarah Kett (Development Director, Welsh Chess Union)
kettsarah@yahoo.co.uk (029 2061 3870)
- Ian Eustis (Director Junior Chess, Welsh Chess Union):
ianrhos@hotmail.com (01792 862115)
- Kevin Staveley (Welsh Chess Union Junior Committee)
kevin.staveley@btinternet.com (01443 772750)
- Howard Williams (to order copies of this booklet or the CD referred to on page 5) howard.swynant@btinternet.com (01239 682182)

Educational advantage of chess – see for example

- www.chessintheschools.org/why_chess.html

Some specialist chess equipment suppliers

- Chess Suppliers Scotland, 15 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6AQ
(Tel/Fax 0141 248 2887) www.chess-suppliers.co.uk and
- BCM Chess Shop, 44 Baker Street, London, W1U 2RT (Tel/Fax 020 7486 8222/3355) www.bcmchess.co.uk
- Chess Direct Ltd PO Box 18, Mexborough, South Yorkshire, S64 9AR (Tel/Fax 01709 890565/874076) www.chessdirect.co.uk

UK Chess Challenge (*see page 7*)

www.ukchesschallenge.com

Laws of Chess

These can be downloaded from the website of the World Chess Federation :
<http://www.fide.com/official/handbook.asp> (see section E1 for the Laws of Chess)

Chess instruction

www.ChessKids.com (includes free on-line chess course)

Playing chess on the internet

- www.chessclub.com (Internet Chess Club site)
- www.gwyddbwyll.com (Welsh language site)

Organising Chess In Schools

Appendix 3

Examples of basic forms for running a Swiss system tournament (see page 6)

Pairing Card

Number:			
Name:			
Rd	Opponent	Result	Total
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Wall Chart to be completed round by round (extract)

No	Name	Rd1		Rd2		Rd3		Rd4		Rd5		Total
1	M Llwyd	+5	1	+4	2	+8	3	-2	3	+9	4	4
2	E Wynne	=15	1/2	+10	1 1/2	+6	2 1/2	+1	3 1/2	+8	4 1/2	4 1/2
3	G Owen	-4	0	-9	0	+23	1	+10	2	=6	2 1/2	2 1/2
4	L Morris	+3	1	-1	1	+14	2	+9	3	-11	3	3
5	I Morgannwg	-1	0	+1	1	=13	1 1/2	-15	1 1/2	-17	1 1/2	1 1/2

*The first column for each round shows the player's opponent and the result.
The second column shows each players cumulative score.*