

[*Comments:* based on notes at <https://necl.org.uk/wordpress/ecf-rolling-membership/>

Original reference at <https://www.englishchess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Rolling-Membership-Update.pdf>]

Paper to Council Members

Rolling Membership Update

Please note that references to 30th June dates in this paper refer to winter leagues. The equivalent date for summer leagues is the date on which the last match in the summer league is scheduled to be played.

At the Annual General Meeting on 25th October Council asked the ECF Board for an update clarifying how certain aspects of rolling membership and game fee invoicing with regard to how local leagues operate, and what future plans are in hand to enhance the functionality of the game fee invoicing process. This paper provides that update. We should be grateful if recipients would share the paper more widely, for example with league officials and clubs – and we will also send the paper to our organisers email database and include it in *ChessMoves*.

There are four main points that we should like to bring to Council members' attention regarding the rolling membership system:

- The main reason why rolling membership was originally introduced was to be finally rid of the unfair pre-rolling membership arrangements under which a player joining the ECF at a point other than 31st August in general only received membership benefits for part of the year up to the succeeding 31st August. Under rolling membership a player joining the ECF at any point now gets a full year's benefits for a full year's membership fee.

[A main 'benefit' for many members is to have their games freely graded. Players who only start a series of graded games when joining still in general only receive this benefit for part of their first year, so still 'unfair'.]

- The underlying principle of rolling membership remains unchanged from pre-rolling membership days, namely that if league players are members as at 30th June there is no possibility of game fee being levied for the preceding season. The requirement continues to be retrospective rather than prospective.

[Why stick to a 'principle' that no longer has value? Instead, why not retain the 'underlying principle' of 'no game fees whilst you are a member' to be more easily understood. Players who first start a series of graded games when first joining could then have no game fee liability for the whole of their first membership (and subsequent rejoining periods) with levies only applying to non-membership periods and 30th June having no special fee-related significance.]

- The new arrangements under rolling membership differ from, and are significantly more generous than, the arrangements under the pre-rolling membership regime. Now, if a league player is not a member as at 30th June we will always consider a game fee waiver for the

preceding season so long as the player concerned was a member when their games in the preceding season were played. In the pre-rolling membership era, if a league player was not a member as at 30th June game fee waiver would only be granted in exceptional circumstances (e.g. death, emigration etc). Please note, however, that a game fee waiver will usually be granted only once for an individual player; if any further waiver requests for the same player are received thereafter, the assumption will be that a game fee waiver will not be given on the basis that the player is either trying to 'game' the system (see below) or that the message from the first waiver request that they should renew by 30th June has not been heeded. Even in such cases, we will still consider a game fee waiver if it can be demonstrated that the request is for reasons such as death, emigration etc (so the same as under pre-rolling membership arrangements).

[The onus need not be on leagues to check details and 'appeal' to be 'considered' for a 'waiver'! ECF have all game dates and membership dates, so it should not be difficult to simply not invoice fees for games played whilst a player is a member.]

- It is true that clubs/captains need to be more vigilant than under the pre-rolling membership regime when it comes to checking membership status given, that players' membership can now expire at different points of the year. However, the 'sort by club' facility in the ECF rating database is a very easy way for club captains to check membership status and expiry dates (and the LMS functionality provides a very similar facility for leagues). Please see the appendix to this paper, which explains how to navigate the ECF rating database to check on players' membership status in the most efficient way.

['Vigilance' was more relevant when clubs could use former leverage to mostly ensure memberships/renews took place prior to league participation. Rolling membership undermined this and made periods of perceived liability unavoidable.]

We continue to investigate options to further improve our game fee invoicing processes. For example:

- One enhancement which we are investigating is an upgrade to our game fee invoicing software to automate more of the process for invoice production. In particular, we will investigate the key issue of whether the accuracy of date information in the rating submissions we receive is sufficiently accurate to be used to automatically match dates on which league games are played with the membership status of the players when the games were played. If so, it should obviate the need for clubs/captains to ask for game fee waivers as the games concerned will be automatically ignored for games fee invoice purposes.
- We will also investigate whether the membership system can support advance renewals (for example, six or nine months before expiry of existing memberships); this would enable those clubs/captains who wish to do so to require their players to take out membership up to 30th June following the end of the league season before picking league teams.

[Steps now 'investigating' were requested (/rejected) some years ago - implementation from the start should not have been difficult.]

- The covering letter that accompanies game fee invoices already includes wording to the effect that a game fee waiver will always be considered if the conditions in the third bullet point in the previous section are satisfied. That said, on the basis that not all game fee invoice

recipients necessarily read the covering letter we will be adding the same wording to game fee invoices as a reminder of the game fee waiver facility.

Three other observations if we may:

- We do need to bear in mind that most clubs/captains are diligent about getting their players to join/renew as ECF members by 30th June – only clubs/captains who do not do that who will need to ask for game fee waivers in the first place. [*see above*]
- There is a risk of players trying to ‘game’ the rolling membership system. To that end we will be maintaining a register of game fee exemptions which will be an important resource for the ECF in identifying players in respect of whom the ECF receives recurring game fee waiver requests.
- The accuracy of game fee invoices derived from rating system data depends on results and rating officers submitting correct dates for games. This is particularly important as regards the game fee invoicing enhancement we are investigating (see above), and we should be grateful if you would reinforce the message with your results and rating officers accordingly please.