

Report to AGM - August 2008:

By Craig Pritchett (schools chess development)

I reported comprehensively to Chess Scotland Council in February 2008 and my final report for the year Sep 2007-Aug 2008 follows the format of that report, filling it out and updating it as required. The year has been a busy one and the seven items below relate to a mix of specific initiatives, events and responses to the ever-present and fundamental challenge of seeking to expand the chess grass roots base:

1. Dinosaur Chess:

- CS progressed a generous offer from Dundee creator Paul Shafi to make this BAFTA nominated piece of chess teaching / self-learning software available in PC and Mac formats to all Scottish schools.
- This was launched nationally in the spring and the CS website contains a homepage box explaining the program's benefits and how schools must access the program via IT heads in Scotland's 32 local education authorities.
- The program can be loaded on to all school PCs and laptops; pupils can access the program and control their own learning; chess teachers can also use the program as a teaching basis.
- The program is also designed for use with interactive school whiteboards. The Spring launch included Promethean flipcharts / WORD worksheets, which can be used with Promethean whiteboards enabling not just greater scope for chess teaching but also to use chess to help teach problem solving elements of the maths curriculum.
- Donna Officer, who developed these (Promethean) flipcharts / worksheets, also uses Dinosaur Chess to teach autistic children. I have just received a Smartboard conversion of her flipcharts that enables schools that use interactive Smartboards (interactive whiteboards come in two main Promethean and Smartboard brands) and I am now seeking agreement for these to be distributed via the LEA structure already in place for the main program and the Promethean Whiteboard tools.
- I am also seeking partners to set up a distribution framework that enables private schools to benefit from this initiative. They are not linked into the LEA state school structures and have no corresponding private IT provider network or support.

2. Development of a half GCSE in chess integrated into the English exam system and potential for its adaptation for accreditation in Scotland

- This key skills qualification, developed by an assistant head teacher in London with (a little) input by me, has now been accredited by exam board ASDAN for pilot with a view to full launch in 2008-09.
- Since February, I have established that it may indeed be possible to convert this into the slightly different Scottish key skills exam framework and that it may also be possible to obtain Scottish accreditation. I believe there is a real opportunity here to establish a valuable educational qualification based on chess.
- Anyone interested, perhaps particularly chess playing school teachers, in helping progress this work, which I am sure would (at least!) attract CPD points for any teachers involved, please contact me.

3. Law Society of Scotland secondary schools Allegro

- See details of this splendid new event at the February report on the event at the CS website. We welcome a first class new sponsor.
- The second Allegro has already been scheduled to take place in March 2009 with the continuing enthusiastic support of The Law Society. Considerable thanks are due to tournament director Lynsey Shovlin for her very hard work, which ensured that this event was a most definite highlight.

4. Borders schools chess Championships

- I attended the 25th Borders primary school chess champs (the David Matthews Associates Primary Chess Tournament) in February. A very successful event, it has now been integrated as a qualifier for both the national primary individual and team championships.
- The event was extensively covered by Borders TV and local media. Congratulations to the organisers, particularly Tom Lawson, who has been the main inspiration and tournament director for all 25 years. A report appears at the CS website.

5. N Ayrshire Council's chess in schools programme

- N Ayrshire Council's chess in schools programme continues to draw advice and some administrative support from Chess Scotland. But it has now essentially developed a direct teaching (near full-time) arrangement with Sam Collins, now entering its second year, which covers many schools.

- The early programme began some years ago as a more limited “teach teachers to play and teach chess and to organise school chess clubs”. The teaching was delivered by Chess Scotland, with funding from central budgets for the continuing professional development of teachers (CPD).
- Chess Scotland always encouraged the Council to develop a “visiting schools coach” arrangement (this is perhaps the key recommendation in the Aberdeen University research project into the Aberdeen chess in schools project in 2004-05).
- To its great credit, and in no small part due to the vision of the Council’s chess programme manager, Irene Gilmour, the Council has now managed to find the finances to achieve this goal.
- We hope that this project can be financially sustained in the future. It remains wholly financed by N Ayrshire Council, who recently tapped into additional finance which they have in part spent on chess projects from Proceeds of Crime grant funds.

6. Aberdeen University chess in schools and communities conference

- This was a very successful inaugural, truly international conference, which built on the success of the Aberdeen chess in schools project, managed by David Leslie, and the very highly regarded year-long piece of research carried out on the project by a University of Aberdeen Rowan Group team.
- The conference was hosted by the University, sponsored by Aberdeen City Council, with Scottish Junior Chess taking a prominent organisational role. Chess Scotland officials gave a number of presentations. These included: Donna Officer (and her daughter Amy), Stephen Hilton, Jonathan Rowson and me (supported by Donald Wilson).
- There have been a number of reports at the CS website on this event, which received international coverage, not least by Susan Polgar, who spoke at the conference and was an honoured guest.
- Aberdeen University has now very helpfully made many of the papers / presentations from the conference available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/rowangroup/ciscon.shtml>

7. Junior Development Business Plan

- I have always seen the schools development post as primarily concerned with the (often difficult) job of encouraging the growth of more local and regional schools / junior activity and infrastructure, particularly more clubs wherever possible and

inter-schools leagues. The “difficulty” lies in the inescapable constraint that the “centre” lacks resources and is in any case largely dependent on local / regional enthusiasm to develop chess in their own patches.

- Against this background, the Junior Development Business Plan, arising out of the Junior Development Review in 2006-07, encouraged the Scottish Junior Chess Association Educational Trust to make an ambitious application for funds to finance a schools development project in Edinburgh. In the event of its success, it was hoped that this might provide a pattern for further applications and similar projects nationally.
- The main application to the Young People’s Fund unfortunately failed. It was, however, extremely successful in attracting many letters of support from MSPs, MPs, business organisations and others, so that the rejection itself was not wholly discouraging, and available YPF funds, too, were extremely limited in relation to applications at the time.
- The application’s failure was disappointing, but should in my view be seen more as a learning opportunity than a terrible blow. Indeed I touched on the possibility of “failure” (which of course could never be ruled out) in my presentation at the Aberdeen University chess in schools conference (see paper at the link above). This stressed the positives in the Scottish schools environment, which are indeed there ... we just need more of them!
- It still remains open to enthusiasts anywhere to lobby for greater activity and Chess Scotland must continue to be alert to possibilities to promote more growth. The SJCA Educational Trust’s response has been positive, with a renewed commitment to seeking to raise more funds, which are always chronically short in chess. The Trust moreover has not ruled out renewing an interest in bidding for large funds in support of large projects in partnership with others, where that might make sense.