

## Standards Committee Report to Chess Scotland AGM (August 2012)

*[as Amended 28 October 2012 and Edited on 19 December 2012]*

It would be fair to say that the existence of a Standards Code, and mechanisms to promote and safeguard good standards of conduct among the chess-playing community in Scotland, continues to be treated with some suspicion by a minority of the community. However, it is hoped that after three years of operation, these concerns will have been largely allayed. The case for the majority view has been eloquently expressed by others and need not be repeated here.

Some (relatively minor) improvements to the Standards Code and its operation are still needed and I regret that I still have not brought those matters to the AGM for discussion - these await the attention of the next Chair of the Committee who, I hope, will be able to take a much more energetic lead in this respect than I have been able to.

August will mark the end of my 3-year term as Chair of the Committee at which time I intend to step down: I am assured that there is at least one excellent candidate for this post which, above all, requires commitment to promoting the well-being of the chess-playing community in Scotland. It is hard to retain that commitment if one does not, like me, even play the game any longer.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported the work of the Standards Committee - there are too many people to mention individually, except that I must single out the extraordinary level of support afforded to the Committee by Steve Mannion Snr to whom I am deeply indebted.

In the last year, the Committee has dealt with only one case (other informal enquiries have been received but have not proceeded to formal complaints, up to August 2012). This case was a difficult one in several respects but raised issues of importance. One of the objectives of the Standards Code was to provide a mechanism by which disputes could be prevented from escalating to the point where individuals (especially committed volunteers) were hurt - leading to their disenchantment and withdrawal from the scene.

There are at least five lessons to be drawn from this case:

- 1) the Code's warnings about the dangers of email should be more widely known. For example, that section of the Code should be explicitly drawn to the attention (in writing) of all Chess Scotland officer bearers. (It is very easy to give unintentional offence by email, and all too easy to go much further than that - as in this case).
- 2) everyone has a responsibility to uphold standards: if I am copied into an email exchange which threatens to get out of hand then it is wrong of me to ignore this: by so doing, I legitimize the offence. At the very least, I have to distance myself from the exchanges and demand that I am no longer copied into such correspondence.
- 3) senior Chess Scotland officials have particular responsibility to uphold standards: indeed, there was a very strong argument that this case should never have reached the Standards Committee at all but should have been swiftly and decisively handled by those officials. With the exception of the Executive Director, who did indeed act and also provided the Panel with additional evidence, the Panel was disappointed by other senior officials' failures to grasp the nature of their responsibilities in this case.

4) the composition of the Standards Committee should reflect a much wider geographical base than at present, otherwise there is a high risk that the Committee's work will be hampered by conflicts of interest where one (or both) parties to a dispute are known to several members of the Committee.

5) organized chess in Scotland exists only because of the sterling work of committed volunteers: however, they (and Chess Scotland) need to remind themselves frequently that chess is only a board game, played for fun.

The Panel charged with this case expended a great deal of effort on it, culminating in the production of a 25-page report on the matter (authored by the Chair). As far as the Committee was concerned, the case ended when the complainant received an apology, although understandably too much time had passed for the complainant to be fully satisfied with this. The complainant was given leave to take the matter to appeal but declined to do so.

In view of the complainant's subsequent actions, the Committee proposes that the Standards Code and/or the Operating Procedures should be amended to ensure that no complainant (or any other party) shall in future be able to breach the confidentiality of the Committee's communications (or misrepresent them) with impunity in the future.

Trevor Davies (Chair (2010-12), Standards Committee)