

An Eligibility Working Party (EWP) was set up after the 2019 CS AGM and over four months from early November 2019 to mid February 2020 examined the rules and procedures related to eligibility for Championship titles and International representation. The covid pandemic and ongoing restrictions prevented an earlier presentation of the proposals.

Subjects Discussed by EWP

Grandparent: The group considered if parentage should be changed to a grandparent link rather than the proposed and previous link of one parent born in Scotland. Grandparent is the bloodline requirement indicated by the Scottish government in their 2014 white paper of what would qualify someone to be granted Scottish citizenship. Grandparent is also used by some sports bodies as the parentage level required to become a player for that country. However, Chess Scotland has conducted two votes on the grandparent issue in the last decade both of which have been rejected by the membership, albeit on low turnout. Grandparent could in theory extend the catchment of players eligible to play for Scotland who may have no current connection with the country which may have been the motivation to reject the proposal.

Chess Scotland membership: This was initially considered as a compulsory eligibility condition for Championship or International participation but later moved out to the Operating Procedures as a requirement for players who are already eligible by the three main criteria. A player may be fully eligible but they won't be a Championship participant or a member of a Scotland representative team if they do not have up to date membership status.

Juniors: Rules pertaining to juniors and eligibility was discussed. In official FIDE and ECU events the normal eligibility conditions would be required. However certain invitational events (e.g. the Junior Quadrangular Tournament), the International Junior Director, in collaboration with selectors of a particular event, may relax requirements for juniors at the lower age levels in order to gain relevant experience.

FIDE registration: The expansion of FIDE rating down to 1000 level has increased greatly the number of new FIDE registrations in recent years. Before the pandemic lockdown many weekend tournaments now offer FIDE rated sections. CS submits the Spens and Richardson Cups for FIDE rating. The popular SNCL FIDE rates the top two divisions. A series of FIDE rated blitz tournaments conducted by the Scottish Chess Tour has further expanded the number of players requiring a FIDE ID to participate in these events. FIDE rating can be seen as an excellent way to promote the game by offering players a chance to gain a "world ranking".

The method by which players are initially allocated a FIDE ID was the subject of extensive EWP debate and has resulted in some changes to the procedure adopted. Previously most players were registered on the basis of having a visible playing record in Scotland for at least a two year period – since that provided information that the player had been resident here for the minimum time required and would qualify at least on residency. Players will now be required to submit an application form and confirm their eligibility for a Scotland registration based on the three criteria of birthplace, parentage or residence. Parents of players under the age of 16 will have to provide consent before CS will process a registration request. The current and intended procedures do not record how a player qualifies for the FIDE registration – we require a statement to be confirmed that

the player fulfils the eligibility conditions. There would not normally be any checking of birth certificates, passports, council tax notices etc.

There is a much higher level of checking required when processing transfers from a foreign FIDE registration to Scotland. In addition to fulfilling the CS eligibility criteria the transfer process involves various financial obligations as well as signed information which has to be provided to FIDE before transfers can be completed. Transfers are rare.

There are currently over 1000 players who are registered as SCO in the FIDE rating system.

Longevity: The current interpretation of a SCO registration is that a player has lifetime rights associated with the SCO registration and is not subjected to ongoing checks on their status. A player would normally retain the SCO registration for life and it would only be removed if they wish to transfer to another federation. The residency section highlights the main focus of the discussions. There was consideration given to improving the connection to the country by restrictions countered by the increased administration requirements to adopt such a policy and whether it would be appropriate to restrict rights to players who had chosen to be Scotland registered.

Residency issues: With possibly 20% of the Scottish population not born in this country the rights of players who qualify only on residency is of importance to how SCO eligibility is established. More time was spent on this topic than any other during EWP discussions.

Chess Scotland has long used two years residency as the required period before a player will be allocated Scotland status (one year for under 18s). The EWP considered the situation in some other countries where a longer residency period is required but a majority preferred to continue with the existing period. Some countries such as England do not impose any residency or nationality conditions and will register any player.

There was debate on whether a player initially allocated a SCO badge solely on residency should retain the rights associated with SCO status if they subsequently left Scotland. Players who are in Scotland on short term residency will be subject to fees if their intention is to transfer later to their own "home" country. Players may also have difficulty of participating in their own home events with a SCO registration. Players are advised of these issues in the information notes in the FIDE ID Operating Procedure prior to their application for a SCO registration.

There was majority opinion for the current two year residency for initial registration and the continuation of lifetime rights once a SCO registration is allocated. Some of the issues are presented below.

The argument against current policy of two years residency and lifetime rights: Individuals who represent Scotland should have a Scottish connection. The current practice compromises that connection by permitting lifelong qualification to Scotland status via a residency qualification of just two years. The eligibility of players who qualify only on residence should end if they move out of Scotland, or be subject to a grace period determined by how long they lived in Scotland. The published eligibility rules of similar countries (like Wales, Ireland and New Zealand) do not provide lifelong eligibility from short term residencies.

The admin requirement could be minimized or reduced using existing mechanisms, as players wishing to be eligible for international selection are already expected to ensure that contact details, address etc. are current. Players entering Championships also provide contacts, and addresses etc.

Although Scottish birth or parentage always head the criteria for eligibility, this information is not stored or even collected from the (80% or so) of players who could qualify this way. If this were done, the number of players seeking eligibility but who qualify only on residency would be relatively small.

There would be a need to retain the data, but this is arguably worth the effort in order to preserve a degree of 'Scottishness' that would otherwise be lost.

The argument for the continuation of the existing policy.

CS will register any player as SCO who has been resident for at least two years. This period of time is considered as sufficient to indicate a connection to Scotland for the large section of the population who are "resident only".

There would be a significant level of intrusion into the personal circumstances of individuals if CS were to set out to enquire and record exactly when someone became resident in Scotland and to mark them for their whole chess career as resident-only qualifiers for a SCO badge. Organisations now have to take considerable care with personal data. To operate the policy that resident-only players should have rights withdrawn or modified when they leave Scotland the database of players would need to be shared with others in the organisation. The Championship entries secretary and International directors would need to know which players had to be checked in relation to their current residency address and whether their eligibility period had expired. Proposals for a change of policy must also take into consideration the administrative capabilities of the organisation. Would this be a suitable allocation of the time available to CS officials to maintain and update such a database even if legally permitted?

While the policy would eliminate very short term residents such as students it could mean that an established international player who had been resident in Scotland since childhood and considers themselves to be Scottish would be subject to lifetime checks on their rights to title and international representation if at any time they were resident outwith Scotland. This could create situations that a player who would fulfil projected Scottish citizen rights would still be subject to status checks by the chess organisation.

It is unlikely that a player without a current FIDE registration will be a candidate for Scottish international teams or title wins. Most other countries make more extensive use of the FIDE rating system. So any strong player is likely to already be FIDE registered with their home country and will not be seeking a new SCO registration.

As far as FIDE is concerned any player holding a SCO registration would be considered as Scottish regardless of their geographic location. Any player ruled ineligible from representing Scotland under a CS residency check would be unable to play for any other federation until they had transferred away from Scotland. Should CS place restrictions on players who have already demonstrated a connection to the Scotland chess community now or at some time in the past?