

BCET APPLICATION: WITNEY CHESS CLUB JUNIOR SECTION

Witney Chess Club would like to put its junior section forward for a BCET award please. Over the last few years we have adopted a structured approach to the training and development of junior players which allows a junior to progress from just a bare knowledge of the moves to becoming an expert player within the framework of a single club at both regional (Oxfordshire) and national chess level. The success of our approach is shown by the increase in our junior membership from no more than two or three juniors five years ago to a thriving junior section of around 20 players, whose strength varies from beginner to England international level.

The various initiatives we have put in place to promote chess among juniors and to provide a structured and coherent environment for them within which they can develop their chess playing skills are as follows:

- We provide coaching at the club almost every Monday evening for an hour (7:30-8:30 pm) for our less experienced members. Next season we plan to extend our capabilities further in this area by recruiting a prominent local junior coach to take our less experienced juniors through a comprehensive programme of structured coaching classes on Monday evenings.
- A number of us coach at various local schools, which not only serves to increase the general standard of junior chess in and around Witney but also helps to “spread the word” about Witney Chess Club’s support for local junior chess.
- Last season we set up a fifth team in Division 4 of the Oxfordshire Chess League specifically to allow our junior players to take their first steps into competitive local league chess. Moreover, our fourth team (also in Division 4) and our third team (in Division 3) are also set up to cater for those players who have progressed to around 100-120 and 120-140 ECF grade level respectively. One of our juniors has already progressed so well that he is already playing in our first and second teams, and we confidently expect other juniors to join him in the not too distant future.
- We run a team in the Junior 4NCL for our stronger juniors, who finished fifth in 2013/2014, fourth in 2012/2013 and first in 2011/2012. Apart from the steadily increasing strength of the Junior 4NCL, there is a good reason for the apparent fall-off in results! See below

- For the first time in a number of years Witney Chess Club re-entered the 4NCL itself last season. The purpose of this team was specifically to provide tough competitive chess in the country's premier league for our strongest juniors, in other words those who had progressed beyond Junior 4NCL level (but with a couple of well-seasoned grizzled old greybeards on the top boards to ensure that the juniors were not tested beyond their capabilities). This experiment has proved a great success; as well as exposing our best juniors to top level league chess, the team itself acquitted itself nobly despite its lack of experience on many of the boards.
- We organise an annual junior rapidplay tournament in September, divided into a Major (experienced players) and a Minor (less experienced/beginner players) section, which allows our juniors both to hone their skills before the season proper starts and to cross swords with other juniors from Oxfordshire and beyond. Last year's tournament saw Witney Chess Club juniors placed first in both the Major and the Minor sections, a tribute to the growing strength of our junior section.
- Our annual Witney Weekend Congress in October also provides our juniors with an opportunity to play hard competitive chess within striking distance of the club's own premises. Last year our most prominent junior Marcus Harvey won the Open section (although we cannot claim too much credit for this one, as Marcus was already a top English junior before he joined us) while young Pavel Asenov came third in the U180 section (this one we can claim credit for, as Pavel has gone from ECF grade 127 to 170 on our watch).