

OCA Junior Report 2020–21

Andrew Varney, 16 September 2021

Like everything else, junior chess in Oxfordshire did not run in the normal way this last season, primarily due to the pandemic.

Schools

- The Schools League did not run at all for any age group
- Most after-school chess clubs were discontinued entirely
- A handful of schools ran successful online clubs with a significant coaching element on Zoom – this included well-established chess schools (e.g. St Joseph's), some independent schools (e.g. Dragon, Summer Fields) and some completely new schools for teaching beginners
- Scholastic chess with CSC (Chess in Schools and Communities) was significantly impacted, with only one local school continuing during the pandemic

Ojays

- The county-level invitation-only Oxfordshire junior chess squad club, Ojays (<https://oxonjuniorchess.blogspot.com>) has continued to run throughout the pandemic, with chess games played on www.chesskid.com and one-hour coaching slots via Zoom.
- Master-level holiday chess coaching over several mornings offered online during Christmas, Easter and half term school holidays proved to be popular, especially with some of the more advanced players.

Tournaments

- Many tournaments ran on-line, including the regular Witney Rapidplay
- Oxfordshire county trials and Oxfordshire Junior Championships did not run at all
- The Delancey UK Chess Challenge did not run local OTB Megafinals, instead using online tournaments
- Notably, a series of junior tournaments was run OTB at Cheney School by Joe Conlon as regulations permitted this to happen. These well-run events were much appreciated by parents and children (not just locally in Oxfordshire). This resulted in the tournament being declared the ECF Congress of the Year and Joe receiving the ECF President's Award. You can read more at <https://www.englishchess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ECFAwards2021.pdf>

National Team Competitions

- A lichess club <https://lichess.org/team/ojays>, run by Ola Murawska, welcomed all Oxfordshire Juniors to play regularly for the county.
- Regular online inter-club and inter-county team competitions, mostly on the lichess platform, included the Junior 4NCL, Inter-County team battles and England Junior Blitz arenas.
- Some tournaments were run in divisions and some according to age and/or gender.
- Oxfordshire Juniors took part in all EPSCA online events (Girls U11, U9 and U11 Open).
- Oxfordshire entered U14 Minor, U14 Major and U18 sections in the SCCU (online) Jamboree in June. The U18 team won their section.
- Many thanks to Ola Murawska and Joe Conlon for managing the Oxfordshire online teams.

Individuals – Notable Results

Notable individual results include:

- The U10 section of the ChessKid UK Championship in June was won by Jan Murawski.
- Kenneth Hobson and Tashika Arora have qualified from the online stages for the main Terafinal of the Delancey UK Chess Challenge to be held OTB at Blenheim Palace.

Outlook for 2021-22

While there are ongoing issues related to the pandemic, most school chess clubs appear to be reforming to play OTB rather than run online. There has been unprecedented interest from schools locally wanting to take up scholastic chess lessons and/or after-school chess club provision with CSC for the first time. This is probably due to a combination of factors including “The Queen’s Gambit Effect” and the new interest in chess from people starting to play online during the pandemic.

Unfortunately this has also coincided with a lack of available chess coaches and chess tutors in the Oxford area. I am unable to teach much in person due to ongoing back issues (officially disabled) and many of the existing chess tutors have stopped for a number of different reasons. I am therefore looking for new chess tutors in my role as CSC Regional Organiser as well as on behalf of various schools I am in contact with in my voluntary chess organisation roles.

Oxfordshire Junior Chess, featuring the Oxon Schools Chess League, is due to hold our AGM online via Zoom on Monday 27 September 2021. The last two years this has not taken place due to my back injury and the pandemic. As I am relinquishing two of my voluntary roles for health reasons and both the Treasurer and (Schools League) Secretary have already stood down, the future of the schools league is currently in doubt, along with some other junior chess activities, unless we have new volunteers to take up the roles.

Please contact me if you are active in running junior teams, school clubs or in junior chess coaching locally and would like to hear more about getting involved in some way.

Andrew Varney
OCA Junior Liaison