

## Why this Document?

The purpose of this document is to elicit responses from clubs and individual members to the thoughts of a sub-committee of the OCA on chess during the current pandemic. In particular please see the questions at the end of the next section.

## The Current Situation and Proposals for the Coming Season

With the 2020-21 chess season rapidly approaching it is clear that due to the Covid-19 pandemic it will not be possible to start the season playing Over The Board (OTB) matches. It is also unclear whether such matches will be possible at any point during the season. And further, even if they are possible it is not clear what fraction of players in clubs within the OCA would wish to play in such matches due to the increased risk of infection.

Therefore we plan to amend the rules for OCA administered matches such that they may be played online. This will allow online matches to have equal status to those played over the board, and will not be restricted to the current situation - the plan is to provide for them even once the pandemic is finished. This will be proposed as a motion at the AGM in September, and a rough outline is included at the end of this document; the full motion will be provided to the clubs by the Secretary in the last week of August. Note the intention is to have online matches as a backup where, for whatever reason, OTB is not possible. Thus, for instance, it could also be used to cover the situation where travel is inadvisable due to poor weather. OTB will, however, remain as the main platform for OCA matches.

Thus the simplest plan for the coming season is to move all the matches for the coming season online, at least until OTB becomes possible. The standard fixture list will be published; teams will play in the same divisions as before; matches will consist of 6 boards; the time controls will be as before; the only difference is the matches will be played online. However, this does not address all the issues. Of particular concern are:

1. It is not clear that all members of Clubs within the OCA would wish to participate in what may well become an entirely online competition. Therefore it may well be that clubs do not have sufficient players to support all the teams they have previously run when the competitions were OTB.
2. The standard time controls are very long for online games. Beyond the practical issue of not being disturbed for 3 hours or more when playing on a computer at home there are the health issues that long, uninterrupted screen time can bring. Oxford University for instance recommends taking hourly breaks from the screen.
3. [Online games themselves bring their own issues, especially privacy and cheating. Please see the last section which outlines the AGM proposal for these]

With regard to time controls, at meetings over the last years both the Committee and the Clubs have expressed the opinion that all matches within a given competition must be played under the same control. So although it may be desirable to reduce the time controls for the coming season, for instance to 45+15 (i.e. 45 minutes plus a 15-second increment),

*all* matches shall be played under that reduced time control, even if a return to OTB chess becomes possible.

The first issue, that of participation, is more fundamental. There is no point in running the league if match after match is defaulted. If such a situation looked likely, a possible alternative would be for the 2020-21 OCA season to consist of two team Swiss tournaments, one before Christmas, one after, based upon the ECF Online Clubs Championship ( see <https://englishchessonline.org.uk/ecf-national-online-clubs-championships/> ). Clubs would put forward as many teams as they wish; each team would have a nominated squad of up to 10 players; teams would be seeded on the average grade of the six strongest players in the squad; and matches would be held weekly with a 45+15 time control. Again, detailed proposals will be circulated to the clubs via the Secretary in the second half of August, written as a proposal to the AGM to allow for such a competition. Two tournaments are proposed to allow for the unlikely occurrence that OTB matches may be used for the second event.

Thus there are a number of possibilities for the coming season, and feedback would be much appreciated. The questions to be addressed are

1. Is there sufficient interest for the season to be played as currently except matches are online where required?
2. Alternatively should the season be played as currently save a 45+15 time control and matches are online where required?
3. If 1) or 2) are not possible due to insufficient interest from players at the Clubs would the proposed Swiss tournaments be an acceptable and interesting replacement for the coming season?
4. Alternatively would Clubs and players prefer to organise their own online chess, either internally, or through the ECF (<https://englishchessonline.org.uk/>), or the 4NCL (<http://www.4ncl.co.uk/>), or through other means?

## Outline of Online Chess Proposal for OCA AGM

The proposal for how online matches should be conducted is derived from experience playing online competitions organised by both the ECF and 4NCL, and thanks go to those responsible for the organisation of those events for showing us the way forward. The essence of the proposal to allow online matches will be as follows:

By default all matches in competitions organised by the OCA will be played over the board (OTB). However in exceptional circumstances matches may be played online. This may occur if

- required by the League Secretary,
- or the captains of both teams involved in the match obtain permission from the Secretary.

Such matches will occur on a suitable platform specified by the League Secretary. As far as is possible the playing conditions for the match will be identical to those as specified in the Rules for OTB. Differences from OTB play are described in the

document “Online matches in OCA Competitions” which will be available on the OCA website. This document will consist of at least the following 4 sections:

- Guidance to Captains for organising matches
- Playing OCA matches on the online platform
- Fairplay and Anti-Cheating Rules
- Privacy Guidance, especially for juniors

The platform for the 20-21 season will be Lichess (<https://lichess.org/>). We shall specify only one platform to avoid confusion between the interfaces used on different sites.

Matches will be set up via the OCA website. Captains can enter their teams separately before the match date, but the team submitted first now becomes visible to the opposing Captain only once the opposing team has also been submitted. This removes the potential disadvantage of being first to declare a team. To discourage misleading declarations, any changes to the declared teams are logged; the dates and times of the amendments are visible to anyone viewing the match card. Repeated amendments violate the spirit of fair play and will be treated as malpractice.

Captains will be expected to identify to the opposition the login names of their players on the online platform, so that the correct players play one another. This way we expose no more personal data online than is currently available, though we do recognise the increased role of the Captain.

The guidance of use of the online platform will be based heavily on that provided by the 4NCL, which can be found at

[http://www.4ncl.co.uk/data/Guide\\_to\\_Playing\\_Games\\_on\\_Lichess.pdf](http://www.4ncl.co.uk/data/Guide_to_Playing_Games_on_Lichess.pdf)

For fairplay and anti-cheating rules we shall use those published by the ECF, [https://englishchessonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ECF-Online-Fair-Play-and-AC-v2\\_1.pdf](https://englishchessonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ECF-Online-Fair-Play-and-AC-v2_1.pdf). This will require registering the competitions as a Tier 2 ECF event. The process for this is currently being investigated.

The privacy guidance will apply to privacy while using the platform. We shall recommend all users to treat chess playing platforms as Social Media sites, and so treat them appropriately. For juniors we shall strongly recommend the use of “Kid mode” on Lichess (see <https://lichess.org/blog/VStlbikAAK0yJ2UC/new-features-kid-mode-simuls-and-more>). This removes all communication features on the site, leaving just the chess playing facilities. We will also provide instruction on how to turn off chat and similar facilities during the game. We shall, however, require that all players in a team be contactable during the match by their Captain, even if communication facilities on the site are turned off - this is necessary to circumvent such issues as the game being played under the wrong time control, or being played as an unrated game (which may turn off the cheating detection software) or similar. For this reason we shall also require that a Captain of a team is contactable by the opposing Captain during the match. This way, if so desired, a player can restrict all contact during play to that from his/her Captain.