

# **SOUTHERN COUNTIES CHESS UNION**

## **FOUNDED 1892**

### **Citation for the British Chess Educational Trust**

#### **Watford Junior Chess Club**

The Southern Counties Chess Union would like to nominate Watford Junior Chess Club for a British Chess Educational Trust Award.

This junior section of Watford Chess Club has been growing steadily since 2013. In 2014-15, Watford Juniors entered the Junior 4 Nations Chess League for the first time, something they have done every year since, typically with two teams. Watford Juniors also competed, for three seasons, against adult opposition in evening matches in the Hertford & District League. This integration with chess outside of junior competition has also seen many of their juniors playing for Watford 'adult' teams in over-the-board events such as the main 4 Nations Chess League.

July 2018 saw the first open-to-all Watford under-12 rapidplay tournament, a modest one-day event with maximum capacity 40, which was followed by similar events in May 2019 and July 2019. The latter were intended as practice runs for a larger FIDE-rated junior tournament scheduled for July 2020 which was necessarily abandoned due to the Covid pandemic.

Junior membership of the club over the last 4 years has varied in the 36-48 range well in excess of the adult contingent of between 24-30 adult members. ECF membership is more or less universal.

The success of the junior section in advancing chess is evident has resulted in England Juniors representation for about half-a-dozen juniors in international events such as the European Cadets.

Whilst Covid-19 has prevented over-the-board chess since the spring of 2020 the club transferred to online activities with "Watford Juniors" sites on both Chess.com and Lichess, the more active of the two, where most junior team events are hosted.

Watford Juniors have fielded 5 teams in the Online J4NCL, 3 teams in the main Online 4NCL, 2 teams in the Five Counties Online League, 3 teams in the Hillingdon & District Online League, 1 team in the Online National Club, 2 teams in EAC U Online and 1 team in the 2020 World Online Chess League, as well as having several friendly matches and internal competitions. Of the 7 leagues mentioned, 6 were contested against wholly or mainly adult opposition - their "A" teams have generally held their own against adults although our lower-ranking teams have sometimes suffered, though not deterred given the enjoyment of the fun of playing against adults.

This is not to say that Watford Juniors has been inactive over-the-board during the last pandemic restricted year. Over-the-board club meetings have been encouraged when conditions have allowed.

Watford Juniors reopened for a couple of nights last summer (2020), during a lull in the pandemic, and a handful of rated rapidplay games (which can be found on the ECF rating database) were played. Understandably some parents felt caution was the order of the day so that attendances were not surprisingly well down. Similarly, the first HMG relaxations of 2021 came into force on 29 March 2021 and, the weather being favourable that day, the juniors celebrated with a "Chess in the Park" afternoon with more ECF-rated rapidplay.

Further relaxations then permitted indoor play by juniors, subject to satisfactory risk assessment, and indoor club meetings recommenced on 26 April and on subsequent Mondays although, once again, some parents have been nervous about attending. The club also encourages its junior members, who range in age from 6 to 17, to get outside their comfort zones and participate in external events and six have recently travelled to Oxford to do just that.

A BCET award would be a fitting response to the efforts of the organisers of the Junior section to encourage chess not just within junior competition but in the wider local, national and international chess communities. It is a fine example of what can be achieved for junior chess, even in the most trying of circumstances, with club, junior players and parents working together to ensure that junior chess has thrived in such different ways in a unique year.

Mark Murrell, President, Southern Counties Chess Union

31<sup>st</sup> May 2021