

Lincolnshire League Survey

In order to improve participation in the Lincolnshire League for the 2019-20 season, I submitted this questionnaire to all the secretaries of the clubs affiliated to the Lincolnshire Chess Association.

As an affiliated chess club to the Lincolnshire League, we would like to know your thoughts on any potential improvements that could be made to the Lincolnshire League, with the aim to provide more opportunities for both new and existing players in the Lincolnshire League.

1. How many teams and in which divisions are club thinking of entering teams into the league next season?
2. Is there anything the league could do to encourage you to enter more teams?
3. Do you think the number of boards in each division is appropriate? 5 in division 1 and 4 in division 2.
4. Do you think the grading limit in Division 2 is set at the correct level? It is currently 155.
5. Are you happy with the current time control or do you think it should be altered or Fischer timings introduced? If you favour a change, please state what you would like it changing to.
6. Do you think that we should stay with a split between the north and south in Division 2 or have the 2 divisions merged with long distance matches taking place at a neutral venue?
7. Would your answer change if a team or teams dropped out?
8. Are you aware of the ECF LMS system for reporting chess results?
9. If so, would you favour this being used to report matches instead of the current system?
10. Would you like a change to league structure that would allow for promotion and relegation between division 1 and division 2?
11. Are there any other rule changes you would like to see that you feel would improve the league?
12. Is there anything else you would like to contribute to this survey?

The results of this survey will be used to draw up proposals to change the league rules at the AGM. The proposals will be voted on at the AGM with the results coming into force for the start of the 2019-20 season. To this end, the fixture meeting will take place after the AGM this year. Thank you for your contribution.

The following results were submitted by the respective clubs.

Barton

Thanks for this

These views are my own and as I have not consulted our members should not be considered as those of Barton upon Humber chess club.

1. No teams I am sorry to say we should be entering a team in the Scunthorpe league. (if we had more active members, we would enter a team in Div. 2 north)
2. No, we just need more active members, this is being reviewed by the Scunthorpe chess association
3. For ease of travelling I think 4 boards is best.
4. Yes
5. The current time rules are fine.
6. I think the split makes sense.
7. No.
8. Yes, I have been impressed with the reporting done by Denis for the Scunthorpe league.
9. Yes, providing links to the ECF system are placed in the Lincs chess association website
10. Unfair to comment here
11. No

12. Like many clubs Barton suffers from a lack of Active members, I think the way forward will be via social media it is surprising how many clubs have active Twitter Accounts.

Appleby Frodingham

1. Same as last year: 1 in Div. 1, 1 in Div. 2, but see my suggestions as well. Basically, we can field only 2 teams.
2. Maybe my suggestions below.
3. I think there is a case for 4 board teams in Division 1 & 2. That may increase the number of teams. This makes most sense with my other suggestions.
4. I think that an average grading limit should be used -- see below.
5. I think we should try Fischer timings -- see below my rather complex suggestions.
6. Merging North & South would be a good idea. Some rule about a halfway venue would be essential; if travelling is over, say, 35 miles. It does depend on central clubs (just Lincoln?) being willing to host matches. Will it work? It does put a load on, say, Lincoln. Having a single Div. 2 does mean that there would be a greater variety of opponents, which should generate some more interest.
7. No, if halfway venues are allowed/will work.
8. Yes. I've used it and it works fine. If captains enter the results directly then it reduces the workload on the webmaster and should speed up the process. Currently the results are too slow getting on the web site.
9. Yes, but the match results should be reported to the league secretary as well, so that he can keep an eye on the it. LMS allows for the verification of results, which could be done by the results secretary.
10. Yes, good idea. See my further comments.
11. See my comments below.
12. See below

MY SUGGESTIONS

- Have 4 players per team irrespective of division.
- Have promotion and demotion between divisions (2 up 2 down?)
- In a match a team cannot exceed a 160 average grade. This applies to ALL teams (Div. 1 & 2). (We can debate 160). The justification is that it would make the league more competitive. Something we do in Scunthorpe & District -- not a rule but we split strength evenly by convention. What's the point of one team running away with the trophy? For those teams that have 2 (or three) strong players it would give a chance for the 2nd or 3rd players to play higher up, something they should enjoy (personally I find a closely competitive game and playing a stronger player more enjoyable than one where I am winning all the way -- maybe others do as well). Grimsby, for example, could have one team with Nick as board 1 and one team with Joe as board 1. Joe would not have to be constantly in Nick's shadow. At the Lincs Champs I overheard Murray encouraging James Moreby to join Lincoln, I don't suppose either one would be happy with playing board 2 under the shadow of the other.
- If we do this (i.e. have promotion and relegation) then players have to be tied to a team. This would bring a greater "team spirit" ethos into the league. Once a player plays for a team then they are tied to that team for the whole season. Every team has to have a minimum of 4 registered (tied) players. Currently players can play in division 1 and 2; with promotion/relegation and the team ethos this won't be allowed. New teams can be accepted into the league at the start of the season and players can transfer freely at the beginning of a new season. The league secretary will decide which division a new team will play in (based upon the strength of the minimum 4 registered players); and, initially, whether teams are in division 1 or 2.
- We should try Fischer increments. It seems to be the future. A lot of congresses are using this, and the national stages of the County championships uses this. For league chess, in the evening, where games need to end by a reasonable time, we need a rule to ensure this. The rule should be: "After the completion of Black's Nth move the game is a draw" I think that this is vastly superior to saying the

game is a draw at a specific time, say, 10:30: which clock are we using?; what if the game was late in starting?; "my watch says 10:29, yours 10:31". Using the number of moves is a less ambiguous and more easily measurable event. Currently we play for 3 hours, that is, 90 minutes each. This should be used as the basis of any calculation. For example, one of the following, but there could be endless arbitrary options based on the same method.

- There has to be rule that players must record the moves, perhaps all that is required is that after less than 5 minutes just record that a move has been made (tick the move). (With 30 second increments then must always make a full record).
1. 30 minutes start, 30 seconds increment, draw after Black's move 120 = 30 mins + 60 mins from increments = 90 mins each.
 2. 60 mins start, 15 seconds increments, draw after move 120 = 60 mins + 30 mins from increments = 90 mins.
 3. 45 mins start, 30 seconds increment, draw after move 90 = 45 + 45 mins from increments = 90 minutes.
- If this goes to a vote, then: Motion 1 -- shall we use Fischer increments. Yes or No.
 - If Motion 1 is passed, then vote on the 3 options above. Winner is implemented. If 2 equal, eliminate the loser and vote again. If then equal, then League Secretary has casting vote. Similarly, if all 3 are equal on the first ballot.
- I think I prefer option 2.

Following John Grasham's recent questionnaire about the league I would like to propose the creation of a working group to consider ways of revitalising the leagues. I have some ideas, which I did consider putting forward as voting proposals to the AGM. I decided against this as they are a significant change from what we do now and I felt that, with the AGM on 8 September, there was insufficient time for serious consideration. I will give the essence of my thoughts that could be considered by the working group so that people can have an idea of the working would do. I am not suggesting that these should be its only agenda. There should be an open discussion as wide-ranging as people want it to be.

The two main areas in my thoughts are: -

1. League Structure.
2. Move rate.

LEAGUE STRUCTURE

The purpose of my proposals is to address the following concerns.

- Division 1 and Division 2 North have only 4 teams. These are too small. We play each other twice and there is little variety of opposition.
- Often the leagues are not competitive in the sense that there is often one team that dominates with many easy games. I believe, maybe wrongly, that the purpose of league chess is to provide teams that are equally matched, resulting in a closely contested struggle, and that most players prefer a close contest.
- Currently, the same players can play in Division 1, Division 2 North, and Division 2 South so there is little "team spirit".
- The stronger clubs have top boards of about equal strength. The boards 2's (and 3's) are forever playing second fiddle to their stronger board 1's. Personally, I like playing stronger opposition (OK, not everyone does); maybe the board 2's would like to lead a team.

The essence of my suggestions are: --

1. Abandon Division 2 North and South and have a single Division 2. Travelling would be a problem. Distant teams would play at a "half-way" venue (Lincoln or Louth), or at a weekend. [This could give a division 2 with Scunthorpe, Lincoln, Grimsby, Louth, Spalding, Skegness].
2. Reduce Division 1 to teams of 4 (same as Division 2).

3. Have a grading limit on ALL teams (Division 1 & 2). I thought 160 average across the board but certainly open to discussion and maybe different limits for Division 1 and 2. [These last 2 suggestions could expand Division 1 to Scunthorpe, Grimsby (maybe 2?), Louth, Lincoln (maybe 2?), and Grantham. This could give more closely contested matches].
4. "Tie" players to teams across Division 1 and 2. That is, a player cannot play in both divisions. Have promotion and relegation between the 2 divisions; that could be 2 up & 2 down if there were, say, 6 teams in each. ["Tying" could engender a "team spirit"].

MOVE RATE

The purpose of this is to introduce Fischer incremental move rates to the league. This is becoming more popular at congresses (the majority?) and is used at the national stages of the county games. I'm concerned that we are not getting the necessary experience using Fischer timings. I believe that the big advantage of using increments is that it removes the need to have the "2 minute rule", which is vague, judgmental, and difficult to implement. As I see it, the biggest problem with increments is determining when play stops. Most venues have a closing time and most people (apart from those silver-haired retirees, such as myself) have to get home, get some sleep, and go to work the next day.

One option I've considered is: --

- 75 minutes on the clock and 10 seconds added for each move from the start.
- Stop playing after 3 hrs and adjudicate.

This gives at least 90 moves that have to be played, which should cover most games. It does mean that for the longer games it gives a faster average move rate than currently used (75 minutes then 15 minutes allegro finish). Adjudication was abandoned many year ago, but that was after 36 moves for Division 1 and, risibly, 30 moves in Division 2. Now, with computers, I don't think that adjudication will be a problem, and with 90 moves this should not occur very often.

Grimsby

Point 5, broadly in favour but we recognise there would be issues in regard to Timings and increments, games lasting more than 3 hours will be an issue. Not all clubs may have sufficient digital clocks.

Point 6, this generated some discussion, general consensus was that this is feasible but the games to be played on neutral venue could be played as a block of matches in one venue. The more local matches played on an evening. We discussed the idea of combining all Divisions into one league and expanding number of boards.

Point 8, No, more information required.

Point 10, meeting agreed this to be not feasible due to grading issues.

Point 11, have home teams play white on odd boards in both Divisions.

Louth

Merging Division 2 north with south:

The two divisions do look a bit of a joke at the moment as the difference between the two groups of participants is minimal. But a decision to merge is likely to only affect a couple of clubs in reality - Spalding and Scunthorpe and so their opinions are the important views on this one. I suspect if there was a merger then Spalding may well pull out of the Lincolnshire league as they also play (or certainly used to play) in another league, I think Cambridgeshire. I see the benefits of a neutral venue suggestion, but the question then is where and it means they don't get any home matches, so their travel costs become a lot higher. If say Louth was the neutral venue, then that may impact on the venue availability for Louth Chess Club. If it wasn't held at another chess club, you then have

cost of venues that need to be factored in etc. But Spalding and Scunthorpe are two main clubs to look at for this one.

If Div. 2 north and south merged would the club still run as many teams:

No doubt the overall number of teams would fall but I suspect not by much.

Promotion/relegation:

I personally much prefer this idea normally, but I don't think it would work in Lincolnshire due to the sizes of the clubs. I suspect Louth is not alone in having players in more than one division. That is OK in the current set-up but what if one was promoted/relegated and two teams ended up in the same division, if that happened some clubs may have to pull a team out. You may also have to consider a ruling of a player being limited to how many games they can play in Div. 1. Some leagues have a rule that you can only play up to 3 games in Div. 1 before you are banned from any more games in Div. 2 for the rest of the season. But again, some clubs rely on players playing in both to be able to support more than one team. Some leagues allow clubs to 'refuse promotion' if they cannot support two teams in the same division but that goes against the whole concept of promotion/relegation. So as much as I personally prefer the promotion/relegation concept I think the current set up with a grading limit for Div. 2 is probably best for Lincolnshire.

Grading limit of Div. 2 at 155:

The current set up requires a grading limit for Div. 2 and 155 seems as good as any. You could make it a bit more scientific and pick it as a third the way down the grading list for all Lincolnshire players for example. But that gets messy, no doubt controversial and makes it difficult for clubs to plan.

Fisher Clocks:

I like Fisher timing, and much prefer it to the current system. Do all clubs have sufficient digital clocks to do it now? What restrictions do all the clubs have with what times they need to be out of their venues? With Fisher timings of course you never quite know how long a game will last and few players would be happy with being hassled to get things finished so they can get out of the venue by a certain time. I know 50 min + 10 second counts as long play because it is all based on 60 moves a game but in reality, a typical game is nearer 30 moves. If you did go for Fisher timings, I would suggest aim for longer rather than shorter. 1hr 15 plus 10 second would be reasonable. Using the 60 move concept would make it quicker than the current timings (2hr 50 against the current 3hr) while allowing a bit of leverage for longer games and a decent amount of times for thinking before playing on increment kicks in.

Lincoln

1. How many teams and in which divisions are club thinking of entering teams into the league next season? Four
2. Is there anything the league could do to encourage you to enter more teams? No - Four is our limit.
3. Do you think the number of boards in each division is appropriate? 5 in division 1 and 4 in division 2. Current no of boards is OK.
4. Do you think the grading limit in Division 2 is set at the correct level? It is currently 155. Current grading limit is OK.
5. Are you happy with the current time control or do you think it should be altered or Fischer timings introduced? If you favour a change, please state what you would like it changing to. Current time controls are OK.
6. Do you think that we should stay with a split between the north and south in Division 2 or have the 2 divisions merged with long distance matches taking place at a neutral venue? Current league structure OK with the current number of teams.

7. Would your answer change if a team or teams dropped out? If a team in Division 2 North drops out the consolidate into one Division 2.
8. Are you aware of the ECF LMS system for reporting chess results? Yes
9. If so, would you favour this being used to report matches instead of the current system? No – should continue to email league controller for vetting and confirmation.
10. Would you like a change to league structure that would allow for promotion and relegation between division 1 and division 2? No – leave as is.
11. Are there any other rule changes you would like to see that you feel would improve the league? Should add to rules that request for postponement on the grounds of lack of players or drivers should not be allowed.
12. Is there anything else you would like to contribute to this survey? Not at this time.

Skegness

1. To start with I think it's sensible to have one team in Division 2 South rather than overextend ourselves at this stage and risk defaulting boards.
2. Not to enter more teams but to get more people interested in playing Chess Social Media advertising would be very effective and also cost free for the LCA.
3. It's going to be different for each club. Skegness does seem to have a lot of very enthusiastic players so I think a 5 player team in Division 2 would be ok. One thing to bear in mind is that 5 players in a small car is going to be a push so that's one thing to bear in mind as some players only have a small car.
4. Seems ok to me. Maybe 150?
5. Skegness clocks don't have the ability to add a second time control. They do have bonus time though. I've noticed at Doncaster Chess Congress they have changed to increments and I would be in favour of changing to this, so we don't have to keep pausing and resetting the clocks. These new clocks are a quarter of the price of the ones at Louth and much more affordable. I would definitely propose a change to 1hr 15mins with a 5 or 10 second increment. Much easier and it seems to be going that way elsewhere anyway.
6. A difficult one this as when one looks at the map most of the clubs are actually in the Western area with just Louth, Skegness and Spalding in the eastern region. It could be awkward to organise I would say but I wouldn't be against a neutral venue. The problem is that there isn't a club in the centre of the county unless a venue could be organised that is in the centre of the county. For example, if Skegness were playing Scunthorpe where would we play Louth or Lincoln? Louth is convenient for us, but Lincoln would be convenient for them. A venue for all League games would be the best option probably in the Horncastle area. But that said when you work it out it won't be any less mileage per team than playing home and away in any case. The devil is in the detail here I would say. One league would also mean double the games-is that going to be too much for the clubs to fit in? Proposals to how it would work are needed for me to say either way.
7. If more teams drop out, I think a single Division is more viable as it's not going to be too much fun playing with 2 or 3 teams and it would be better to amalgamate the whole thing.
8. No I'm not aware of this. I always send all graded results to Peter Sherlock. If it's better or more convenient I'd be happy to do it that way.
10. Another difficult one that. Most of the clubs in Lincolnshire are small clubs and the potential problem I see is that if one or two of the strongest players in these clubs stop playing for whatever reason you could end up with a small club being hammered in Division 1 because they were promoted from Division 2 prior to the player(s) stopping coming to the Club. In a heavily populated County with bigger clubs and city clubs it would work better and individuals coming/not coming to a club would have less impact on the prospects of the team. In a County like Lincolnshire with small clubs I could see potential issues.
11. Not that I can think of.

12. Would it be possible to have links to Skegness Chess Club website and Facebook page put on the Link section of the LCA website?

Grantham

- 1) Stay with 4 players per team in Div. 2;
- 2) Switch time control to 80 mins all moves with 10 sec increment from move 1;
- 3) Merge N. & S. in Div. 2 and play some matches at neutral venues.

Spalding

1. How many teams and in which divisions are club thinking of entering teams into the league next season? 1 team in div 2 south please
2. Is there anything the league could do to encourage you to enter more teams? NO
3. Do you think the number of boards in each division is appropriate? 5 in division 1 and 4 in division 2. YES
4. Do you think the grading limit in Division 2 is set at the correct level? It is currently 155. YES
5. Are you happy with the current time control or do you think it should be altered or Fischer timings introduced? If you favour a change, please state what you would like it changing to. We would like to change to Fischer timings – 70 mins for the whole game plus 15 seconds per move from move 1.
6. Do you think that we should stay with a split between the north and south in Division 2 or have the 2 divisions merged with long distance matches taking place at a neutral venue? Yes
7. Would your answer change if a team or teams dropped out? NO
8. Are you aware of the ECF LMS system for reporting chess results? NO
9. If so, would you favour this being used to report matches instead of the current system? If it is an online results entry system- then yes as the league tables would be up to date at all times.
10. Would you like a change to league structure that would allow for promotion and relegation between division 1 and division 2? We would agree to the div 2 winners being offered the opportunity to go up – we would not wish it to be compulsory.
11. Are there any other rule changes you would like to see that you feel would improve the league? NO
12. Is there anything else you would like to contribute to this survey? NO

Results of the Survey

The results have produced the following proposals.

1. Structure of Division 2 North and South
 - a. Merge Division 2 North and South and play long distance matches at neutral venues. (Grantham)
 - b. Split on an east west basis rather than a north south basis. (Skegness)
 - c. Remain the same.
2. Time Controls in the Lincolnshire League
 - a. 80 minutes with 10 seconds per move (Fischer timing) (Grantham)
 - b. 70 minutes with 15 seconds per move (Fischer timing) (Spalding)
 - c. Remain the same
3. Use the ECF LMS for the reporting of results in conjunction with the system already in place. (Spalding, Barton & Appleby Frodingham)
4. Home teams should have white in both divisions. (Grimsby)
5. The creation of a working group to consider ways of revitalising the leagues. (Appleby Frodingham)
6. Publication of the results of the survey on the Lincs Chess Website. (Secretary)