ICCF Services Director’s Report to Congress, Cardiff 2014

Austin Lockwood, ICCF Services Director, July 2015

Dear friends,

Members of the ICCF Services Committee met in Paris, France, in July to review the progress of the Phase Twelve Plan, and to develop the proposed Phase Thirteen Plan which I present here for delegates approval at Congress.

As a member of the 2015 Congress organising committee I was determined to use web technology to further the commitment of the current ICCF President and Executive Board to openness, transparency, and engagement. With this in mind, the Welsh Correspondence Chess Federation developed a Congress website designed to encourage ICCF member federations to submit proposals to Congress and for the process of evaluation by relevant commissions and committees to have high visibility.

This project has been very successful; however this success does have some implications for the Services Committee in planning work in 2016.

The number of proposals generated has been extraordinary; proving beyond doubt that the imagination and creativity of ICCF delegates, officials, and players is alive and well! This prolificacy however is not without cost; if a number of the current proposals to Congress are accepted, then server development costs may be significantly higher than in previous years.

So that we can continue our planned updates, and after some discussions with the ICCF President, I will ask you as delegates to approve a higher budget than in previous years.

I believe that we have made great steps in modernising the way that correspondence chess is played, supported by some ambitious decisions of Congress in Sydney and driven by a progressive Executive Board. My aim for 2016 (if re-elected as Services Director) is to continue the theme of modernisation and automation, and I am particularly looking forward to integrating the proposed new Arbiter’s manual with the webserver if you, as delegates, approve this innovation. I genuinely believe that we have very exciting times ahead.

Unfortunately documentation for players and tournament organisers still remains a problem, however I am very grateful to Ralph Marconi (CAN) who has agreed to transfer the help file text written by the documentation team to the webserver.

# Congress Resolutions 2014

* The server now handles flag falls (including forfeits under playing rule 3b) automatically for all ICCF events started after 1.1.2015; additionally certain ‘dead’ positions now trigger an automatic draw and most deterministic claims (for example threefold repetition, tablebase claims, etc.) are handled automatically without the need for TD intervention.
* The requirement for claims to be entered by team captains in team events has been removed from the server; all claims are now made by players.

# Server Updates 2014/2015 (Phase 12)

* Performance optimizations: Bundling and minification
* Responsive design for specific pages
* Hide inactive rating history
* Webmaster can change promotion games
* Performance optimizations: Reduce number of round-trips for images of chess pieces
* Responsive design for dialogs
* Remove popup dialogs
* Promotion games: More than 2 promotion games (like a gallery)
* Multi group events: Add a link to player allocation to the list of all groups for the TO
* TD must enter reason, when adding/subtracting time
* Friendly URLs
* International Title Tournaments with category 7 or higher must have an IA as TO
* Game log improvements
* Short display name on top of cross tables instead of short name
* Direct Entry: Zonal restrictions for tournaments
* Direct Entry: Rating restrictions
* Structured tournament announcements
* Player message facilities remain open for 7 days
* Store player messages permanently
* Tie breaking rules displayed below cross table and in start list email
* Hyperlink to game in move notification email
* Review tables and results screen
* Add pending adjudications to time report
* Event list for TDs, TOs, and team captains
* Manual entry of historic and non-server games by TD and games archivists
* Globalize mailings
* Sort achievements on the player details by year
* Direct entry for team events
* Display pairing rule on new events list
* When signing up for a postal event, require postal address
* Improvements to new events list
* Enforce age restrictions, when signing up for a tournament
* Appeal email improvements
* Recording ETLs
* Email to backup TD, once TD starts his leave
* Backup TD should be able to see the leave of the TD

# Proposed Server Updates for 2015/2016 (Phase 13)

Because of the possible amount of work involved in implementing Congress proposals, the Services Committee have attempted to keep the number of routine updates to an absolute minimum; the following items have been assigned high priority:

## Development

* Improved Paypal integration
* DE role: can edit event registration tab of all events
* Hide old registrations from registrations list
* Registration list changes
* Search for player or ICCF ID on the registrations list
* Additional historic events (pre Eloquery)
* Historically correct display of IA title on cross table
* Appeals in national tournaments
* Include player messages in Xfcc
* Add link to cross table or game to email notifications
* Add running games to forecast
* Recalculate rating history of a player
* Further security improvements
* Automation of "Document of Withdrawal"
* Trusted user should get a warning when changing another user's email address to a duplicate
* Do not require an email address for players who died
* Remove popup messages
* Conform to EU cookie law
* Email all players should not disclose email addresses

## Marketing

* New player signup discount
* Embeddable version of game screen
* Player bios
* Report or export for advertising statistics
* Improvements to player photo uploads
* Hall of fame
* Replay a game even if it is your turn
* Improved game replay
* Pin news items to the front page
* Add FIDE title display to promotion games on front page

# Review of Technical Implementation of 2015 Congress Proposals

The following cost estimations are very approximate and based on time estimates from Martin Bennedik, estimates of testing requirements, and estimated overheads.

## ICCF 2015-001 Eliminate Ladies Titles of LIM and LGM

Change norm calculations to eliminate LIM and LGM titles from norm calculations for tournaments starting from 1.1.2016

*Estimated cost: €250*

## ICCF 2015-003 Title Norm Application Process Changes

The server would automatically recognise when the required norms had been achieved and apply the title (including sending notification emails). The process for handling incorrectly set results, or changed results arising from appeals would need to be defined.

*Estimated cost: €2,000*

NB: This proposal could be implemented with no development cost by simply removing the NF validation from the QC workflow.

## ICCF 2015-005 Eliminate Free Day Calculation

A new time control option would be added to the tournament setup screen (mandatory for ICCF tournaments starting from 1.1.2016).

This feature would require extensive testing.

*Estimated cost: €2,000*

## ICCF 2015-006 Same playing conditions for all games.

The cost of this proposal is negative; if we allow mixed postal and server and server events then a new tournament type will be required in which server conditions can be applied to some games and postal conditions to others; this would require a major overhaul of some core code and extensive testing. It is difficult to estimate the cost of implementing this new tournament type, but it is likely to be in excess of €20,000.

*Estimated cost: Negative*

## ICCF 2015-007 Create a Class of Isolated Players

An additional icon could be shown by each isolated player alongside their flag, this would require some design consultation and code refactoring.

*Estimated cost €1,000*

Note that this proposal could be implemented using the current national federation database feature with no cost.

## ICCF 2015-008 Unattached Players

No technical implementation cost

## ICCF 2015-010 Eliminate Normal Leave Restriction

This would require a new option on the tournament setup screen and some modifications to the take leave screen and leave calculations.

*Estimated cost: €750*

## ICCF 2015-011 Equitable Normal Leave Allocation

This would also require a new option on the tournament setup screen and some modifications to the take leave screen and leave calculations.

*Estimated cost: €750*

## ICCF 2015-012 Delegates Not Able to Attend Congress

A section of the server website would be dedicated to this feature; the layout would be similar to the proposal database on the 2015 Congress website however additional features would be added for voting.

*Estimated cost: €2,000*

## ICCF 2015-014 Coordinated Universal Time for Server

Although I have proposed this (and if the server were new, it would be an obvious decision), the task of switching the server to UTC is not trivial. The current time is used in several places in the code and each change would require extensive regression testing. As delegates you may decide that the benefit does not outweigh the cost, particularly given that the server is currently hosted in the United Kingdom, where local time is identical to UTC for the winter months.

*Estimated cost: €5,000*

## ICCF 2015-016 Revised Arbiters Manual

It is difficult to estimate the cost of implementing the proposed new Arbiters Manual because the technical implications are extensive and broad in nature. All the proposed changes, however, are generally aligned with the current strategy of modernisation and the automation of tasks which do not require human intervention. Many of these tasks would have been likely to appear on future server development plans anyway, and others overlap with tasks already planned.

*Taking a workload estimate from Martin Bennedik, and adding overhead for project management and testing, a reasonable estimate for the full technical implementation of the proposed manual is around €9,000.*

## ICCF 2015-017 International Arbiter Qualifications

(Included in Arbiter’s Manual)

## ICCF 2015-018 Revision of Adjudication Procedures

No server development would be required to implement this proposal in its simplest form; automated adjudicator selection could be added reasonably easily and cheaply.

However the ideal implementation would involve the switching of games into “for adjudication” status (either at tournament end date, or on withdrawal) automatically. This would be part of a revised and comprehensive player withdrawal system (see also #025 and #027 below).

*Estimated cost of a revised withdrawal/tournament closing system, with correct handling of adjudications (including TO selection of games to adjudicate), allocation of adjudicator, Document of Withdrawal automation, correct application of substitutions, etc.: €3,500*

## ICCF 2015-019 Revised Norm Calculations

This proposal has no development implications for 2015/16 however if accepted it is likely that there will be significant server development required for 2016/17

## ICCF 2015-021 Restrict Accumulated Time

This will require an option to be added to the tournament setup screen for the TO to specify a maximum accumulated time. A validation check would also need to be in place to ensure that the time control was logically consistent and that ICCF rating requirements were met. Systematic testing would be required.

*Estimated cost: €750*

## ICCF 2015-022 Optional Sofia Rule

An option would be added to the tournament setup screen allowing the TO to enter the number of moves before which a draw could be offered. The “offer draw” checkbox would be disabled on the game page in games where this move count had not been reached.

*Estimated cost: €500*

## ICCF 2015-024 Substitution

See #018 above

## ICCF 2015-026 Penalty for Resuming a Tournament

Further clarification of this proposal is required before a full evaluation can be made.

The proposal as it stands would require previous and current rating lists to be recalculated and potentially for norms to be revoked, it is unclear from the proposal how this should be handled.

## ICCF 2015-027 Withdrawal and Substitutions

See #018 above

## ICCF 2015-030 Extended Reflection Time (use 40+ days)

This would require the menu option to extend reflection time to be removed from the game screen for events starting after 1.1.2016, an additional option would be added to the tournament setup screen, and some additional validation added.

*Estimated cost: €750*

## ICCF 2015-031 Conditional Continuations

Change new tournament validation so that conditionals are mandatory in ICCF events.

*Estimated cost: €250*

## ICCF 2015-032 Non Gender Specific Versions of Ladies Titles

This would require adding fields for the new norms to the database, revising the calculation logic for norms, updating the achievements database and adding new medal images, updating the titles screen, and showing the new norms on crosstables.

*Estimated cost: €1,500*

## ICCF 2015-033 Discontinue Free Two Game Matches

No server development cost would be incurred by discontinuing the free two game matches, however if the matches were replaced with the proposed trios, some checks would need to be added for players joining.

*Estimated cost: €250*

## ICCF 2015-034 Linear Conditionals in Server Events

The UI option would be removed from the tournament set up screen.

*Estimated cost: €250*

# Hosting Arrangements

In my previous report I announced that the hosting arrangements with domainbox.de were increasingly unsatisfactory, with increasingly extended periods of unavailability and poor out of hours customer support.

I am very pleased to announce that the server has been transferred from domainbox.de to Melbourne Server Hosting in Manchester, England. Melbourne offers a fully managed hosting service, which has released Martin Bennedik from his previous server management tasks; this has freed him up to spend more of the time he is contracted to ICCF on development. Server availability since the move to Melbourne has been excellent; the company actively monitor the server for problems around the clock and respond to urgent support requests within a few minutes day or night. I am confident that the extended periods of unavailability we occasionally experienced at the previous hosting company are now a thing of the past.

# Email Deliverability

A persistent problem with the server in the past has been email deliverability; a number of solutions to this issue have been evaluated and tested over the course of the past year. The eventual solution was to install software on the server which digitally ‘signs’ all email.

Since this software was installed and configured, the number of complaints to the helpdesk about undelivered email has been reduced to almost nothing.

# Helpdesk Report

Approximately 250 help desk questions were fielded since the last congress, which represented an increase in about 100 questions over the previous year. The highest number of questions came along the following topics:

* The majority came immediately after the major changes to the Webserver (large update in winter).
* The next largest group were questions related to rule changes (most particularly the use of Tablebases)
* An increase in the questions relating to setting results on the webserver.
* And many questions related to personal details for players (changing passwords, changing names, etc.). There seems to be a lack of understanding as to what the individual player can do himself vs. what ICCF should do.

Questions were generally fielded within a day if not within a few hours, with coverage from both Europe and North America. In addition, special thanks to the National Directors and other board members who continue to provide help and guidance to all our players.

*Thanks and Amici Sumus,*

*Jason Bokar (Help Desk Manager)*

# Help files/Documentation Update

Unfortunately the lack of online documentation for players remains a problem; the documentation team have written a detailed help document however we have not yet transferred this to the server content management system. Ralph Marconi (CAN) has offered to do this work and I am very grateful to him for his contribution.

Full and detailed documentation for tournament directors is offered in the proposed new Arbiter’s Manual, and the full text of this document will be added to the server before 1.1.2016 if approved by Congress.

Discussions will continue with the relevant officials to produce online documentation for tournament organisers.

# Document Archive

A request has been received from the ICCF General Secretary for an online storage system, which allows archiving and searching of ICCF documents.

Documents are currently held on Amazon S3 storage, however this does not allow for searching, and allocating permissions to upload/edit/delete can be convoluted.

Alternative document storage services will be investigated.

# Testing Arrangements

Neil Limbert continues to work as a professional tester contracted to ICCF. Previously we relied heavily on volunteers for systematic testing work; unfortunately because of the nature of this work, this was haphazard and inconsistent. Having the benefit of a professional tester has removed a significant bottleneck to progress, and Neil’s contract will be extended to the end of 2016.

We do still require acceptability testers, and I am very grateful to members of the ICCF Services Committee who evaluate new features on the test server before release.

# Ongoing Agreement with Martin Bennedik

Martin Bennedik continues to offer ICCF an excellent service as contracted developer and his contract will be extended to the end of 2016, however in previous years Martin has provided ongoing server maintenance and IT support. As these services are now offered by our hosting company; daily maintenance is no longer agreed with Martin, and we can release these hours for more specialised development work.

This does mean that Martin’s availability will be limited to agreed blocks of time during which he is exclusively available for ICCF work; one implication of this change is that new releases will only be deployed to the server when we know that Martin is available during the high risk period following a new release.

This agreement will be reviewed when Martin’s contract is next renewed at the end of 2016.

# Budget

If a number of the proposals to Congress are accepted this year are accepted, the amount of server development work required will be significantly increased from previous years. To compensate for this possibility, the Services Committee have attempted to reduce the number of other high priority development tasks, however there is still a high risk that the previous development budget of €15,000 will be considerably overspent in 2016.

I ask delegates, therefore, for an increased development budget of €25,000.

# Acknowledgements

I am again grateful for the confidence and support offered to me by all ICCF players, delegates and officials since we last met in Australia. I am particularly grateful for the support of my deputy, Jason Bokar, and all other members of the ICCF Services Committee, who participate fully in the important work of the committee, including responding to helpdesk requests, giving feedback on new server features, and acceptance testing.

I am also grateful for the high quality of services offered by our professional contractors, Martin Bennedik and Neil Limbert.

If re-elected as Services Director, I will look forward to continuing the important work of modernising ICCF services for the next four years.

*Rydym yn Ffrindiau – Amici Sumus*

*Austin Lockwood, Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaethau ICCF*

*Manceinion, Gorffennaf 2015*

# Appendix i (Services Committee Nominations 2015/16)

**Chair:** ICCF Services Director (to be elected)

**Ex officio:** Deputy Services Director (to be appointed), ICCF President (to be elected), ICCF General Secretary (to be elected). Other ICCF officers to be co-opted on an ad-hoc basis for consultation where appropriate.

**Commissioners:** Gerhard Binder GER (Ratings Commissioner), Mariusz Wojnar POL (Qualifications Commissioner), Gino Figlio PER (Webmaster).

**Acceptance Testing Team:** ICCF Services Director (to be elected, team lead), Michael Freeman NZL, Jo Wharrier ENG. All ICCF officials are expected to contribute to testing updates which fall under their specific area of responsibility.

**Testing Team (2016 Arbiter Manual – if approved):** ICCF Services Director (to be elected, team lead), Dennis Doren (ACO Chair, consultation), Thomas Biedermann USA, Markus Hömske FRA, George Pyrich SCO.

**Translation Team:** ICCF Services Director (to be elected, team lead), Eric Ruch FRA, Gino Figlio PER. Core team only listed here; other translators may be co-opted for specific tasks and languages.

**~~Web Content Team:~~** ~~Transferred to Marketing Committee~~

**Documentation Team (Help Files):** ICCF Services Director (to be elected, team lead) , Ralph Marconi CAN, Gino Figlio PER (Webmaster), Tony Kain USA, Rex Cristal USA, Jason Bokar USA, Jim Ramsden AUS (Proof reading), Dennis Doren USA, Russell Sherwood WLS.

**Accessibility Team:** ICCF Services Director (to be elected, team lead), Peter Maylott AUS.

**Helpdesk Team:** Deputy Services Director (to be appointed, Helpdesk manager/team lead), Ian Pheby ENG, ICCF Services Director (to be elected).

**Professional Consultation:** Martin Bennedik GER (development), Neil Limbert ENG (testing).

# Appendix ii (Silli Pairing System Implementation, Italy)

Delegates will recall that we discussed the implementation of the Hutton Pairing System last year in Sydney. This was at the request of the English Federation for Correspondence Chess; the English federation offered to fund this implementation, however Congress agreed that the implementation would be funded by ICCF.

The system was installed on the server and EFCC have started a number of events using the Hutton Pairing System over the course of the last year.

The Hutton System is available to all ICCF federations for national team tournaments, and it is encouraging to see that the Australian federation have now also started an inter-state team tournament using this server feature.

ASIGC, the Italian federation have now requested that we implement the Silli pairing system on the server. This is a very similar request to last year’s request from England; ASIGC are willing to pay for the implementation, however I would like to ask delegates to approve this work at the expense of ICCF. Once implemented, the system will of course be available for all ICCF federations to use for national events.

The estimated cost of implementing the Silli System on the server is €1,500.