

2 July 2025

FPL's Response to Alex Holowczak's Proposal

Dear Mr President, Dear Management Board, Dear members of Council,

We have been notified of **Alex Holowczak's proposal** regarding fair play organisation with the removal of Fair Play Titles and the moving of Fair Play Duties to Arbiters being the key arguments. This proposal is similar to previous ones which were discussed and rejected at two previous Council meetings. While we are pleased that the tone of this proposal has softened and that we are back on speaking terms with Alex, we believe it was unwise of him to submit this proposal, given that it has no support from the heads of the FPL and Arbiters' Commissions. Furthermore, the proposal does not align with the vision of FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich, as presented at the joint meeting on 13 May, which included all stakeholders – including Alex Holowczak. We therefore ask the Council to reject this proposal.

Reflection

We would like you to consider a recent German study on cheating in chess. You can access it here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211266925000271>.

In short, it was found that 10% of 2000 club players admitted to some form of cheating over the board in the last 12 months. This breaks down as follows

- 4.3% match fixing
- 1.4% deliberately lost a game
- 1.4% advice from another person
- 0.5% parallel replay of the game using software (toilet)
- 0.4% received electronic advice during the game
- 0.3% replayed the game on a second board

Firstly, it is reasonable to assume that the actual number will be higher, as not everyone will be convinced by the anonymity of the survey (resulting in false negatives). Secondly, since money and prestige are the main motivators for cheating, it could be more prevalent among higher-rated players. In context, we could expect to see 4–5 people cheating in an open event with 200 participants. I am sure you will agree that these numbers are unacceptable.

Bearing this in mind, it is crucial that we can focus on addressing the issue of cheating without being distracted by the need to justify our existence. As I will discuss later, our presence in the playing hall is crucial. This highlights the need for the two-tranche approach we are taking: strengthening arbiter training to provide a solid foundation in fair play, and running our own seminars to develop future experts for those who choose the Fair Play career path.

Significant technological advances in recent years have led me to realise that we need a professional Fair Play Service to keep ahead of these changes. As some of you will know, I am highly skilled in technology. It has been my life for the last 44 years. In my previous role on the commission, I was responsible for staying up to date with current technologies and devising ways to prevent their use for cheating.

'Stupid' cheaters are relatively easy to catch. Our newest FPO caught one during one of her own tournaments last month. However, determined cheats are very hard to catch and require the knowledge and training that our FPOs have. During our discussions with GSC, we learned that players currently do not feel safe. We will be meeting with them to find out why, but I suspect it's also because they don't fully understand what we can do, as we don't tend to publicise our capabilities. If players do not feel safe with our professional team, what will they think when the responsibility is handed over to arbiters? As the German study mentioned earlier shows, arbiters are currently having only a small effect in preventing cheating.

The main idea of the proposal is to return fair play to the arbiters. To be honest, fair play is nothing like it was when the arbiters were responsible for it, and it would take years to get them up to a decent standard. There just isn't the time or the will to do this. In light of technological advances, it would be a serious step backwards and open us up to cheating at top-level events, which we have managed to avoid so far. I am not sure that the Council would want to take this risk. The two professions have become too diverse to be combined at the top level. Without Fair Play's involvement, we would no longer be able to provide training or develop methodologies to combat future technologies. Testing has to be done on the ground. If we were not there, it would have to be done by the ARB, who lack the necessary knowledge and capabilities.

Now, let's consider the proposal to abolish titles. Fair play should never be just a tick-in-the-box exercise. This approach is utterly demeaning and belittles the importance of fair play. There must be a way of determining a person's competence. In FIDE, we use titles: We have Arbiter, Trainer, Organiser, Lecturer and Player titles. The Council has already approved the titles system, and we now have over 250 people on our database who have been awarded a title or are working towards one. It would be grossly unfair to those who have paid and done the work to suddenly say, "Sorry." One of the tasks that Vincent and I will undertake over the coming year is to simplify the system. We are also expanding the range of events that can be used to make it easier for people to obtain the FPE title. The FPO title will always be very difficult to obtain as it is intended for the most talented and trustworthy individuals. We agree with the 26 signatories that not just anyone should be able to become an FPO. In our view, it should be someone with extensive experience of how tournaments are run.

For the remainder of the year, Vincent and I have the following planned.

- We are going to review all of our policies and procedures, making any necessary changes based on the feedback we have received. The revised policies will then be sent to our stakeholders for comment and review prior to submission to the Council.
- Arrange a meeting with some of the top players to understand their concerns. It is vital that they feel safe at the tournament, and we are happy to listen to their concerns and act on them where possible.
- Supervision has effectively ceased. The revised process was planned for this Council meeting, but the Shevchenko appeal has caused delays. We will finalise this at our June meeting, share it with the ARB and Rules for consultation, and then submit it for the next Council meeting.
- Title regulations will be simplified to make them easier to understand, so that people know exactly what is expected of them.
- Continue working with EVE to reduce the cost of their events. We have a few ideas to run past them.

- Consider the implications of the report and make recommendations to the Council about the best way to tackle it.
- In consultation with ETH, make recommendations to the Council concerning the penalties for breaches of fair play.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Council has a choice here, and we urge you to close this chapter so that we can focus on what we must do next. We can either continue with the current dynamic Fair Play Service, which can react to technological advancements, or we can concede to Alex Holowczak's constant demands and wait for the first scandal.

I trust the Council to make the correct choice and abide by it.

Gens Una Sumus

Andy Howie

Chair Fair Play Commission



A proposal to resolve the issues between arbiters and fair play

From Alex Holowczak <alexholowczak@gmail.com>

Date Fri 30 May 2025 21:20

To FIDE President Mr. Dvorkovich <fidepresident@fide.com>; Dana Reizniece <dana.reizniece@fide.com>; Viswanathan Anand <viswanathan.anand@fide.com>; Zhu Chen <zhu.chen@fide.com>; Emil Sutovsky <emil.sutovsky@fide.com>; Victor Bologan <victor.bologan@fide.com>; Akaki Iashvili <akaki.iashvili@fide.com>; Nigel Short <nigel.short@fide.com>; Lukasz Turlej <l.turlej@fide.com>; Sava Stoisavljevic <sava.stoisavljevic@fide.com>; Aleksandr Martynov <aleksandr.martynov@fide.com>

1 attachment (15 KB)

Proposal.docx;

Dear FIDE Management Board,

We have come up with a compromise proposal regarding the ongoing issues between arbiters and fair play.

As you are aware:

- The Laws of Chess, approved by the FIDE General Assembly, specifically state that arbiters are responsible for "ensuring fair play"
- More than 170 International Arbiters signed our letters (names can be provided upon request)
- More than 100 people from the chess community signed our public petition
- The majority of arbiters on the Green Panel support our letter (some felt unable to sign it, despite supporting it) - this is the highest FIDE arbiter panel.
- A majority of arbiters on the Blue Panel signed our letter - this is the second-highest FIDE arbiter panel.
- The FIDE Athletes Commission has written to the FIDE President to support our letter.
- A number of organisers who traditionally bid for FIDE events have stopped bidding for FIDE events, and wrote to support the position that Fair Play should be administered by arbiters.
- Professor Regan has put in writing that his system is "designed to be used by arbiters".
- None of the four Continental Associations have adopted the FPL title system.
- Significant closed tournaments such as the London Chess Classic, Wijk aan Zee, the Grand Chess Tour and Freestyle Chess are using arbiters, and not FPO/FPE titleholders.
- No significant Open tournaments are actively employing FPO/FPE titleholders, and the work is being done by arbiters.

We have consulted the following Commissions:

- The Arbiters Commission Chairman refused to circulate the proposal to his Commission or provide any comments. We therefore emailed the members of the Commission ourselves, and those who responded in private support it. Note that these responses include responses from people who had not previously signed a letter.
- The Athletes Commission supported an earlier letter. Those who expressed an opinion support the proposal.
- The Events Commission did not respond to the consultation, except for the Honorary Chairman who supports it.

- The Fair Play Commission cannot support the proposal, however their Chairman "would have supported this proposal 2-3 years ago"; i.e. prior to the introduction of the new system.
- The Global Strategy Commission had several of its members express their unequivocal support.
- The Rules Commission supports the proposal.

A summary of some of the comments from various respondents include:

"I find the proposal reasonable."

"This seems reasonable and well thought out."

"This is fine by me. An arbiter by definition is to ensure fair play. Just as there is pairings arbiter there can also be fair play arbiters. I support this proposal to merge the two sectors."

"This appears to be a reasonable and well-considered approach. Certainly, an arbiter is defined as someone who ensures fairness in play. I wholeheartedly endorse this proposal."

"I support it because the proposal is logical and decreases the cost of organizers."

"Your suggestions make sense."

We encourage you to support this proposal.

Regards,

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Alex Holowczak

We believe that:

- The work of the Fair Play Commission is valuable and required
- The arbiter system and the fair play system need to be merged into one system
- Arbiters need far greater training in fair play than they currently receive
- There needs to be a transition period for existing FPO/FPE to become arbiters

There are currently only 39 FPO/FPE. We would run an online FA Seminar for those who are not arbiters, and upon passing the test, they would be eligible for the FIDE Arbiter title. This is the same process currently used for countries with limited chess activity. We think this is reasonable, because FPO/FPE do have tournament experience, which can be considered similar to FIDE Arbiter norms. They would then be required to achieve International Arbiter norms, and pass the International Arbiter Seminar, in the same way as all other arbiters. Many ambitious arbiters are able to achieve this within one year. Therefore, we propose that the existing FPO/FPE titles would lapse on 1st July, 2027, to give them two years to reach International Arbiter without unduly impacting their rights to appointments at FIDE tournaments.

International Arbiter Seminars would feature increased material on Fair Play, including the relevant parts of the Fair Play Seminars. This will ensure all new International Arbiters meet the required standards to be eligible to administer Fair Play at FIDE tournaments. For existing FAs and IAs, the forthcoming FA Refresher and IA Refresher courses can include the relevant training materials.

Some additional detail on the proposed reforms:

- The refresher courses will already be divided into modules, with arbiters needing to pass all modules, so the Fair Play elements will be their own module that the candidate needs to pass.
- The IA Seminar will contain 20% Fair Play content as part of the Seminar. You need to pass **both** the FP part of the exam, and the exam as a whole, to pass. Thus, candidates pass both the IA Seminar material and the FP Seminar material in one exam.
- The IA norm certificate will be amended to include two checkboxes:
 - The existing one to say that you are of the required standard for International Arbiter, and
 - A second checkbox to say that the arbiter has demonstrated competence in Fair Play matters.

These checks are all that is required to achieve an IA norm, or a FPO norm, at the moment. You would need 2/2 ticks to get the IA norm; and all 4 IA norms as part of a title application would need to have both ticks. Thus, an IA norm also includes the Fair Play norm.

As a result of these reforms, the two systems will be fully merged, and it will no longer be necessary to run dedicated Fair Play Seminars, or for people to acquire FPO/FPE norms at tournaments because these will be integrated within International Arbiter norms. There would be no need for a parallel system.

At most tournaments, one arbiter is responsible for administering fair play, with support from other arbiters where necessary. Currently at FIDE tournaments, these numbers have ballooned significantly, and placed an increasing burden on organisers when it comes to cost.

We propose that:

- For limited-field FIDE events, such as 10-player Round Robins or smaller, there should be one Chief Arbiter and one Deputy Chief Arbiter from the relevant arbiter panel for that event. The Deputy Chief Arbiter should administer Fair Play. This system worked very well for FIDE until this new system was introduced.
- For mass-participation FIDE events, such as those organised by the Events Commission, one International Arbiter from the relevant panel should be appointed to administer Fair Play, with support from other arbiters where necessary. This system is already adopted successfully at mass-participation events organised by Continental Associations.

These reforms also preserve the FPL's other main responsibilities as a regulator, and with regard to investigating cases of cheating.