

Chess Arbiters Statement

This statement has been prepared by the arbiters who submitted their letter to FIDE, in response to the 7th April, 2025, statement of Andy Howie, the Chairman of the FIDE Fair Play Commission, <https://fpl.fide.com/2025/04/07/statement-about-fair-play/>.

The 170 arbiters who signed this letter have significant experience of World level events, some stretching to more than 20 years. They include at least 5 World Championship Matches, and numerous other top-level tournaments including Candidates Tournaments. The primary nature of our complaint is the system of administering fair play. We oppose the concept of Fair Play Officers and Experts. Article 12.2.1 of the FIDE Laws of Chess states that arbiters are responsible for fair play - not fair play officers.

We believe that in principle, the training for all fair play matters should be delivered to arbiters as part of their normal arbiter training, although the Fair Play Commission should have significant input into the material delivered. There should not be two disjoint systems of training, with two title norm structures and two title systems. This is inefficient, duplicates effort, and takes away resources from the Fair Play Commission that could be better spent on what we consider their actual role should be. We reject the idea of finding ways for arbiters to obtain FPE and FPO norms and titles. This implies we are motivated by self-interest, and all that we really want are titles for ourselves. This was never our interest. Our interest is in the principle of what is right for the game of chess.

We are not just defending our territory. In all-but-a-few FIDE events, arbiters administer fair play around the world in tournaments on a day-to-day basis. We believe that arbiters should have all-round skills and be suitably trained in all areas of their responsibility. For example, we would never support a system of Pairings Experts and Officers with their own title system, with a role limited to administering pairings at top level FIDE events. It is obvious that this should be the responsibility of arbiters, and we believe the community expects fair play to be the responsibility of experienced arbiters too.

Other organisations have excellent arrangements for fair play, without Fair Play Officers and Experts, without any issues whatsoever. Typically, one arbiter is assigned fair play responsibilities, and they coordinate the anti-cheating arrangements with the whole arbiter team. That arbiter is also able to help with regular arbiter duties if required. This is something that is lost with the two-team approach, as Fair Play Experts and Officers are not able to discharge the role of being an arbiter, as in all but a few cases, they have not gone through the appropriate levels of training to work at top level FIDE events.

We respect the Fair Play Commission's work with regard to Investigation Panels and prosecuting cases of cheating. We believe the role of the Fair Play Commission should be to undertake research into cheating methods, make the results available to arbiters, provide advice upon request, review tournament procedures, provide technical support, including statistics and/or software, and co-operate with the Arbiters Commission to provide suitable training to arbiters as part of the arbiter training system. This is similar to how the Technical Commission works in the context of pairings, and it is an excellent model of how the Fair Play Commission should work. It should not have the responsibility for its own training and titles system.

We call upon the Arbiters Commission and FIDE Management to support the view of its most senior, experienced, and well-respected arbiters.

The Chess Arbiters