Review of Coaching and Coach Education Programmes

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Introduction & Scope

One outcome of British Rowing’s development of a Strategic Plan was the agreed need to review the way in which coaching and coach education programmes support the development and growth of rowing in the UK. Specifically, the Strategic Plan identified the following three key strategic objectives for the sport where coaching and coach education will have a direct impact in the future:

- Grow the Number of People in Rowing
- Be one of the Leading Rowing Nations at the Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Maximise the Value of the Sport

Within these strategic objectives British Rowing has identified areas of potential development to maximise the success of the plan. These encompass Coastal, river and lake rowing, and indoor rowing across all age ranges and from causal participation to high performance rowers.

The scope of the review included:

- Assess the existing strengths and weaknesses of British Rowing’s coaching and coach education programmes.
- Make high level recommendations for what further improvements can be made with specific reference to creating/further enhancing a coherent and coordinated pathway for rowing coaches.

The original scope was explicit to not include making recommendations on staff structure and organisational design. However, given that this was identified as a key feature of how any new model might work, staff structure and organisational design was considered and broad recommendations made.

\[1\] Sport coaching is central to developing, sustaining and increasing participation in sport. It drives better performances and increased success as well as supporting key social and economic objectives throughout the UK. At all levels of society coaches guide improvement in technical, tactical, physical, mental and lifestyle skills, contributing to personal and social development. (Sports Coach UK, 2007, p.1)

\[2\] Coach education in British Rowing is the process of supporting coach development through the provision of learning opportunities that take account of coaches’ experience and working contexts.

\[2\] This review is confined to Coaching and Coach Education and does not include other roles such as volunteers in clubs and events or umpiring.
Context

British Rowing has a strong relationship with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Sports Councils and has always sought to align programmes with the objectives of partner organisations. Of particular relevance to this review are the following:

DCMS

To make sure as many people as possible are playing sport, the government is:

- funding Sport England, to help community sports grow, including helping 14- to 25 year-olds to keep playing sport throughout their lives
- expanding the School Games programme to increase opportunities for more young people to play competitive sport
- spending over £450 million on improving physical education (PE) and sport in primary schools over the 3 academic years from 2013 to 2014 to 2015 to 2016

Sport England

Sport England is committed to helping people and communities across the country create sporting habits for life. This means investing in organisations and projects that will get more people playing sport and creating opportunities for people to excel at their chosen sport.

In order to support this Sport England are developing a Coaching Plan for England.

The Coaching Plan for England looks ahead to the coaching workforce that might be needed in the new Sport England strategy and 2017-21 funding cycle. The plan will seek to make coaching simple and everyone’s business; having the right people in the right place, importantly showing the right behaviours, is critical. The plan will respond to current and emerging societal trends, and throughout its lifecycle Sport England will arrange regular engagement events with new and existing partners to ensure prudent, collaborative use of resources.

Working groups from across the sector have identified the following key messages so far:

- Participants and coaches are valued customers who require tailored opportunities
- Coaching should be simple to get into and match with people’s motivations and values
- Coaches should be profiled on expertise for audience, setting & purpose
- People’s expertise from beyond sport should be considered before training is offered – which should be appropriate & proportionate

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Appreciating that behavioural changes in participants and coaches take time and require quality prompts and support

**UK Sport**

UK Sport has identified coaching as a key element of the high performance system in the UK.

Coaching, alongside other key performance support services plays a crucial role in ensuring the ongoing success of British athletes. The UK Sport coaching team seeks to ensure the delivery of quality coaching to athletes on UK Sports’ World Class Performance Pathway, a system devised to identify, develop and refine talented British athletes.

To achieve this, the UK Sport World Class Coaching Strategy must deliver targeted and innovative programmes and interventions specific to the needs of world class coaches.

**The Rowing Community**

The Government policy and Sport England and UK Sport are committed to bringing more people into sport and then helping them develop the habit of sport for life. Coaches are important in introducing beginners to rowing as there is a very high probability they are coming to the sport for the first time, rather than returning to the sport. Enabling rowers to excel at their chosen sport also requires a coach to work with the rower to achieve their goals.

Members of British Rowing enjoy their rowing traditionally within one of the 550 clubs which are spread around the whole of the country. A number of clubs are diversifying offering more than one type of rowing experience and British Rowing affiliated rowing organisations offer a very wide range of rowing opportunities and experiences. The clubs and organisations are autonomous and develop and support their members as they see appropriate. British Rowing have a number of programmes designed to support new and current members, but up until now these have been developed without an overarching Strategic Plan but rather as seen necessary from time to time.

**The Power of the Coach**

When considering what coaching can achieve the first thought is generally improving the competence of the athlete. Research shows the coach must have knowledge and an awareness of their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in order to coach effectively. Effective coaching impacts the athlete in four ways. These are:

- improving the competence of the athlete in all aspects of their sport
- improving the confidence of the athlete both in the sport and generally
- creating connections for the athlete with the coach and group

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5 Reference: http://www.uksport.gov.uk/our-work/coaching
• influencing the character and this will include issues from fair play to timekeeping and anti-doping

The 4 Cs have all been shown to be transferable to other aspects of the athlete’s life. The confidence and competence of a person will continue to be impacted upon at all stages of the athlete’s development.

Talent development of coaches will be easier if athletes (in this case rowers) have been well coached from the beginning as they will become the next generation of coaches and volunteers in the clubs. A great coach will be an expert learner and they will create the same opportunities for their rowers. Within the UK we have examples of coaching dynasties unintentionally created by great coaches who inspired their athletes but also were great role models on how to coach. Examples of this would be Steve Gunn who coached Richard Boulton, Louise Kingsley and Paul Stannard. Windsor Boys School has a similar culture with Darren Whiter and Nick Baker. There are also examples of coaches who have developed coaches: Wade Hall-Craggs with Peter Lee, James Harris and Franz Imfeld, and Mark Banks with Rob Dauncey, Rob Morgan, Jane Hall and Matt Beechey.

The first contact with rowing requires a warm welcome, enthusiasm, good communication and organisation but also a knowledgeable coach. A knowledgeable coach creates a supportive environment which enables the rower to develop and achieve their goals.

**Informal vs Formal Learning**

Understanding the best way to support adult learners is key to maximising the quality of coaches and coaching. In recent years a large number of studies have been shown that the most effective learning happens as informal or non-formal learning opportunities rather than the formal opportunities that most National Governing Bodies (NGBs) have in place. The formal qualifications provide an anchor for the coaches and the framework of coaching and coach education but alongside this there is a need to ensure there are opportunities for coaches to maximise their own learning and development.

British Rowing provides workshops, seminars, on line learning and conferences and include continual development as a coach behaviour within the coaching awards. British Rowing promotes and actively support coaches to seek out a range of opportunities to develop themselves as coaches.

In order to provide sustainable activity, rowers need to become expert learners who by definition will be solution focussed. This requires the coaches to be expert learners and the way coach education is delivered cannot be by a series of lectures. The lecturer becomes the facilitator, the learner must be committed to the process and come to the coach education sessions with key knowledge in order to explore suitable solutions to their own situation. This in turn will change the delivery of coaching to rowers.

One of the best learning opportunities is through communities of practice. These have been defined for sectors such as health specialists and include three key elements:

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6 Professor Jean Cote- A presentation at the 2015 Level 4 conference 9-10 March 2015 organised by Sports Coach UK and hosted at the University of Gloucestershire.
- Mutual engagement - participation through choice
- Joint enterprise - negotiated purpose in the same area
- Shared repertoire - answers, solutions, resources related to a common goal

An expert or unbiased facilitator is required to make the community of practice an effective learning opportunity. An example within British Rowing of a community of practice is the Olympic and Paralympic programmes based at Caversham and another is the Start programme. For the “Start” Community of Practice, Steve Gunn is the expert facilitator, the coaches are highly motivated to develop their rowers, the joint enterprise is developing the next generation of Olympic rowers and the group are experienced and solution focused so most of the learning and ideas can come from within the group experience. As these have demonstrated effective learning opportunities it was questioned whether other communities of practice can and should be established within British Rowing.

**Coaching Pathway**

A defined pathway for coaching will provide the clarity for coaches to understand how they can best achieve their personal goals to be the best they can be in their chosen coaching role. The pathway must include clear definitions of the coaching role required by that programme or that club. Roles can be loosely grouped together and the required, knowledge, skills and experiences defined. Benchmarking themselves against the role criteria will enable the coach to plan their own development and will enable British Rowing to develop the necessary awards, workshops, seminars and on line materials to best support coaches to fulfil coaching roles at all levels of the sport. Inevitably a role may require specialist experience or knowledge which may be best gained outside of British Rowing. Generic courses will provide the basic framework and formal and informal opportunities will enable the coach to develop in the most appropriate way for them. The diagram below illustrated the basic pathway for coaches. The coaching Awards will be named rather than numbered to reflect the role of the coach.

![The pathway](image)
Review Methodology

This coaching and coach education review was carried out over a two month period and the narrative regarding what could be improved in the future is based on interviews with over 60 people from all areas of British Rowing, coaching partners and representatives from other sports.

The review was based on semi-structured interviews mainly with staff and volunteers inside British Rowing and a few from other sports and partner organisations. All programme leaders and chairs of major committees who support or report on coaching and coach education were interviewed. Many of the delivery staff from British Rowing were interviewed as were volunteers in the regional Council Structures. In addition, all British Rowing staff and main chairs were informed that the review was being carried out and all were encouraged to contact the author if they would like to be involved.

The interviewees were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current coaching and coach education programmes and systems, and where possible provide solutions. Interviewees were asked to only comment on the areas for which they had first-hand knowledge and so in some cases this might be at national level but also as an active member of a club. Some choose to report this as a SWOT analysis. Finally, the interviews were purely to capture insight and were not designed to enter into debate about what currently happens and any discussion was for clarification and to ensure the main views of the interviewees had been accurately captured.

All the interviewees were pleased to be able to express a view about the current situation within coaching and coach education. The following is based on the analysis of those interviews.
Recommendations

Strategy Planning

A significant number of those interviewed highlighted the need for an overarching coaching and coach education strategy. Specifically, it was suggested that any such strategy should include and/or address the following:

1. There is not one clear coaching and coach education vision for the organisation and there is therefore the potential for staff and volunteers to develop their own materials and their own agendas. This extends to the regions who are frustrated by the lack of clarity and what they perceive to be lack of suitable support from the centre. It is therefore critical that any such strategy must incorporate all levels of the coaching pathway at home nation level, British Rowing, regions and clubs, with specific and agreed action plans, and be simple.

2. There needs to be a clearer definition of the role of coaching and coach education in support of the British Rowing vision and strategy. This also extends to an agreed position on, and recognition of, the value of quality coaching and coach education to the growth of the sport.

3. There is an absence of a clearly defined coaching pathway. Defining coaching roles and the knowledge, skills and experience to fulfil this role is critical for coaches to know what the pathway is and how they progress to their chosen place on the pathway. Because it is not joined up then coaches do not always know how to develop skills into boat performance. Sequential training model information is available but not sufficiently recognised or disseminated.

4. The Learn to Row Instructors and Rowing Leaders award awards will be aligned with the current “Coaching Courses” developed and delivered by the Coach Education Team. A Sessional Coach Award will replace the Learn to Row Instructors award and the alignment with the coaching awards will enable the sessional coach to progress to a club coach via experiential learning and a transition course.

5. The vision and strategy must be right for the sport and not simply for external funding partners. This may mean that only a part of the plan will be externally funded.

Structure

6. At present there is no single point of accountability for coaching and coach education within the professional staff of British Rowing. This inhibits a coordinated approach and means that tasks and activities are duplicated with no clear line of responsibility and final decision making in this area. As a matter of urgency this needs to be addressed.

7. A further weakness is the two part structure, where the development of curriculum and technical content, and the delivery of courses are separated with little formal
coordination. An improved structure would be to pool resources under one team with a clear direction and a coordinated approach. In addition, consideration should be given to what role the participation officers have in the area of coaching and coach education, particularly as this area provides a good way to engage with the clubs and can lead to other discussions on what support clubs require beyond coaching and coach education.

8. There is a need for the component parts of British Rowing to be coordinated in their approach to coaching and coach education. There is a need to clarify the roles of the National Coaching Committee, the Technical Panel and the SOURCE group and how they interact in developing coaching and coach education programmes. An assessment should be made as to the relative merits of whether these groups should be based on desirable skills rather than on a representative basis. In addition, the Sport Committee must be able to operate strategically in support of coaching and coach education.

9. An area for improvement is how British Rowing uses our professional staff to empower the volunteer network at all levels and particularly in the regions. Consideration needs to be given to how we grow this network and capacity, provide volunteers with ownership of vital activities while ensuring that the objectives of the Strategic Plan remain the focus in the field. One way this can be achieved is by further developing strong Regional Coach Educator groups to support the establishment and delivery of plans for their respective clubs, to provide standardisation across the region and country, and to plan for the long term future of coaching and coach education in the regions.

Development & Delivery

10. As there is no clear pathway there is by consequence no clear suite of resources to support the pathway. It is vital that we not only develop resources and courses for rowing programmes against an agreed strategy (rather than on an ad-hoc reactive basis) but also pool and promote existing resources developed by regions. British Rowing resources need to support coaches at all levels and allow for the delivery of specialist workshop tailored to discreet audiences and parts of the sport that have been identified as opportunities for growth within the Strategic Plan (eg. universities, masters, fixed seat, indoor rowing, adaptive, etc.). In order for this to be achieved there needs to be a proper commissioning process for resources as agreed by the central coaching point of contact within the professional staff.

11. At present there is no agreement on coach and coach education best practice. In a modern world with enormous opportunity to be innovative in our delivery mechanisms we need to consider developing multiple ways of delivering coaching courses which take into account the limited time individuals have outside of their professional and family lives. Tapping into social media and electronic communication offers the opportunity to develop communities of practice within and across regions, virtual groups, mentoring and using high performance coaches to deliver aspects of our coach and coach education course, to name but a few. In order to facilitate this effectively it will be necessary to create a means by which British Rowing can track
and communicate with those who have completed, or are in the process of completing, coaching qualification.

12. Within the pathway development there needs to be a recognition that there is a need for a lower level of award in clubs especially those with a lot of learn to row participants such as universities. In addition, coaches already operating within the national trials who have Level 2 qualifications do not always see why they should progress to Level 3. This reduces the quality of coaching at the upper end and is something that needs to be addresses.

13. With respect to the delivery of courses, the existing model has a large contracted workforce who deliver courses around the country. As with any specialist field it is critical that skills are reinforced and developed by regular activity. While the quantity of contractors offers reach across the country it may be possible to provide the same number of, or more, courses with a smaller workforce who individually deliver more courses, thereby ensuring a high quality of delivery. It would therefore be beneficial to assess the future business model for delivery, British Rowing’s investment in this workforce and ultimately empowering our workforce to deliver a contemporary programme in line with the Strategic Plan.

14. Funding and the cost of courses was a real issue for many. There are grants available but these appear to be inconsistently approached meaning that funding is not maximised in this area. By way of example the Learn to Row Instructors course is subsidised whereas the Level 2, 3 and 4 are not. A more consistent and strategic approach to the funding and subsidising of courses needs to be agreed.

**Communication**

15. Improvements are required to how British Rowing communicates with the regions and specifically ensuring that access to qualified coaches is simple and does not overly rely on British Rowing being the facilitators. A means of doing this would be for the regions to have appropriate access to contact details of coaches in their regions. Clearly this needs some careful consideration but the impact could be significant if achieved.

16. There is a lack of understanding about the current awards and coach education system and how this supports rowing participation and performance. More should be done to communicate the benefits of quality coaching and how individuals can get involved in this area. British Rowing needs to market the coaching course on offer better and in a more timely and relevant manner. This should include the promotion of coaching conferences and opportunity to share best practice.

17. When redesigning the British Rowing website there is a need to bring people to our website with taster and free information. If we can make the website the destination for coaches with regular and relevant advice then we can create a centre of excellence and ensure that coaching and coach education is at the forefront of the rowing community.