Item name:	7.1.3 Competition Framework Update – Phase 1
Date of meeting:	Board – 10th July 2018
Report written by:	Andy Parkinson
Status:	Information
Rationale summary:	To summarise the development and delivery phase of the new British Rowing Competition Framework project.

1.   Introduction

On 2 April 2018 British Rowing formally introduced its new Competition Framework ("the Framework"). This is the national structure that supports the way British Rowing affiliated competitions operate and are run.

The purpose of this paper is to summarise the history and timelines of this project to date, as well as the consultation, development, technical, testing and communications processes behind its delivery.

2.   Initial Research and Consultation

Since at least the 1940s, a rower's competitive status has been determined by the number of events he or she has won at regattas. Various changes and additions have been made to this framework over the years, most recently via a formal competition review in 2002. This led to a tweak in the points system in 2009, but even after this there was a growing sense within the sport that a more fundamental overhaul was needed.

In October 2012, the National Competition Committee (NCC) led an initial investigation to gauge whether the Framework was meeting the needs of the sport. The response from the rowing community was a clear 'no'. A subsequent large-scale consultation of British Rowing members was conducted, which comprised a series of regional workshops across the country, led by expert volunteers and British Rowing staff, with input from every level of the rowing community (including clubs, rowers, competition organisers, coaches, umpires and volunteers).

This consultation found four key themes:
- The majority of members wanted to compete at an appropriate level, against rowers of similar ability and expertise
- Competitors wanted a Framework that discouraged the practice of crews and individuals actively trying to avoid gaining points (and by extension, avoiding racing) so they could compete at a low level

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- Competition organisers wanted a less rigid Framework that gave more flexibility to band competitors of a broadly similar ability together, so as to minimise the number of entries they have to reject
- There was consensus that the old framework, and the system of awarding points solely to the winners of events at regattas, and nothing for everyone else, was not the best way to create a profile that accurately reflected a rower's abilities

The latter point was reflected by a statistic that showed that 85% of women and 71% of men had just two or fewer British Rowing sweep points, while 90% of both men and women had two or fewer sculling points. That meant the overwhelming majority of British Rowing members fitted into just two categories – Novice and IM.3.

In summary, through the consultation process, the rowing community asked for a flexible new Framework to better provide fair, close and exciting racing, for all levels of ability and experience.

3.   Agreement by Council

In June 2014, Council agreed a proposal for the NCC Competition Review Working Group to develop a new Framework. The working group included Guin Batten, Phil Clements, Fiona Dennis and Tim Walton, as well as a number of British Rowing staff.

At the heart of this proposal was a new, contemporary Ranking Index for competitors, as is common in many other sports. With 97% of affiliated competitions using the British Rowing Online Entry system (BROE), the sport had some of the technical capability and a lot of the data required to implement a Ranking Index for individuals that could change over the course of a season, and potentially after every competition.

A variety of ranking algorithms were investigated and considered, including both ELO and TrueSkill systems, but as they were designed for winner/loser scenarios, a system that had more flexibility was required. Cost was also a consideration and some systems, such as TrueSkill, are licensed.

The other consideration was that rowing is fairly distinct in nature, given the many permutations in which an individual competitor can compete (ie. as an individual, as a pair/double, or as part of a larger crew). When looking at the ranking indices of other sports, they were either individual based (eg. golf, cycling, tennis, badminton), based on two-person teams that competed together consistently (eg. badminton, tennis) or based on large teams, where the team, not individuals, are recognised (eg. football, hockey, rugby).

Any new system had to work with an incredibly diverse competition structure; events of varying sizes, a wide range of skills across competition organisers, as well as reporting results in a simple and easy to understand way. It also had to be easy enough for the rowing community to grasp as a concept, which many heavily algorithmic systems are not.

In light of this, the decision was made to develop the new Framework with a bespoke Ranking Points system that focused on the specialist requirements of the sport. This would be delivered via a specialist project team.

4.   Project Team

The implementation phase of the project was led by the CEO office with senior volunteer and cross-directorate staff support. The following roles and individuals made up the core of the project team with additional volunteers and staff providing ad hoc support and advocacy:

- Project Owner: Andy Parkinson, CEO
- Project Manager: Jeff Elms, Competitions - Project Officer
- Project Officer (with focus on technical development): Phil Clements
- Subject-Matter Experts: Tim Walton, Fiona Dennis, Will Everitt
- Technology Lead: Harvey Davies, Head of Technology
- Communications Lead: Sophie Galasinski, Head of Communications & Marketing
- Community Lead: Phil Hornsey, Director of Membership & Rowing Community
- Membership Lead: Emily Carter, Head of Membership
- Competitions Lead: Sarah Leys, Membership Officer - Clubs & Competitions

5.   Development of the Personal Ranking Index

Under the new Framework, it was proposed that rowers would get Ranking Points for racing and beating crews. The higher up a competitor finished in an event, and the more crews they beat, the more Ranking Points they receive. The implication is that the more Ranking Points a competitor has, the better they are at beating crews in their event.

Ranking Points would be awarded for heads and regattas and for sweep and sculling. Coxes would be awarded Ranking Points depending on how well their crew does, presenting an opportunity for competitors to have indices for rowing, sculling and coxing. Ranking Points for coxes were added after complaints from this group that their skill and efforts were not being recognised, which was an early indication that the rowing community would actively be seeking to gain, not avoid them.

The Personal Ranking Index ("PRI") is the sum of Ranking Points from the competitor's eight highest-scoring events. Up to five years' worth of results are used, with Ranking Points reducing over time. If a competitor has not raced eight competitions, a 'PRI Max' is calculated. This is calculated based on the Ranking Points for the events that a competitor has entered, with the average multiplied up to the equivalent of eight events.

The Framework is flexible, and competitions use Ranking Points and the PRI to decide how they want to band crews for racing, which increases the likelihood of crews getting a race. If crews want to race in a higher band to push themselves, they can do so at the discretion of the competition organisers.

6.   Development of British Rowing Online Entry system (BROE1 and BROE2)

BROE1 was launched in September 2004 and gave clubs and competitions the ability to make and accept entries online, moving the sport away from a paper-based entries system. Between launch and the end of March 2018, when BROE1 was formally retired, around 610,000 entries and £6.2 million in entry fees were processed online.

Development of BROE2 started in 2015 after it became clear that BROE1 could not support the aims and objectives of the new Framework. At this stage the system was due an overhaul in functionality and user experience to meet the expectations of the competitions community, and to streamline the administrative and financial processes that were critical to office staff at British Rowing.

A new technical solution was needed, one that was a new platform rather than an evolution of the old, and that would meet a number of key objectives:

- Support the Framework, application of the Rules of Racing and the calculation of ranking points
- Provide an effective entry management solution for a wide range of competitions from heads and regattas to GB Trials while also having the flexibility to accommodate one off events
- Support the work of competition administrators and entry secretaries
- Provide a validation process confirming the eligibility of competitors (age, membership status, points and experience)
- Be available across a range of platforms (including mobile) and have the ability to integrate with third party club and competition management solutions via API and other industry standard output/input formats
- Be compliant with the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Improve administration processes related to membership, communication, finance and production of the British Rowing Almanack
- Provide a single point for national rowing competition data (capture and management - entry and result)
- Be sustainable both financially and technically

The first test version of BROE2 was released in early 2016. Internal testing was initially undertaken with the valuable assistance of a number of volunteers. Particular thanks are due to Phil Clements, Will Everitt and a small group of competitions that were willing to assist with the development process.

Live testing of BROE2 started in late 2016 and the first live entry was made on 17 November 2016. BROE2 was made available as a fully operational 'beta' platform alongside BROE1, with competitions having the choice of using either system up until the formal launch of the new Framework in April 2nd 2018, after which point all competitions were required to use BROE2.

7. Costs and Benefits of BROE2

To date, the development cost for BROE2 has been:
- 2015/16 - £32,000
- 2016/17 - £58,000
- 2017/18 - £22,000

With significant volunteer and staff time also provided to support the development of BROE2.

BROE2 provides a number of significant improvements over its predecessor, including:
- Enhanced end-to-end data capture and management of all level of competitions from age-group competitions, to BUCS, to GB Trials. This will provide a comprehensive picture of competitions, competitors and results and will enable detailed analysis of competitive rowing throughout the talent pathway
- Better financial processes. The introduction of automated refund processes at the competition/administrator level reduces the administration overhead within Membership and Finance directorates and gives an improved end user experience.
- Reduction in transaction charges with the move from Worldpay (1.9%) to Stripe (1.4%) payment gateways. Stripe also gives better analysis and integration than Worldpay.
- Improved user experience at every level, competition administration, entry process, and post event as well as updated web apps, supporting mobile access.

8. Communications Summary

A comprehensive communications action plan was created and executed to support the launch of the new Framework. A variety of media and channels were used, with significant reach into the core audience and wider rowing community.

Below is a summary of the activity by channel, as of 16 May 2018:

Via email
- Updates included in 11 editions of the British Rowing member e-newsletter (The Stream) since December 2016. Each email sent to circa 15,000 British Rowing members
- Updates included in two editions of British Rowing club e-newsletter (The Club Stream) since January 2018. Sent to 550 club secretaries
- Updates included in three editions of the British Rowing Regional Chairmen's monthly report (November 2017, February 2018, March 2018). This content is provided to Regional Chairmen for use in their own local communications with clubs and volunteers

In Print
- Updates included in six editions of Rowing & Regatta magazine since January 2016, including the lead news story in Feb/March and April/May editions in 2018. Circulation of each edition, across print and digital, is over 30,000 copies.

By Post
- Printed A5 inserts titled 'Racing is Changing' included in every British Rowing membership mail-out pack since August 2017. Sent to around 22,000 members by launch in April 2018
- An updated insert ('Ready to Race') continues to be included in all mail-out packs

In Person
- Presentations and Q&A sessions held at eight specially organised meetings across the country from January to April 2016. These were widely promoted across all our channels. 205 individuals attended, representing 117 affiliated clubs
- Additional seven presentations, specifically aimed at competitions organisers, held around the regions from January to June 2017
- Two meetings with full-time coaches from Tideway and wider Thames clubs held in 2018. Six coaches attended.

On britishrowing.org
- Dedicated Competition Framework knowledge hub created on the British Rowing website in July 2016. This received 40,000 unique visits. 20% of these visits were in the first three months of 2018. Average time spent on the pages: 2 mins.
- Additional ten news stories published since 2016. Included a set of 'Mythbuster' articles, in which 21 misconceptions about the Competition Framework were corrected.

On Social Media
- 15 'always on' social media posts about the Competition Framework shared from January to May 2018.

9.   Live Status and Issues

Over 250 British Rowing affiliated competitions have now used the new Framework and BROE2. 64,000 entries have been made, and £2.2 million in entry payments processed.

Each competition is unique, and work continues with organisers to improve the process and end user experience. Technical challenges have arisen, most notably shortly after the opening of entries for the 2018 Wallingford Regatta, when an unexpected issue with BROE2 was experienced and had to suspend entries to this event. This was an isolated incident and our volunteers and IT and communications staff provided support and updates until the issue was identified and resolved, and a fix released. Other competitions that were open for entries during this period were unaffected.

Members of the Project Team continue to provide guidance to competitions and club entry secretaries. One area of particular focus is to reinforce the need and responsibility for all crew

substitutions to be declared, as per the Rules of Racing. Having this correct crew information in BROE2 is vital in ensuring that Ranking Points are assigned to the right competitors, and for the ongoing integrity of the Framework. A large proportion of post- competition queries are caused either by people flagging up an increase in their PRI that they were not expecting, or the lack of one, and so encouraging the right processes practices is important.

Extra guidance to competition organisers will also be provided on an ongoing basis around good practice in the banding of events within the Framework. This is in response to observations from the racing community that some competitions are being too flexible in their bandings, which is resulting in crews with a high CRI (Crew Racing Index) racing crews with significantly lower CRI. Generally competition organisers are doing this to be as accommodating to their entries as possible but goes against the aim of providing closer, more exciting racing.

10. Next Steps

To gauge customer satisfaction with the Framework, a facility will shortly be offered to all affiliated competitions to capture feedback from their competitors via an online survey. This will be a standard survey for all competitions, hosted by British Rowing, with results provided to competition organisers.

Outside of providing ongoing support to the racing community, the Project Team up are currently working through the scope a second phase of the project.

Already agreed to be included in this phase, and already under way, is a peer review of the Framework by SAS Analytics (as part of British Rowing's Partnership Agreement), to ensure that the data collected is used to provide the best possible measure of ability. In addition, Phase 2 will focus on the potential to use ranking points to create leagues for clubs and individuals. We are also keen to explore the adaptation and use of BROE2 by other rowing organisations and national federations, either under licence or as a benefit of their association to British Rowing.

In order to facilitate this work, a set of Terms of Reference for a Project Team to oversee Phase 2 is being developed. This will be shared with the NCC for comments and suitably skilled individuals (volunteers and British Rowing staff) will then be asked to play an active role in this next phase. Once this Project Team has been put in place the original Project Team will be disbanded.

Andy Parkinson
Chief Executive Officer

28 June 2018