



BRITISHROWING

British Rowing Recreational Rowing Strategy

Strategy group report and initial
action plan - July 2022

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT



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Introduction

In December 2021, a strategy development group was set up to produce an updated recreational rowing strategy to grow recreational rowing of all types - and to put in place a first year action plan to deliver it.

The group was set up as a sub-group of the existing British Rowing recreational rowing committee. Members were selected to ensure effective representation of different types of recreational rowing and from across the regions, within a workable-sized group. The group worked closely with Alastair Marks, British Rowing CEO, and other British Rowing colleagues. Group members are listed in Appendix I.

This report includes the strategy and action plan, and a summary of the group's work.

The group would like to record our thanks to the many people who have contributed their insight and experience to this important work, reflecting the enthusiasm and commitment for recreational rowing across our country and ensuring that this report represents the views of all stakeholder groups. Key contributors are listed in Appendix I.

The group hopes that the strategy and action plan, taken forward in partnership by British Rowing and our national recreational rowing community, will bring the benefits of recreational rowing to more people of all ages and backgrounds across our regions, and have a positive impact for everyone who wishes to get on – or back on – the water to enhance their fitness, friendships, wellbeing and skills.

Graham Hall, Anne Hock, Susie Loates, Paul Lorenzato, Kayte Parlevliet, John Turnbull, Ruth Ward
Strategy development group members



Recreational rowing development plan 2022-25

Recreational rowing review - Spring 2022

Development needs identified in club survey:

- Over 115 affiliated clubs offer recreational rowing activities to new, returning and established rowers of different ages
- Better information, promotion, co-ordination, coaching, support and equipment is needed to grow recreational rowing
- Our rowing culture and communications need to be more inclusive so that people see rowing is not only about formal competition.

2025 development vision:

- A vibrant recreational rowing community in every region welcoming and supporting people of all ages and backgrounds who wish to get on – or back on – the water to enhance their fitness, friendships, wellbeing and skills.

Three development aims:

- Extending our welcome
- Equipping our clubs
- Engaging our communities.

For the love of rowing: Our ambitions to grow recreational rowing

Extending our welcome		Equipping our clubs		Engaging our communities	
We develop a clear, positive and inclusive identity	We put in place the organisation needed to grow	We support clubs with organisation and coaching	We make equipment more accessible	We improve rowing skills	We promote our offer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone can find out what recreational rowing is and how to get involved • Recreational rowing activities and pathways are easy to find on British Rowing website/s and comms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have well organised national, regional and club groups supporting new initiatives and best practice • There is a British Rowing lead with accountability for developing recreational rowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clubs can easily find out how to set up recreational rowing to build their membership • British Rowing qualification review to ensure consideration is given to the needs to recreational coaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested clubs and groups have access to stable boats and trailers for tours and other recreational activities • Clubs are guided how to use and adapt for recreational rowing the equipment they already have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clubs and rowers have a British Rowing recreational rowing development framework to follow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational rowing has a clear and positive brand and presence on social media channels • British Rowing learn to row and return to row campaigns focus on recreational rowing



2022-25 Initial action plan

What is to be achieved?	Who is going to lead it?	How will we achieve it?
Rec rowing comms and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Rowing Comms team Rec Rowing Committee Delivery groups 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Promote/links from British Rowing to existing rec rowing website Review entry points for rec rowing on British Rowing website Expand web guidance and case studies on organising a group and different activities (tours, leagues, challenges) Develop rec rowing social media approach Plan for regular 'heartbeat' British Rowing comms promoting different types of rec rowing and how to start or return to rowing at all ages
Refreshed rec rowing organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Rowing staff Rec Rowing Committee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm British Rowing rec rowing lead Refresh rec rowing committee to include schools/uni rep(s) Increase cross-committee engagement Make rec rowing club leads and events more visible to others
Club and coaching support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Rowing Head of Learning, Education and Development British Rowing staff Rec Rowing Committee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development and launch of the coaching assistant workshop The needs of recreational rowing coaches to be considered within the wider qualification review
Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Rowing working group Rec Rowing Committee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of existing Charles Stanley packages Support clubs to use own and other clubs' equipment



Summary of the group's work

Work approach

The group planned its work in three phases, undertaken during January to May 2022:

Phase 1 – Research and analyse the main opportunities and challenges to grow recreational rowing through workshops with clubs, engagement with stakeholders and other interested parties, and review of supporting data.

Phase 2 – Prepare and engage with key stakeholders in order to finalise a short strategy document including clear statements of the strategy's aims and objectives and the individual workstreams needed to deliver it, together with supporting models and case studies.

Phase 3 – Produce a first year action plan detailing the main strands of activity (including resourcing (people, equipment, skills) and communications).

Phase 1 - Research and analysis

a. Current landscape

The group 'baselined' the current recreational rowing landscape through a blend of research approaches. In addition to mainstream club rowing, the group looked at links to coastal rowing, university rowing, junior and youth rowing, and different types of recreational rowing activities. The group also investigated the situation in other sports. Key contributors are listed in Appendix 1.

b. Headline findings

The group analysed the following headline findings to define and prioritise the challenges and opportunities needed to be addressed to grow recreational rowing. Further details of the findings are set out in Appendix 2.

The broader British rowing landscape – A number of recent British Rowing research and other activities show a feeling of exclusion by people who currently row recreationally or might be interested in doing so. British Rowing membership research indicated many recreational club members do not see British Rowing membership as relevant or valuable. This is perhaps reflected in the data that shows 56% of British Rowing's membership is under 25. This rower perception of British Rowing's narrow competitive focus is reflected in the organisation of its committees and communications (e.g. the use of the term Master) and in responses to British Rowing's recent Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) survey. In the survey, 25% of lapsed rowers gave lack of time to commit to (competitive) rowing as their reason for giving up, and 83% said they wanted to see more recreational rowing options.

Current recreational rowing participation levels and activities – In response to our club survey, 116 out of the 122 clubs who responded said they had recreational rowing activities (see Appendix 2 for further detail on the types of activities and how they are organised). This



figure comes with the caveat that many responding clubs indicated they were unsure if to include people who ‘just row’ at their club and do not regularly participate in formal recreational activities like tours or leagues. The survey showed a good mix of male and female participation in recreational rowing activities and a broad range of ages (34% aged 41-60 and significant percentages in the age ranges below as well as above that). Survey contributions from both the junior and university sectors were limited - but we are starting to see the early stages of recreational options being part of some clubs’ strategy as a means to extend and nurture youth involvement.

Short and long term impact of specific investment (Explore Rowing and Charles Stanley sponsorship) – The 4 year British Rowing Explore Rowing combined equipment and coaching investment programme provided a stimulus for learn to row courses and recreational rowing at clubs and watersports centres across the country, the long term benefits of which are still evident. It also had a significant club membership impact, British Rowing data showing that clubs receiving packages increased their membership by over 50%. The two boat and equipment packages bought with the £100k Charles Stanley investment in 2017 have provided greater reach and flexibility for recreational rowing groups wanting to organise larger trips and tours and for clubs wanting to have the chance to row away from their home waters.

How British recreational rowing compares to other sports (e.g. RYA, OWS/SUP, BCU) – British Rowing has some way to go in terms of its website presence and comms approach to match the inclusive feel of sports such as canoeing and netball. In those sports, the national bodies convey a clear sense and message of a single sport and community, and give equal billing to recreational and formally competitive activities for both new and returning participants. Netball has achieved significant traction with its ‘Return to Netball’ programme, which may provide a model to follow. Such outcomes are based on focused strategies targeting increased and broader participation and coaching over a 3-5 year period and speaking to a range of motivations (e.g. wellbeing, fitness, enjoyment of the natural environment).

How British recreational rowing compares internationally – There are a number of continental European countries who have a mature recreational rowing set up. The best example is Germany, which focuses on ‘leisure’ rowing in all its form at both national and club level.

c. Challenges and opportunities

The group identified following priority challenges and opportunities to be addressed by the strategy.



Challenges	Opportunities
<p>It's difficult to find out about recreational rowing activities on the British Rowing website except for Learn to Row and communications are unclear about what recreational rowing is.</p>	<p>With improvements to British Rowing website layout and better promotion we can increase club and individual awareness of what recreational rowing is and the different types of recreational rowing activities available. In doing this we can speak to both non-rowers and lapsed rowers who currently feel rowing is not open or appropriate for them.</p>
<p>Schools and youth recreational organisation is at an early stage of development.</p>	<p>With increased focus and support we can enable more schools and clubs to offer recreational rowing activities.</p>
<p>There is confusion about British Rowing membership, points and insurance for people who want to organise or take part in recreational leagues and skills events.</p>	<p>With clearer guidance on organising different recreational activities and organisational support for clubs we can make it clearer and easier for clubs and rowers.</p>
<p>Access to equipment at the regional and club level is patchy and there's a lack of awareness about how boats already available and can be best used and/or adapted.</p>	<p>With targeted investment we can extend the availability of stable boats across the country and we can do more to promote the use of equipment clubs already have available.</p>
<p>Some clubs don't welcome or support those on non-competitive pathways.</p>	<p>With better promotion we can raise club awareness and motivation to offer recreational rowing activities and pathways.</p>
<p>We lack recreational organisers and coaches at club level.</p>	<p>With a greater focus on what is needed to start and sustain recreational rowing we can adapt current coaching and training offers, and start new ones as needed.</p>
<p>There is not a consistent development framework for recreational rowers to guide personal development and participation in different types of event.</p>	<p>With a clear framework, rowers can develop and participate in events appropriate for their current capability level.</p>



Phase 2 - Strategy development and engagement

The group reviewed and prioritised these challenges to create a short vision statement and set of development ambitions as set out at the start of this report.

Phase 3 - First year action plan

The group developed a first year action plan in partnership with relevant British Rowing colleagues as set out at the start of this report.



Appendix 1 - Group members and key contributors

Group members

Graham Hall (Recreational Rowing Committee (RRC) Wessex region rep, from Christchurch RC)
Anne Hock (RRC East Midlands rep, from Leicester RC)
Susie Loates (Trafford RC, from North West region),
Paul Lorenzato (British Rowing Head of Community Development, and lead British Rowing contact for recreational rowing)
Kayte Parlevliet (Queen's Park High School RC)
John Turnbull (RRC Chair, from Thames region)
Ruth Ward (RRC Thames upriver rep, from Falcon BC, strategy group co-ordinator)

Other contributing British Rowing staff

Marieke Hagemans – Director of Membership and Community
Sarah Harris – Head of Learning, Education and Development (LEAD)
Alastair Marks – CEO
Angela Westley – Head of Insight and Strategy

Other members of the British Rowing recreational rowing committee

Peter Barker (RRC West Midlands rep, from Upton RC)
Peter Cameron (RRC Western rep, from Castle Dore RC)
Pete Life (RRC WAGS rep, from Bristol Ariel RC)
Billy Sardar (Chair WAGs Regional Rowing Council, interim RRC WAGS recreational officer)
Pamela Walton (RRC Northern rep, from Hexham RC)



Appendix 2 - Research findings

1. The broader British rowing landscape

1.1. Active rowers

British Rowing data provided for April 2022 records [520] affiliated clubs with (based on club self-certification) 43,624 declared members and 30,180 ClubHub members indicating as an estimate 13,444 recreational club members.

While British Rowing's 31,435 members (as at April 2022) range in age from 14 to 80+, over 55% are under 25.

April 2022 British Rowing statistics show female membership at 14,293 (45.6%), male membership at 17,142. The percentage of female members has been slightly increasing since the end of lockdown (42.5% in May 2021) along with the number of total members. In the 19-24 age bracket, there are more female than male members. All the age groups above 30 have more male than female members, with the greatest disparity being in the older age groups.

1.2. Lapsed and non-rowers

British Rowing's D&I survey research findings from Spring 2021 record that 25% of the lapsed rowers who responded said that lack of time/other commitments was a reason in them stopping rowing. 83% of these lapsed rowers said they wanted to see more recreational rowing options. In the survey, lapsed rowers over-indexed vs the population on being women, non-heterosexual and ethnically diverse.

For non-rowers the survey showed a perception of exclusion, a sense that rowing is not a sport for people like them.

1.3. British Rowing membership

Recent qualitative research undertaken by British Rowing in connection with British Rowing's membership offer has shown that many new and established club members who do not engage in formal competition do not see British Rowing membership as relevant or of value to them.

2. Current recreational rowing participation levels and activities - national overview

The group, excellently supported by British Rowing's Head of Strategy and Insight Angela Westley, conducted an online club survey between 4 February and 11 March 2022. 122 clubs provided full responses, mainly inland and coastal community clubs, with a few universities and school clubs.



2.1. Recreational clubs and membership

From the clubs who responded, 95% state that they have recreational rowers, which means that **at least 116 clubs have recreational rowers.**

It is, however, difficult to say with confidence that this is an accurate figure as many responding clubs indicated that they were unsure if to include in their recreational figures people who “just row” and do not engage regularly in either organised formal competition or recreational events such as tours and leagues.

It is clear that those counted as recreational rowers **span all age groups** with 25% of them estimated to be under 25. The biggest age group is those aged 41-60 with approximately 34% but we can see that recreational rowing isn't age specific. The limited survey contributions from both the junior and university sectors are reflected in these figures.

There is also a **good balance of male and female** recreational rowers. It is estimated that around 48% are male and 51% female, with a small amount of non-binary individuals as well. There is also a good spread of gender across all age groups with only the over 60s skewing slightly more male and the 41-60 skewing slightly more female.

20% of clubs offer a reduced subscription for recreational rowers and the amount varies for what this amounts to.

Generally **sessions are organised** for recreational rowers (68% stating “Yes”) and the most popular times for them to row are **weekend mornings** (77%), weekday mornings (57%) and weekday evenings (55%).

However for half of the clubs, there are no restrictions for when they can row. For those who do have restrictions, either sometimes (21%) or always (29%), these tend to focus around safety aspects or priority given to competing crews.

A mixture of Fine Boats (83%) and Stable/Training/Touring boats (69%) are used and there is a mixture of responses as to whether the recreational rowers have coaches or not. 36% state that they do have coaches, 19% state that they don't and 45% state that some within the club do and some don't.

2.2. What do recreational clubs need to help them?

In terms of what clubs need to help them, it is a bit of everything with “**More Coaches**” being stated by 60% of clubs, followed by “**More boats**” (49%) and “More organisers” (47%). “More coxes” was also mentioned a few times.



In terms of how British Rowing can help grow recreational rowing, 59% of clubs are looking for **coaching support**, 53% are looking for **training courses/resources** and funding was also mentioned along with assistance in **promotion/advertising** and events.

2.3. Non-recreational clubs

6 of the clubs completing the survey did not have recreational rowers and of those, 3 would not be open to having recreational rowers in the future (they are high performance clubs). 2 said “It depends” with 1 club stating not enough coaches as a reason for a lack of recreational rowers and 1 club said yes they would be open in the future.

2.4. Conclusion

It is clear that there are a lot of people taking part in recreational rowing already, across all age groups and genders and there is clearly a passion for it. However, more coaches and boats are needed in order for it to keep growing and there is support needed from British Rowing in many areas, including help with promotion.

3. Current recreational rowing participation levels and activities - regional snapshots

3.1. Western region

Survey response

Based on British Rowing data, there are 17 sliding seat rowing clubs in the region (including 2 university rowing clubs and 1 school club). Of these, just 5 clubs responded to the survey. The large number of Pilot Gig clubs in the region are not included.

Recreational clubs and membership

The Western region does not have any solely recreational rowing clubs. All clubs have competitive members, recreational members and others who are both racing and recreational – proportions vary club to club. Most clubs charge the same membership fee irrespective of how they row. Gender mix varies but is often in the order of 40:60 range for men: women. Typically, Juniors will concentrate on racing, but are then lost to the clubs when they leave the area for university or college. New members tend to be in the 30 – 50 age bracket, and a mix of those returning to rowing, moving into the area and those completely new to the sport. The latter are attracted either by Learn2Row courses or ad hoc teaching arrangements. Members generally only join British Rowing if they are racing outside Western region – club affiliation to WEARA covers all local events. Others join British Rowing to maintain their Coach status.



Recreational activities

There is no clear pattern of recreational activities in the Western region. Informal arrangements appear to be general – rowing for enjoyment, healthy exercise and compatible company, spiced occasionally with pub stops, barbecues etc. Timing depends on weather/conditions and boat availability.

Challenges and opportunities

Clubs say that support for acquiring more stable boats (suitable for both recreational use in a range of water conditions, and also for teaching) is always high on the agenda.

3.2. Wessex region

The Wessex area covers Dorset, Hampshire and the coastal areas of Sussex and Kent so has traditionally been dominated by coastal rowing rather than river rowing where British Rowing is more strongly rooted.

Survey response

Based on British Rowing data there are 19 in the region. 11 clubs responded to the online survey.

Recreational clubs and membership.

We know of only two or three clubs that describe themselves as solely recreational. Mixed competitive/recreational clubs mostly have a significant minority of recreational rowers, but the lines are blurred as most clubs charge all members the same and a few recreational members on occasion do some competitive activities although they primarily row recreationally.

Age data is patchy but it's clear that recreational rowing in the region, where it has been encouraged, draws in significant new and returning rowers mostly in the 30 to 50 age bracket. Gender data is limited but it appears that recreational rowing has drawn in at least as many if not more women than men.

In recent years work patterns have changed with an increase in self-employment, job share and part time working together with working from home, particularly with the Covid pandemic, and this has opened up opportunities to row on weekdays as well as weekends. Former rowers have been attracted to recreational rowing as it provides the pleasures of the sport without the level of commitment required to be a seriously competitive rower. Also recreational rowing provides an opportunity to become a member and continue with rowing for people that attend a Learn to Row course but are either not interested in competitions or unlikely to become a competitive rower.



Recreational activities

Across the region there is a range of activities from gig rowing, coastal rowing, mostly in coxed fours, touring coxed quads in more sheltered locations and recently the new international standard coastal singles, doubles and coxed quads. There are rowing clubs, sailing clubs with rowing sections and commercial operations offering rowing.

Organised recreational groups and their activities within clubs tend to be at times when the competitive squads are not training and are spread across weekend and weekday outings, Formal coaching appears to be limited but established recreational groups bring on learn to row participants by informally integrating them with existing recreational rowers. The region has no organised events for recreational rowers but some clubs are starting to encourage participation in a range of activities such as visits to other clubs and different stretches of water, national and international tours. There is scope for the development of leagues and other fun events.

Challenges and opportunities

Clubs said their priorities for additional support for recreational rowing are more boats of a suitable type for their conditions and support in obtaining them, support for coaching and marketing to change the image of rowing and recruit members.

3.3. West Midlands region

Survey response

Based on the British Rowing data supplied there are 52 clubs in the region. These are broken down into: schools (9); university/alumni (9); sea cadets (13); clubs (open) (17); others (4). Only the 17 open clubs were sent the survey. Of these 8 clubs responded to the online survey and we obtained separate feedback from one club.

Recreational clubs and membership

Age group	Number of members	%
Under 18s	0	-
18-24	0	-
25-40	28	15%
41-60	89	45%
Over 60	80	40%
TOTAL	197	100%

5 clubs have reduced subs for recreational rowers - typically 50%.



Recreational activities

Clubs in the main seem to have sporadic organised outings. Across the clubs there is a reasonable spread of times when recreational rowers go out but most clubs have restrictions to avoid over-crowding. 5 clubs have stable boats – all have fine boats.

Challenges and opportunities

One of the main challenges for the region is to find a new representative to serve on the British Rowing Recreational Rowing Committee. For personal circumstances the existing incumbent has been trying to stand down for two years but no one as yet has been found to take over the role. The position is therefore being filled on a temporary basis. There are a number of clubs where recreational rowing is thriving but these need mentoring to bring them to their full potential. Without representation at national level the region will not be kept informed of initiatives and take advantage of other opportunities coming from British Rowing nor can they provide feedback to the committee on issues that may arise within the West Midlands Region.

Another challenge is to find space at clubs to store newly acquired stable boats. It is likely that boats will be stored outside meaning new boats will deteriorate faster than if stored inside.

The region has the River Severn, one of the major river system in the UK, running through it. This provides some 40 miles of navigable waterway with only six large locks to negotiate between Stourport and Gloucester making it attractive for weekend tours. The Avon is also navigable from Stratford upon Avon through to Tewkesbury providing a further 40 miles of scenic touring probably needing three days due to more locks. A delightful week-long tour can be made along the two rivers without the need for boat transport albeit that one half would have to be rowed upstream.

Along the two rivers described above are seven clubs all of which are prepared to offer help to touring boat crews. There are a number of clubs on the Wye and Upper Severn where the water is only rowable on local stretches of water. These clubs are located in lovely towns making them opportunities for other local clubs to visit over a weekend with the host club possibly providing the boats.

3.4. North West region

Survey response

Based on British Rowing data there are 19 clubs in the region. 10 clubs responded to the online survey and we obtained separate feedback from 4 clubs.



Recreational clubs and membership

We know of one club that describe themselves as solely recreational. Mixed competitive/recreational clubs seem to have a significant minority of recreational rowers, but the lines are blurred as most clubs charge all members the same and many members on occasion do some competitive activities although they primarily row recreationally.

Age data provided makes it clear that recreational rowing in the region continues to draw in significant new and returning rowers in the 41-60 and over age brackets. Gender data submitted by 10 clubs makes it clear that recreational rowing continues to draw in new and returning rowers of all genders. Learn to Row courses seem to be the primary way that clubs onboard new recreational rowers of all ages.

Recreational activities

Across the region, organised recreational groups and their activities within clubs seem to centre on one weekend session and weekday morning outings, half of the responders have some coached recreational sessions. Established recreational groups bring on learn to row participants by informally integrating them with existing recreational rowers. Organised recreational groups try to offer a range of activities e.g. North West Explorer Series by tapping into informal networks and relationships both locally and nationally.

Challenges and opportunities

Clubs said their priorities for additional support for recreational rowing are training courses, resources, coaching support, how to contact other clubs for informal races and more information on what is available.

3.5. East Midlands region

Survey response

Based on British Rowing data there are 15 open clubs in the region, 5 University clubs, one alumni club and no schools. 7 open clubs and 1 university club responded to the online survey.

Recreational clubs and membership

No clubs are solely for recreational rowers, but only one club does not provide for them. That club has others in close proximity (as in next door!) and refers all queries to the one with the largest recreational membership. Most clubs charge all members the same subscription, with one club charging a percentage of full membership for limited access to equipment and water, and another charging for a fixed number of sessions.

The recreational rowers in open clubs primarily row for pleasure, with visits between clubs common, and a few will also row in ranking points and/or ergo competition. There is very



little non ranking points competition in the region, although shared longer rows are common, and the Good Friday Row from Nottingham to Newark is a long established recreational row open to all rowers.

Age data is unreliable but recreational rowing in the region continues to draw in significant numbers of new and returning rowers. There is little to no junior recreational rowing, but a major interest in rowing is generated from junior squads with parents taking up the sport. Although both genders row recreationally, the majority are women. There is little adaptive recreational rowing, but the same can be said of competitive rowing in the region, with a shortage of coaches and appropriate equipment for either.

Recreational activities

Across the region, organised recreational groups and their activities within clubs seem to centre on weekday, evening and weekend outings, largely depending on landing stage and water restrictions, sometimes 'supervised' and sometimes with coaches. Established recreational groups bring on learn to row participants by integrating them with existing recreational rowers. This is partly due to the social side of recreational rowing, but also the priority clubs are currently giving to getting particularly junior but also senior crews back into competitive rowing. Some recreational groups in the region try to offer a range of activities (e.g. regular local outings, tours and local visits) by tapping into informal networks and relationships both locally and nationally.

An important part of the arrangements for tours and visits are the opportunities created by members who are also volunteers and umpires talking about them at local events.

Challenges and opportunities

Clubs said their top priorities for additional support for recreational rowing are:

- More coaches in more clubs
- Opportunities for coach training with appropriate and perhaps lower level skills than offered by Level 2, and definitely at a very much lower cost
- More boats that are suitable for recreational rowers and touring available to clubs.

3.6. Eastern region

Survey response

Based on British Rowing data there are 42 (university not contacted by me) clubs in the region. 13 clubs responded to the online survey and we obtained separate feedback from 1 club.

Recreational clubs and membership

This survey was completed giving only information on recreational rowers rather than whole club make-up. So we cannot be sure of percentage of recreational v non-recreational



members. We know of at least one club that describe themselves as solely recreational. Mixed competitive/recreational clubs seem to have a significant minority of recreational rowers, but the lines are blurred as most clubs charge all members the same and many members on occasion do some competitive activities although they primarily row recreationally.

Age data is patchy but it's clear that recreational rowing in the region continues to draw in significant new and returning rowers. Gender data is also patchy but recreational rowing continues to draw in new and returning rowers of all genders. Learn to Row courses seem to be the primary way that clubs gain new recreational rowers.

Recreational activities

Across the region, organised recreational groups and their activities within clubs seem to centre on weekday and weekend outings, mainly mornings and evenings with some afternoon outings also. Some coached, some not. Established recreational groups bring on learn to row participants by informally integrating them with existing recreational rowers. Some organised recreational groups try to offer a range of activities (e.g. regular local outings, tours, leagues and other events) by tapping into informal networks and relationships both locally and nationally.

Challenges and opportunities

Clubs said their priorities for additional support for recreational rowing are training courses, coaching support, assistance/support through funding for stable boats, a World Rowing coastal four to increase amount of rowers, connection with other recreational groups. Request for British Rowing to change the image of rowing to make it more accessible for all. Assistance in attracting more members.

3.7. WAGS region

Survey response

Five clubs responded all confirming they are partly recreational.

Recreational clubs and membership

Mixed competitive/recreational clubs seem to have a significant minority of recreational rowers. With the exception of Swindon, which is primarily recreational, all the responding clubs charge members the same membership fee.

The age and gender data provided in the survey was insufficient to provide real insight.



Recreational activities

Across the region, organised recreational groups and their activities within clubs seem to centre on weekend and some weekday outings. Coaching is provided at some sessions at each of the four clubs who responded to this question.

Challenges and opportunities

Clubs said their priorities for additional support are: boats, coaching and fun activities. One club additionally asked for land facilities.

3.8. Thames Region

Survey response

Type	Responses	Out of	Rate	Have rec. rowers?
Club	26	65	40%	All respondents
School	3	52	6%	All but only 1 gave numbers
University	4	?		2 yes 2 no
Skiff clubs	3	?		Yes all

Recreational clubs and membership

It appears likely that clubs with recreational interest responded.

Club numbers for recreational rowers are often qualified in responses as estimates but total c1500. Estimated overall membership of responding clubs (from British Rowing club levy returns) is 5000. Recreational rowers may therefore represent around 30% of the membership of these clubs. The distinction between recreational rowers can be blurred in competitive clubs where rec. rowers may be regarded as those that only do the odd Masters race e.g. a Head race

For skiff clubs responding estimated numbers were c300 overall which is a high average of 100, although dominated by 1 club with 230. Heavy fixed seat boats appear to appeal to some recreational rowers!

School and university response was low and difficult to judge.

Breakdown by age and gender is shown in attached charts.

Some points to note are that for most clubs, rec rowers are in the over 40 age groups and that 2 clubs have significant numbers in the under 19 age group. In terms of gender the M/F split is reasonably even but with women predominant in 41-60 and men in 60+. This may be



attributed to women coming into the sport through adult L2R and more men being in the sport longer and/or coming back on retiring.

Recreational activities

Across the region, organised recreational groups and their activities within clubs centre on weekend mornings (88%) with some weekday evenings (64%) and weekday mornings (60%). Afternoon sessions at weekends or on weekdays are much less frequent.

Coaching/organising responses and comments suggest that there is a lack of resource to manage more sessions and that recreational rowers can be less experienced and viewed as needing more supervision. Data on managed sessions and restrictions on boating bear this out. Comments indicate that further limitation can be avoiding peak times when other groups boating. Availability of appropriate equipment also a concern - some clubs need more boats and cannot justify high cost of new stable gig 4x+ as none available on second hand market.

No data from survey but from RRC experience we are aware that established recreational groups bring on learn to row participants (who do not plan to move into racing squads) by informally integrating them with existing recreational rowers. Organised recreational groups try to offer a range of activities (e.g. regular local outings, tours, leagues and other events) by tapping into informal networks and relationships both locally and nationally.

Challenges and opportunities

The majority of clubs (70%) cite lack of coaching as being a major limiting factor in increasing the number of recreational members. As recreational rowers are often less experienced, clubs are reluctant to let them boat without supervision, hence the concentration of outings at weekends when more volunteers are available. Comments received mention that coaches tend to prefer to work with racing crews and that it is difficult to persuade volunteers to take on coaching roles. 60% of clubs would like more training courses and resources from British Rowing, and 40% would like coaching support, e.g. along the lines of the former Community Coach scheme.

Around one quarter of clubs say they need more boats, particularly stable/touring boats in order to increase the number of recreational rowers. As these are expensive (though cheaper than racing boats) and hardly ever appear on the second-hand market, clubs need advice on sources of funding. Having stable boats would also overcome the problem of lack of coxes, since they can be coxed by people of all sizes.

A few clubs would like help with publicity and promotion, both to attract new members and to convince their committees of the benefits of recreational rowing.



The two clubs which responded that they have a large number of junior members (Barn Elms and Fulham Reach) are described as Community Clubs and work with local schools. They receive significant funding and are able to hire professional coaches. Those clubs which do have junior members say that they are not permitted to boat without supervision/coaching and there are too few volunteers to look after them other than at set times.

3.9. Northern region

Survey response

Responses were received from 9 clubs out of some 14 in the region. All stated they had recreational rowers. No input was received from schools or universities.

Recreational clubs and membership

Data on age and gender was estimated but showed some 75% of recreational rowers to be over 40 with a reasonable balance of men to women. Only some 5% were Juniors.

Recreational activities

Rowing times are mainly weekend and week day mornings with some weekday evenings. Some limitations due to fitting in with other groups and availability of organisers/coaches. Both stable and fine boats are used - which reflects that "recreational" rowers are not all beginners but those who just row for the enjoyment of it rather than committed racing. Some comments that some older stable boats can be heavy and harder to handle which can limit their use depending on people around to help. The need for equipment that is set up for those who may be less flexible or tall than fitter racing rowers was also remarked on.

Challenges and opportunities

In addition to equipment, a common theme was the need for more availability of coaching resources and organisation support to enable recreational groups to develop - particularly for those relatively new to rowing. New members generally come through L2R and more coaches need training to support this too.

The Explore league in the North East has been successful in generating enthusiasm for recreational rowing but some clubs felt that more publicity was needed about the opportunities to take part in this type of rowing and also guidance to clubs on how to integrate recreational rowers. These were areas where it was felt British Rowing could assist.



4. Current recreational rowing participation levels and activities - schools and universities snapshot

With the continued strengthening of inclusive rowing programs across the school sector such as Warrington Youth Row and London Youth Row (see Thames regional snapshot above), the accessibility to rowing for children and teenagers is growing. With this growth, the realisation that rowing does not need to start and end with competition is taking shape. Schools and universities are starting to review their rowing strategies in a bid to extend reach. Interviews with secondary school and university students around rowing highlight the very real need for schools and other clubs to review their offering, focusing on wellbeing, enjoyment and teamwork, rather than the single-minded pursuit of excellence.

Most secondary school rowers will move away from the sport during GCSE or 6th Form if they are not focused on competition, as there has traditionally not been the option for them to participate due to coaching limitations and the focus on students who are competing. All too common are stories about rowers who have reached burnout by the time they turn 18, only to walk away from the sport due to poor offerings from either local or university clubs. It is often these rowers who return in their mid to late 30s as a means to getting back into something that delivers significant mental and physical improvement.

School based clubs who are providing recreational rowing meet the same issues as other clubs due to access to infrastructure, coaching times and coach availability.

5. Short and long term impact of specific investment (Explore Rowing and Charles Stanley sponsorship)

The Explore Rowing programme started in 2009 and funded by Sport England over four years provided 50 £12,500 boat packages to individual clubs and watersports centres. The funding included a proportion for coach education and the clubs were expected to match fund this amount so each package was worth £25,000. Research carried out 3 years into the programme showed that club membership had risen by over 50% in the clubs that received these packages. British Rowing membership increased too, but this was because that part of the agreement was that all people using the boats need to be British Rowing members.

A more targeted programme aimed at a smaller amount of clubs and in conjunction with the LEAD team and the new activity course, this type of programme could be highly successful at increasing rowing participation.

In 2018 the RRC developed a proposal for purchasing packages of stable boats which could be deployed to support staging recreational events and courses to introduce new people to



rowing. Sponsorship of £100k was negotiated with Charles Stanley Wealth Management which enabled two trailers each with 4 coxed quad touring boats and full sets of sculls and oars to be purchased. These were then located with host clubs - Isle of Ely in the Eastern region and Goring Gap in the Thames region.

The boats have proven to be a valuable asset enabling more participation in "Explore" league events, club learn to row and community fun events within their regions and staging tours in various areas. Covid lock downs have caused some disruption but figures for each package indicate some 120 days usage in a full year. Overall the investment has enabled some 500 people p.a. to be introduced to rowing and a similar number have taken part in events which encourages retention in the sport.

6. How does rowing compare to other sports (e.g. RYA, OWS/SUP, BCU)?

Many other sports are looking at their strategies, particularly coming out of the pandemic and the importance of encouraging more exercise. Most sports have 5 year plans and their strategy has clear outcomes where success can be measured.

There are common themes such as the **increase of participants** in the sport. Some refer specifically to widening the appeal of their sport, particularly to **improve inclusion and diversity**:

“Engaging recreational paddlers and attracting new paddlers” (British Canoeing)

“Increasing membership and improving member services” (British Canoeing)

Others make more specific targets for new markets:

“To widen the appeal of the sport; specifically targeting new markets such as the disabled, women, long-term illness, obesity, lower-socio economic groups and non-footballers” (The Walking Football Association)

“Targeted appeal to new participants from Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic communities” (RYA)

British Canoeing has seen its current strategy have a significant membership impact. Figures provided at the time of this report show membership has grown 66% during the last 12 months. 50% of those joining in the past month have purchased family memberships. Female members have increased from 27% to 34% during the last 12 months, with females making up 43% of new members who joined in the last four weeks. SUP continues to show increased interest, accounting for around a third of British Canoe’s current membership.



Over the past 12 months, visitors to the Go Paddling website have increased by over 200%, with 570,000 visitors making use of the site. British Canoeing members reported their top three reasons for enjoying paddling as: to enjoy nature/environment and the outdoors; just love being on the water; to relax and de-stress.

Netball England have targeted former players with their highly successful 'Back to Netball' campaign. Running across England since 2010, over 60,000 women have returned to the sport via the programme.

Outside sport, the RHS makes interesting use of existing supporters to encourage participation and membership, through their successful 'Ambassador' scheme.

"They help us by supporting our campaigns and raising awareness of our work to enrich everyone's life through plants and make the UK a greener and more beautiful place." (RHS)

Coaching features in many plans, both to increase the number of coaches, and also to provide support and representation:

"To encourage all teachers of dance to enlist the protection of a recognized dance teach organization." (British Dance Council)

The RYA also makes a strategic aim for "instructor diversity".

There are three separate strategies adopted for netball: corporate governance, coaching and officiating. (England Netball)

The **digital representation** of sport is also an important feature for many strategies:

"Engagement with Start Boating site and digital campaigns" (RYA)

"To raise the sport's profile through increased PR and marketing" (The Walking Football Association)

England Netball's website provides a great example of a digital strategy that speaks equally and inclusively to recreational and competitive audiences: [England Netball | Home](#)

Finally, British Canoeing includes **environmental issues** in their strategic plans which were of particular interest to recreational rowing:

"Create more places to paddle and improve facilities." (British Canoeing)



“Annually improve the awareness amongst members of environmental issues and best practice from 2018.” (British Canoeing)

7. How does British recreational rowing compare internationally?

Touring and other recreational rowing activities are well established in continental Europe, as highlighted in the following country snapshots.

Germany

Recreational rowing is classed as “Breitensport”: mass sport or leisure sport, i.e. sporting activities for physical fitness and enjoyment as distinct from training-intensive and competition-oriented sport. The Deutscher Ruderverband has a web page dedicated to Breitensport <https://www.rudern.de/breitensport> with a list of rowing tours, long distance races (marathons) and details of awards for clocking up the highest number of kilometres rowed in a year, both individual and club-based, as well as the “Equator prize” for rowers who have rowed the equivalent of the equator (40,000 km) in their lifetime. There is also a page on tour planning.

Most German rowing clubs have a recreational section – a good example is Hansa Hamburg, which has a range of stable boats from singles, doubles, quads, sixes and even eights. They welcome both mature beginners and returning rowers, provide coaching and training plans, and encourage participation in tours and regattas aimed at recreational rowers.

France

The Fédération Française Aviron website has pages dedicated to leisure rowing and tour rowing. They state that the majority of clubs have a “leisure rowing” section which permits people of all ages and all physical abilities to discover and participate in rowing. The tour rowing page (Aviron de Randonnée) contains a lot of information about taking part in tours and also a calendar of tours organised by French clubs which are open to everyone to join.

An example of a club with a leisure section is Aviron Cadurcien in Cahors, which is open to all ages from 10/11 onwards, using both stable and fine boats, sculling and sweep. They offer four sessions per week and have a dedicated coach. The club also organises the annual “Descente du Lot”, a three day tour with some 20 touring quads.

The Netherlands

The Koninklijke Nederlandse Roeibond website has a section on “Tour Rowing” which in fact covers several aspects of recreational rowing, such as “mid week rowing”, boat loan scheme (i.e. borrowing boats from other clubs), and a list of tours.

Whilst rowing in the Netherlands is mainly competitive, many clubs do have a recreational section and organise tours. One example is Het Spaarne in Haarlem, which has a fleet of



stable boats, including wherries, and welcomes visiting rowers to take part in the tours that they organise.

Marathon rowing is also popular in the Netherlands, and many marathons include a 'participation' category, which usually features a cake and coffee stop point mid-way for those who are not in the racing category.