



Junior Rower and Crew Eligibility Task & Finish Group: Terms of Reference

August 2025

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Introduction

The progress of junior rowing in the UK is a success story. Schools and clubs across the country have introduced thousands of young people to the sport, nurtured friendships, and built competitive programmes that have excelled on the domestic and international stage. The quality of coaching, the depth of volunteer commitment, and the passion of parents and athletes are all things to celebrate. We are proud of the role that this community plays in developing not only future national team athletes but also lifelong participants, volunteers and coaches. It goes beyond each programme's ambition to ensure junior rowing remains a thriving, accessible and world-leading part of our sport.

A development in recent years has been the increase in rowers moving clubs or schools between J16 and J17. While this can create new opportunities for athletes, it has also raised concerns about fairness, sustainability and the impact on local programmes. It is these concerns this review will explore.

Purpose and Scope

British Rowing will convene a Task & Finish Group to examine eligibility rules for junior rowers and crews in domestic competitions. A number of representations have been made from across the rowing community which have raised concerns regarding the impact of:

- A rise in school scholarship and bursary offers driving the recruitment and movement of rowers in school years 11, 12 and 13.
- Inequalities in access to 'Tier 1' competition opportunities for juniors at smaller clubs and schools through the prioritisation of larger boat classes and / or rules prohibiting composite crews.

The purpose of the review is to facilitate a fair and transparent conclusion to the current junior rower eligibility debate and, if required, develop proportionate recommendations which balance the integrity of competition, sustainability of programmes, and the welfare and choice of individual athletes.

The Task & Finish Group will:

- a) Hear representations from across the rowing community.
- b) Consider stakeholder views and make recommendations to the sport on proposals designed to:
 - i. Protect integrity of competitions and grassroots sport,
 - ii. Ensure fair access to high level competition,
 - iii. Strengthen identity and sustainability of club and school rowing,
 - iv. Respect individual choice.

The Task & Finish Group recognises that many representations to British Rowing have expressed concerns and strong support for change. The review will therefore test the breadth of views (both for and against change) before developing any recommendations.

Review Format

British Rowing to convene a Task & Finish Group that will comprise of individuals with expertise and experience from across the rowing community:

- Up to 8 members; facilitated by BR (Chair: NROD).
- Neutral individuals, not publicly advocating either side of the debate.
- Individuals with demonstrable multi-environment experience e.g., school, club and/or U19 Pathway.
- Balanced composition (gender, educational background and geography)
- Drawn from a variety of roles (club / school coaches, competition leaders, etc)

Guiding principles

- Contributions will be actively sought from a wide range of stakeholders, including schools, clubs, parents, athletes, volunteers, and safeguarding leads. Interim themes will be published prior to final recommendations to ensure transparency and confidence in the process. Where requested, contributions can be made in a confidential manner. Respect will be given to those with different perspectives and an active effort will be made to ensure a range of perspectives will be heard.
- Consultation will include an open call for evidence, targeted focus groups, and the opportunity for written submissions from any stakeholder.
- The review to be conducted in the spirit of openness and a summary report released on the British Rowing website. The Task & Finish Group will maintain and publish a register of interests to manage any potential conflicts transparently.
- All contributors will be expected to work collaboratively and consider how we create positive environments and the strongest possible domestic setting for rowers and coaches to develop.
- The Group will consider the interests of both institutions and individual rowers, seeking solutions that respect individual wellbeing and choice while sustaining the health of the sport.
- A consensus from the rowing community will be sought but will not be required in order to make recommendations.
- Any recommendations will be advisory and non-binding. The Group will ensure that any recommendations are proportionate, evidence-based, and compatible with British Rowing's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion commitments. This will include conducting an equality impact assessment as part of the process. All recommendations will be made with due consideration of good governance and respect for the autonomy of stakeholders.

Output and Timing

Initiate: September 2025

Report: November 2025

Appendix A - Context

A summary of the primary drivers of concern

1. **Sustainability of junior club programmes** - Systematic movement of athletes from clubs to recruiting schools reduces participation and, in some cases, contributes to programme decline or closure, weakening local ecosystems. In some local contexts, athlete movement club-to-club, school-to-club and school-to-school is also evident, adding additional pressure on efforts to sustain balanced and thriving junior programmes. Recruitment from smaller clubs (often after national results) discourages those clubs from entering national events and depresses J16 engagement in GB Trials, undermining local momentum and regional role models.
2. **Competitive balance** - Concentrated late stage recruitment into a few school or club crews skews results, demotivates and reduces the depth of meaningful competition.
3. **Coach development and volunteer retention** - When athletes developed locally are recruited at the point of maturation, coaches report reduced morale and intent to continue.
4. **Restricted competition exposure & access** - The prioritisation of larger boat classes and / or rules prohibiting composite crews leads to strong individuals from smaller clubs being shut out of higher-level racing despite being competition-ready. This leads to restricted development opportunities for rowers on the basis they are from smaller programmes; this barrier is then used to justify athlete moves to larger programmes to “access opportunities” available elsewhere.
5. **Integrity of GB Pathway** - Data sharing within the Trials process has already been curtailed (e.g., tighter sharing of detailed results/analytics) in order to reassure club coaches that performance data will not be used to facilitate school recruitment. There have also been some concerns due to perceived conflicts of interest by those holding both club / school and GB discipline lead responsibilities. In parallel, a typically sweep-heavy recruitment emphasis has raised concerns that it undermines junior sculling depth and quality, reducing internal competition for sculling seats and risking a weaker GB sculling pipeline.
6. **Fulfilling charitable aims** - In many situations children are offered partial scholarships or bursaries that cover only a portion of the full school and rowing costs. For many families, the remaining expenses would be higher than they would have been had their child not moved. Because financial aid is, by definition, targeted at families without the means to pay full fees, these partial awards can place an even greater financial burden on households already identified as having limited resources.
7. **‘Leveling up’ support** - The support available to less resourced programmes is not well understood. There is a need to collaborate further, enhance the support on offer and to communicate it well so athletes and coaches have confidence they can progress locally rather than feeling a necessity to relocate.
8. **Financial sustainability** - The weight of sustaining scholarships has undermined the delivery of some school rowing programmes; wider replication risks further risks of closures and instability across our sport.

Additional considerations

- **Personal choice and individual welfare** - recommendations must respect individual agency and wellbeing. This includes consideration of changes in circumstance for young rowers such as a family relocation, school merger/closure, medical/education needs and / or individual welfare concerns.

- **Programme advantages and competitive balance** – schools and clubs begin with a variety of inherent differences that can create competitive advantage, such as water access, size of school or local population, volunteer and professional coaching capacity, equipment budgets and land facilities. Consideration should be given to whether late-stage recruitment is materially different in nature to these other advantages.
 - **Navigating community interests** - consideration of community interests needs to be managed sensitively but in the best overall interests of the sport.
-

Appendix B - Example representations to British Rowing

“Junior rowing is a vibrant and valuable part of our sport, but its health depends on fairness, transparency, and the equitable development of athletes across the country. I hope British Rowing will take these concerns seriously and consider steps to address them for the long-term good of the sport.”

“Our sport has always drawn strength from its deep roots in community clubs - places where passion, persistence, and people matter more than privilege. But today, junior club rowing faces an existential threat. The growing dominance of private schools and, increasingly, large metropolitan clubs, is fundamentally altering the junior landscape. Backed by full-time coaching staff, vast resources, and aggressive recruitment strategies, these institutions now draw the most talented young athletes and dominate competitive fields. What was once a relatively level platform is becoming a two-tier system. No young rower should feel they must leave home to progress. Club crews, trained by volunteers and funded by parents' cake sales and subs, find themselves lining up against machine-like squads with year-round paid support. This is not just a question of winning - it's a question of identity, sustainability, and fairness. Unless governing bodies act decisively, junior club rowing will be relegated to a second-class sport - a developmental holding zone for athletes until they are recruited elsewhere. The pathway to excellence will narrow, favouring wealth over work ethic, access over aspiration. That cannot be the future we want for rowing...Rowing must remain a sport where talent, commitment, and care for young people - not just money and connections - determine success.”

“A club consultation earlier this year found around 70% support for taking measures to limit the impact of current recruitment practices.”

Appendix C - Precedents (British NGB examples)

In a team sport context, Rowing is an outlier. In the U18 and U16 domestic setting, team sports such as Netball, Football, Basketball and Ice Hockey all have active measures in place to manage individuals transitioning between teams designed to preserve competition integrity and domestic sustainability. Three primary mechanisms exist:

1. A 'cap' on the number of transfers
2. Transfer windows
3. Player contracts (including player sales and fixed-term loans)

Other mechanisms such as seeding, athlete drafts and even licensing exist but are uncommon and sport specific.

While the above sports are valid comparisons, the specific context of the debate within Rowing has parallels with measures taken in Rugby Union, Hockey and Cricket. These three sports have managed this through changes to athlete eligibility via mechanisms 1 (caps) and 2 (transfer windows). They have also put in place measures to improve equitable access to competition for those at smaller clubs or schools.

Rugby Union:

- The English RFU regulates the number and timing of transitions and explicitly counts overseas arrivals toward the cap.
 - *"In the U18 Competitions only a total of three players who have joined the educational establishment in years 11, 12 and 13 from educational establishments offering education beyond Year 11 are permitted to be part of the squad of players. For the avoidance of doubt, overseas players will count as one of the three aforementioned players. Schools may select any player who has transferred into the school post year 11 from an educational establishment that only offers education up to Year 11. This is subject to compliance with RFU Regulation 15 in all circumstances."* ([RFU, Player Eligibility, Point 4](#)).
- Scottish Rugby have taken measures to improve equitable access to competition through individual eligibility and team composite provisions. The RFU have similar measures in place but only permit composite teams in club competitions (via the Cluster framework)
 - *"4.5 - In school competitions a school may seek the Competitions Committee's permission to field a Player who is not enrolled with that school i.e. is enrolled at another school or has left school but still complies with the age grade criteria. Such permission shall ordinarily only be granted where participation for the school concerned provides the only realistic competitive playing option for the Player."*
 - *"5.1 - Entry to Schools and Youth National Competitions may be accepted from two or more clubs or two or more schools which have combined to form either a composite school or a composite club Team provided that the Competitions Committee is satisfied that:
5.1.1 the composite Team has been created solely for participation purposes and not to gain a competitive advantage; and
5.1.2 the clubs / schools involved can demonstrate the need for a composite Team based on their number of registered Players."* ([SRU, Schools and Youth National Competition Rules 2025/26](#))

Hockey:

- England Hockey regulates the number and timing of transitions, and adds an academic-integration test that effectively prevents one-year “fly-in” players who aren’t genuinely enrolled. State schools have an exemption to these rules.
 - *“1. In the U18 Competitions unless an educational establishment is i. a State School or ii has been granted Collegiate status (available to schools who only have an intake of a specific gender in the sixth form / Year 12) only a total of three players who have joined the educational establishment in Years 12 and 13 are permitted to be part of the squad of players selected for any one match (subject to iii. below). For 2025-26 only, players who joined and played for the school in 2024-25 are exempt from this regulation. iii A team may select any player who has transferred into the school in Year 12 from an English educational establishment that only offers education up to Year 11. Such players must be registered in advance with the competition manager.”*
 - *“2. Full-Time Academic Education i. Players must be full members of the named school and must be enrolled to take a full part in the school's academic curriculum for the full academic year. ii. Players must take public examinations at the same centre as the rest of the school iii. Players' academic results must be included in their school's published statistics including those seen in the government's league tables and the national press.”* ([Player Eligibility, England Hockey Schools Championships](#))
- England Hockey and Scottish Hockey have taken measures to improve equitable access to competition with provision for composite when numbers are tight.
 - *“Clubs may merge to form teams with players from two or more clubs only if they have insufficient junior members in a given age group to field a team on their own... One club is nominated as primary for admin and the team name should reflect the merger.”* ([England Hockey Junior Competition Regulations 2024–25. Point 3.2.8](#)).
 - *“3.1.3 Composite schools may be accepted into the competition where one school does not have enough players to participate, subject to approval by the Competitions & Events Manager.”* ([Scottish Hockey Youth National Competition Rules 2024-25](#))

Cricket:

- National Schools Cricket regulates the number and timing of transitions, and adds a geographic limitation for 6th Form Colleges.
 - *“A School 1st XI will contain not more than three players who have joined that school for 6th Form education. A 6th Form College will contain not more than three players from outside their catchment area.”* ([National Schools Twenty20 regulations](#))
- At a junior club level, many leagues explicitly allow “combined” (composite) teams when numbers are short and with pre-season approval (GMCL, Herts, Glos), while school-only competitions remain single-school only.