



**BRITISH ROWING**

# **Junior Rower and Crew Eligibility Task & Finish Group**

**Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

**December 2025**

**TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT**

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## Introduction

The Junior Rower and Crew Eligibility Task & Finish Group has been commissioned to:

- 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.

Having received feedback from across the rowing community, the panel will evaluate five potential alternatives to the status quo against an Equity Impact Assessment (EIA) framework. We will use an assessment of the current status quo as the baseline for comparison and focus on equality impacts for identified groups.

Drawing on established equality and inclusion principles commonly applied in publicly funded sport this Equality Impact Assessment is intended to inform decision-making by identifying and comparing potential impacts. In developing and assessing the options set out in this document, due regard has been given to:

- eliminating discrimination;
- advancing equality of opportunity; and
- fostering good relations between different groups.

The assessment considers both direct and indirect impacts of the current arrangements and the proposed options, with particular regard to age as a protected characteristic, and to socio-economic, geographic and programme-type factors that influence equality of opportunity and access within junior rowing.

## Definitions

- **Athletes developed within the programme:** Athletes whose primary training, coaching and competitive environment has been within the programme prior to the Year 11 to Year 12 transition.
- **Programme:** An organisational unit that trains, selects and enters junior athletes into competition under a single recognised identity. A programme may be delivered by a club or a school and is responsible for athlete development, coaching provision and competition entry.
- **Club:** A community-based rowing organisation, affiliated to British Rowing, that delivers rowing activity primarily outside of the formal school system and enters crews into competition under the club's registered name.
- **School:** An educational institution that delivers rowing activity as part of, or alongside, its educational provision and enters crews into competition under the school's registered name.
- **Large programme:** A programme with comparatively high participation numbers and resources, typically characterised by a broad athlete pool across age groups, regular entry of multiple crews into national-level competitions, and access to paid coaching or enhanced facilities. For the purposes of this EIA, the term is used descriptively rather than as a formal classification.

## Executive Summary

Feedback received from across the rowing community indicates that the current junior eligibility rules (the “status quo”) give rise to a range of equality concerns, particularly by programme type and socio-economic context. Submissions and engagement highlighted that patterns of late-stage recruitment, most notably around the Year 11 to Year 12 transition, place a disproportionate pressure on smaller and volunteer-led programmes.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) examines the potential equality implications of maintaining the status quo and of five alternative policy options intended to address these concerns via a crew eligibility mechanism. The assessment considers impacts across socio-economic, geographic, programme-type and welfare dimensions, using the current rules as the baseline for comparison.

The options assessed are:

- **Option 1:** A min. of 50% of athletes developed within the programme; no composite crews permitted
- **Option 2:** A min. of 75% of athletes developed within the programme; no composite crews permitted
- **Option 3:** A min. of 75% of athletes developed within the programme; local composite crews permitted
- **Option 4:** No min. % of athletes developed within the programme; local composite crews permitted
- **Option 5:** No min. % of athletes developed within the programme; national composite crews permitted

The baseline analysis indicates that the status quo is linked with some adverse equality impacts, particularly for athletes from smaller, volunteer-led or geographically isolated programmes, and for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Evidence suggests that current arrangements may indirectly disadvantage these groups by limiting access to competitive opportunities and by incentivising recruitment patterns that are difficult for less-resourced programmes to sustain.

Each alternative option is assessed against its likely effects on these identified issues, including its capacity to mitigate recruitment-driven inequalities, improve access to competition, support programme sustainability, and protect athlete welfare and individual choice. The analysis also considers the proportionality of each option and the extent to which mitigations or safeguards would be required to manage unintended consequences.

Taken together, the assessment indicates that options which address both recruitment pressures and structural barriers to collaboration are more likely to advance equality of opportunity than those which address only one of these factors. The EIA findings set out the relative strengths, limitations and risks associated with each option and inform the Task & Finish Group’s consideration of which approach, if any, would represent a proportionate and effective response to the identified concerns.

This Equality Impact Assessment forms part of the evidence base for the Task & Finish Group’s final report and recommendations, and is intended to support informed decision-making by clearly articulating the equality implications of the options under consideration.

## I. Scope: Decision Context and Options

**Decision Context:** British Rowing's Junior Eligibility Task & Finish Group is considering regulatory changes to junior competition rules in response to fairness and sustainability concerns. The focus is on athlete movement between ages 16–17 (Year 11 to Year 12) and access to tier 1 national competitions, especially for those at smaller or less-resourced programmes. The decision involves selecting among five policy options that adjust based upon a minimum of athletes developed within the programme and allowances for composite crews.

### Options Assessed:

- **Option 1**  
**A 50% min. of athletes developed within the programme, no composites permitted.**  
 Each junior crew is required to comprise a minimum of 50% athletes developed within the programme. Composite crews are not permitted, meaning all athletes must represent a single club or school.
- **Option 2**  
**A 75% min. of athletes developed within the programme, no composites permitted.**  
 Each junior crew is required to comprise a minimum of 75% athletes developed within the programme. Composite crews are not permitted, meaning all athletes must represent a single club or school.
- **Option 3**  
**A 75% min. of athletes developed within the programme; local composite crews permitted.**  
 Each junior crew is required to comprise a minimum of 75% athletes developed within the programme, while permitting composite crews within local areas. “Local” composites enable clubs or schools within a defined region or vicinity to field joint crews for competition.
- **Option 4**  
**No min. % of athletes developed within the programme; local composite crews permitted.** No minimum proportion of athletes are required to have been developed within the programme. Local composite crews are permitted, allowing collaboration between nearby clubs or schools while retaining unrestricted athlete movement.
- **Option 5**  
**No min. % of athletes developed within the programme; national composite crews permitted.**  
 No minimum proportion of athletes are required to have been developed within the programme. Composite crews are permitted nationally, allowing athletes from any clubs or schools across the country to combine into a single crew for competition.

Each option is evaluated for its causal mechanisms (how it would change current practices), impacts on different groups, and alignment with equality principles. The assessment is structured according to a standard six-phase EIA methodology.

## 2. Stakeholders and Affected Groups

Multiple stakeholders in junior rowing are affected by these policy options. Key affected groups and relevant characteristics include:

- **Junior Athletes:** Boys and girls aged ~15–18 in Year 11–13. Especially:
  - *Athletes at Small Clubs/Schools:* Often from local community programmes, which may be volunteer-led and have fewer resources. Smaller squads mean less opportunity to join age-group peers in bigger boats and squads are less resilient to the impact of departures.
  - *Athletes Transferring Between Club / School Programmes:* Reasons for changing programmes include welfare, educational and family circumstances, improved development environment and increased competitive opportunities. Changes in primary club typically occur at natural points of transition (start of the season, starting sixth-form) but can occur within season, particularly when based upon welfare or changes in family circumstances.
  - *Athletes Developed within the Programme of Recruiting Schools:* Students originally from the large programme's own feeder system. They may be displaced by incoming transfers, affecting their welfare and motivations. Correspondingly, there are positive impacts from strong athletes joining the programme, improving competitive chances and increased aspiration of the group. Athletes typically benefit from a breadth and depth of crews, and squads are more resilient to change.
  - *Lower Socio-Economic Background:* Talented juniors from lower-income families who tend to be part of smaller club/school programmes, for whom scholarships/bursaries at independent schools or clubs are both an opportunity and a potential financial strain (note: most respondents explained the majority of aid is partial circa <30%). They are impacted by recruitment and composite policies in distinct ways (e.g. ability to afford moving vs. staying local).
  - *Geographically Isolated Athletes:* Juniors in regions with few rowing programmes. They have fewer local competition opportunities and may consider moving or need composite arrangements to compete in larger boat classes.
- **Clubs and Schools (Programmes):**
  - *Small Clubs & Volunteer-Led Programmes:* Community rowing clubs or state schools run by volunteers or limited staff. They often have limited numbers and resources. These face resilience challenges, many report being “on the precipice” of going under or becoming purely recreational due to repeated talent loss.
  - *Large Clubs & School Programmes:* Well-resourced programmes (often with professional coaches, high-quality equipment and, in some cases, boarding facilities) that may also actively recruit junior athletes. These programmes are likely to be most affected by any changes to crew composition requirements, including reduced flexibility in late-stage crew selection, greater emphasis on progression pathways for athletes developed within the programme, and some uncertainty in squad planning during implementation period. Programmes may engage in local composite arrangements where appropriate under revised rules. Large, mature clubs and school programmes are at a distinct advantage if greater emphasis is placed upon athletes being developed within the programme. The potential welfare and performance implications of these impacts for both athletes and programmes have been considered as part of the overall assessment.
  - *Regional Rowing Communities:* Groups of clubs within an area - impacted by whether they can bring together athletes (composites or as regional teams) to field competitive boats, and whether talent remains within the region or is drawn to national hubs.

- **Coaches and Volunteers:**

- *Volunteer Coaches at Small Programmes:* Their morale and retention are negatively affected when their programmes have competitive aspirations but athletes they trained leave for bigger programmes. They are invested in fair competition and programme sustainability.
- *Coaches at Large Programmes:* The need to account for significant investment in their programmes places additional pressure on these coaches, and in some cases programme sustainability may take precedence over wider community interests. Coaches at larger programmes often have experience across multiple environments and show a strong commitment to the development of the sport. They value clear rules that support fair competition and responsible recruitment, and that provide clarity so they can focus on developing competitive programmes.
- *Junior Rowing Administrators and Regatta Organisers:* They will implement these rules and need to ensure fairness and clarity in competition entries. These volunteers are already dedicating many hours of their time, any changes should be administratively minimal and may benefit from centralisation for both efficiency and consistency purposes.

- **Parents, Carers and Guardians:**

- *Of children considering moving programmes:* Their child's welfare and opportunities are the primary concern. Financial factors (such as club fees and scholarship offers) influence decisions, and inconsistent approaches to scholarships have, in some cases, caused confusion or frustration. Any rule changes may affect how families balance the decision to transfer against the opportunities available within their current programme.
- *Of children in existing programmes:* Changes to squad composition can affect parents as well as athletes. Submissions highlighted frustration where late-stage changes disrupt established squad dynamics, while also recognising that movement and choice remain important features of the system.

**Relevant Equality Characteristics:** Based on the scope and baseline analysis, the primary characteristics and contexts considered are:

- **Age:** All are Juniors, but the critical transition age (around 16–17, Year 11->12) is in focus for the EIA. Age is a protected characteristic.
- **Socio-Economic Status:** Not a protected characteristic in UK law, but crucial here it is considered as an equality dimension. The ability to pay for club fees, schooling, travel, or extra training differentiates athletes' opportunities, and the current system does advantage those with greater means.
- **Geography:** Region and location create disparities in access. The policy outcomes differ for athletes in club-dense regions vs. isolated areas.
- **Program Type:** This includes school vs. club, large vs. small, well-funded vs. volunteer-run. A "two-tier" outcome in the sport (elite programmes vs grassroots) has been highlighted as an inequality issue in submissions to the T&F Group.
- **Individual Welfare/Choice:** Preserving the ability of junior athletes and their parents to choose the most appropriate development pathway is important. Some currently feel that transferring programmes is necessary to progress, while others are concerned that changes to expectations on programmes developing their own athletes could limit opportunities to move.

Other protected characteristics (e.g. sex, race, disability, etc.) were not identified to be directly impacted under the status quo, and there is no suggestion that proposals would affect those groups differently. Therefore, our focus remains on the above contextual dimensions, while ensuring that none of the proposals create new bias against any protected group.

### 3. Baseline: Status Quo

Under the current rules (No minimum proportion of athletes are required to have been developed within the programme; composite crews are generally not permitted at tier 1 national events), the following baseline outcomes and evidence have been documented (from community submissions and focus groups):

Outcome Area	Baseline Finding	Equality Implication
<b>Community Perception</b>	Broad belief that the system leads to unfairness and is unsustainable (72.0% support change).	Loss of integrity and trust in the sport.
<b>Small Programmes</b>	Regular recruitment of J16 athletes is "severely damaging" grassroots clubs, leading to talent drain and sustainability risk. In 2024 and 2025, 20-21% of GB U19 trialists made a transition between Year 11 → Year 12.	Indirectly disadvantages less-resourced, community-based programmes.
<b>Competitive Balance</b>	Creates a "two-tier" system favouring affluent programmes; success is perceived as "financed."	Reinforces elitism and socio-economic inequality.
<b>Athlete Welfare</b>	Freedom of choice available for those with the means and resources. 'Homegrown' athletes at recruiting schools and clubs are displaced; those at small clubs face repeated discouragement as the impact of one departure has a greater knock-on impact.. Pressure to move for progress is high.	Impacts welfare and pathway choice.
<b>Socio-Economic Paradox</b>	Reported financial aid is partial (often <30%). Low-income families accepting aid may face greater net financial strain than if they stayed local.	Exacerbates socio-economic disadvantage.
<b>Access to Competition</b>	Ban on composites restricts small clubs from coming together to field larger boat classes (4x/8+), limiting development and exposure.	Disadvantages geographically isolated and small programmes.
<b>Volunteer Retention</b>	Demoralising effect on volunteer coaches when their best athletes leave en masse, threatening grassroots sustainability.	Impacts Program Type equality.
<b>Discrimination Check</b>	Risk of indirect discrimination: neutral practices (open transfer, strict club-only crews) disadvantages athletes from smaller/less-resourced programmes.	Reinforces existing socio-economic and programme-type inequalities.

**Baseline Conclusion:** The status quo raises specific concerns in relation to British Rowing's commitments to fairness, inclusion and sustainability. The evidence indicates adverse impacts associated with the status quo (especially across socio-economic and geographic lines) provides a strong rationale for considering change. In summary, the baseline is one of inequity: advantaging already-strong wealthy programmes while undermining grassroots development. This sets the stage for evaluating how each proposed option could improve or further impact these identified issues.

## 4. Impact Assessment of Potential Recommendations

The Task & Finish Group identified two primary drivers of unequal outcomes: (1) unrestricted late-stage recruitment and (2) structural barriers to collaboration between small programmes. Each option is therefore assessed against its ability to mitigate one or both drivers.

### Option I - 50% min. developed within the programme, no composites permitted

Impact Area	Anticipated Outcome	Equality Assessment
<b>Small Clubs</b>	<b>Limited change.</b> A 50% min. still likely to lead to significant talent movement. Without composites, many clubs remain excluded. Smaller programmes with resource can recruit at scale.	Weak Program Type equity. Fewer mechanisms to offset disadvantage for small/volunteer-led clubs.
<b>Large Programmes</b>	<b>Limited change.</b> Recruitment is still available at scale (up to half a crew); no composite crews means multi year club growth or resource to recruit are primary routes for smaller clubs to be competitive.	Strong advantage to better-resourced programmes; may reinforce existing inequalities.
<b>Competitive Fairness</b>	<b>Partially improved.</b> Stronger emphasis on athletes developed within a programme moderates competitiveness only achieved through recruitment.	Only partially addresses elitism; does not resolve the two-tier experience for under-resourced clubs.
<b>Impact on Lower Socio-Economic Communities</b>	<b>Negative.</b> Families would largely be reliant upon financial assistance from well resourced clubs or schools in order to access some competitive opportunities. No local composite option to mitigate access barriers.	Access disparity remains; undermines inclusion goals for economically disadvantaged athletes.
<b>Geographic Access</b>	<b>Limited change.</b> Without regional crews or composites, small or remote programmes cannot field large boats even if athlete numbers exist.	Reinforces geographic inequity; limited progression paths outside urban/school-club hubs.
<b>Welfare</b>	<b>Limited change.</b> Movement and choice are still available at scale. Limited local opportunity risks higher pressure to move.	Limited genuine choice; introduces stress for families unable or unwilling to relocate.

**Summary for Option I:** This option offers moderate limits on transfer activity but, without regional or composite allowances, disproportionately favours large, well-resourced programmes in accessing participation in some events. It weakens protections for small and regional clubs, increasing inequality in access, competition, and athlete development.

**Option 2 - 75% min. developed within the programme,  
no composites permitted**

Impact Area	Anticipated Outcome	Equality Assessment
<b>Small Clubs</b>	<b>Positive trend.</b> Reduced recruitment pressures and stronger promotion of 'within club development' incentivises long term club growth; enhances small clubs' sustainability and coach morale. Recruitment is still feasible to complement internal development.	Improves Program Type equality.
<b>Large Programmes</b>	<b>Possible change.</b> May need to adjust within programme development pathways and related recruitment strategies.	Proportional restriction for fairness. Mitigation may be needed to prevent circumvention (e.g. earlier recruitment).
<b>Competitive Fairness</b>	<b>Positive trend.</b> Less domination by "all-star" recruited crews; gap should narrow but larger programmes may dominate through sheer numbers.	Reduces elitism and some inequalities between programme types.
<b>Impact on Lower Socio-Economic Communities</b>	<b>Positive trend.</b> Fewer scholarship opportunities at individual programmes may arise, but likely the overall volume remains the same. Fewer families may fall into the "partial scholarship trap".	Minimal impairment on individual family choice.
<b>Geographic Access</b>	<b>Unchanged.</b> Fails to address access issues for small/remote clubs that still cannot form larger boats due to no composite allowance.	Continued inequality in access to compete in larger boat classes for small club programme types.
<b>Welfare</b>	<b>Protected.</b> Choice remains. Reduces some pressure to uproot; staying local becomes more viable.	Supports athlete welfare and genuine choice by protecting the option to move as well as encouraging long term programme development.

**Summary for Option 2:** Strongly addresses recruitment-driven unfairness but fails to fully resolve the access issues faced by the smallest clubs.

**Option 3 - 75% min. developed within the programme,  
local composites permitted**

Impact Area	Anticipated Outcome	Equality Assessment
<b>Small Clubs</b>	<b>Significantly positive.</b> Encourages within programme development and clubs gain access to enter all events through a proportionate use of composites. Improves sustainability and regional collaboration.	Offers stronger improvements for small clubs and local geographic equality than the other options considered.
<b>Large Programmes</b>	<b>Possible change.</b> May need to adjust within programme development pathways and related recruitment strategies. May face new competitive challenges from local composites.	Encourages long term programme development while improving overall competitive balance.
<b>Competitive Fairness</b>	<b>Significantly positive.</b> Recruitment is still permitted <i>and</i> clubs are encouraged to develop talent from within. Outcomes reflect program development and local collaboration, not budget.	Mitigates perceptions of 'pay-to-win' outcomes by shifting emphasis toward programme development and collaboration.
<b>Impact on Lower Socio-Economic Communities</b>	<b>Significantly positive.</b> Low-income athletes have the opportunity to move as well as stay local to gain top racing experience. Potentially changes allocation of scholarships (fewer, higher-value).	Likely to deliver a stronger positive impact on socio-economic inequalities relative to other options. May require cost mitigation measures for composites.
<b>Geographic Access</b>	<b>Positive trend.</b> Helps regions with multiple small clubs collaborate. Requires a proportionate definition of "local" for remote clubs.	This option is expected to address geographic inequality by enabling collaboration between programmes when appropriate.
<b>Welfare</b>	<b>Enhanced.</b> Fosters welfare by allowing athletes to pursue competitive goals within their home environment and support network as well as the opportunity to move to another programme.	Provides genuine choice and minimises necessity to move to access developmental opportunities.

**Summary for Option 3:** This option addresses both recruitment-related pressures and structural barriers to access. Taken together, these features mean it is assessed as more likely than the other options to deliver positive equality outcomes across programme type, socio-economic and geographic dimensions.

**Option 4 - No min. % developed within the programme,  
local composites permitted**

Impact Area	Anticipated Outcome	Equality Assessment
<b>Small Clubs</b>	<b>Mixed.</b> Composites improve competition access. However, unlimited recruiting remains a threat, potentially stunting long-term growth and volunteer morale.	Half-measures: Solves access, not sustainability. Program Type equality is only partially achieved.
<b>Large Programmes</b>	<b>Limited change.</b> Mixed incentive to develop athletes within the programme. Potentially facing stronger composite crews.	Does not address the core issue of resource-driven competitive imbalance.
<b>Competitive Fairness</b>	<b>Mixed.</b> More entrants via regional composites, but top events could still be dominated by fully recruited crews. "Two-tier" problem persists; only the second tier can now merge.	Does not fully address concerns of the rowing community.
<b>Impact on Lower Socio-Economic Communities</b>	<b>Positive trend.</b> Low-income athletes have the opportunity to move as well as stay local to gain top racing experience.	Likely to deliver a positive impact on socio-economic inequalities. May require cost mitigation measures for composites.
<b>Geographic Access</b>	<b>Positive trend.</b> Helps regions with multiple small clubs collaborate. Requires a proportionate definition of "local" for remote clubs.	Addresses regional access but not the departure of talent from regions to recruitment hubs.
<b>Welfare</b>	<b>Enhanced.</b> Fosters welfare by allowing athletes to pursue competitive goals within their home environment and support network as well as the opportunity to move to another programme.	Does not significantly diminish the pressure to relocate.

**Summary for Option 4:** A partial fix. It improves competition access but fails to curb large volume or concentrated recruitment, which was identified as a root cause of the community's concerns regarding fairness and elitism.

**Option 5 - No min. % developed within the programme,  
national composites permitted**

Impact Area	Anticipated Outcome	Equality Assessment
<b>Small Clubs</b>	<b>Mixed.</b> Maximises opportunities for remote/very small programmes via nationwide pooling. Risk of resource disparity (travel/coordination costs) limiting who can actually benefit.	Maximum theoretical inclusion, but likely to amplify existing lower socio-economic communities /Geographic resource disparities without significant support.
<b>Large Programmes</b>	<b>Negative.</b> No eligibility criteria considerations, but now face "all-star" national composites, which threatens club identity and ability to compete.	Sacrifices the club-based competition ethos for individual opportunity/equality.
<b>Competitive Fairness</b>	<b>Mixed.</b> Likely results in the fastest possible crews. Fairness for individuals is maximised, but fairness for clubs/programmes as units is lost.	High-risk in meeting fairness objectives for grassroots programmes. Could create a new elite composite layer.
<b>Impact on Lower Socio-Economic Communities</b>	<b>Uncertain.</b> Offers a non-institutional path to success. But participation in national composites is likely to be resource-intensive (travel/camps), excluding low-income athletes without financial aid.	Success in achieving real equality hinges on extensive external financial support.
<b>Geographic Access</b>	<b>Positive trend.</b> Eliminates geographic barriers on paper. Practical distance/travel logistics remain a major hurdle.	Highest potential for geographic inclusion, but resource-dependent.
<b>Welfare</b>	<b>Mixed.</b> Individual choice is maximised, but potential for high travel strain and workload for athletes in long-distance composites. Negatively impacts local identity and belonging.	Likely additional strain which ultimately negates the maximal choice.

**Summary for Option 5:** Offers maximum flexibility but also maximum uncertainty and logistical complexity. It sacrifices the club-based competition model for individual opportunity/equality. It leaves recruiting unchecked and would likely create new inequities related to resources needed to participate in long-distance composites.

## 5. Mitigations and Safeguards

To support balanced and effective implementation, the following safeguards are proposed:

- **Recruitment guidance and practice:**  
British Rowing should review and strengthen its guidance on recruitment so that it is clearer and more effective in practice. While the principles behind the guidance remain sound, clubs, schools, families, and athletes would benefit from enforceable and practical guidance when managing transitions.
- **Composite crew controls:**  
To address concerns about composite crews being used to create “super teams”, British Rowing could introduce a central approval process. This would independently assess applications for composite crews and ensure they are only permitted where they genuinely enable access to competition that would not otherwise be available. This process could also include limits on how many local programmes can combine, helping to protect the principle of club-based racing.
- **Transitional safeguards:** To support a fair and effective transition, the implementation programme should ensure that no child is disadvantaged by decisions made prior to these recommendations. Appropriate systems must be put in place to support Competition Organisers, including clear processes for managing exceptional circumstances and exemptions.
- **Exceptional circumstances:**  
A clear exemption process should apply where athletes move schools or clubs for reasons unrelated to sport, such as family relocation or school closure. Exemptions should also apply to sixth-form-only and schools not fully co-ed, where transitions are a consequence of the structure of educational establishments.
- **Monitoring and review:**  
British Rowing should review how the changes are working over a 24 month period. Better information on recruitment patterns, including socio-economic data where appropriate, would help improve transparency and inform future Equality Impact Assessments.

## 6. Conclusions

This Equality Impact Assessment has examined the equality implications of maintaining the current junior eligibility arrangements and of five alternative policy options. The analysis indicates that the status quo is associated with adverse equality impacts, particularly for athletes and programmes operating within smaller, volunteer-led or geographically isolated settings, and for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These impacts arise primarily from the combined effect of unrestricted late-stage recruitment and structural barriers to collaboration between programmes.

The analysis demonstrates that options which address only one of these factors provide partial mitigation, but do not adequately resolve the underlying causes of inequality. In contrast, options that both limit recruitment-driven concentration of athletes and enable proportionate collaboration between programmes are more effective in advancing equality of opportunity while maintaining competition integrity.

On the basis of the evidence considered, Option 3 - requiring a minimum proportion of athletes to be developed within the programme while permitting local composite crews - emerges as the most proportionate response to the identified issues, based on the equality impacts assessed. This option addresses the principal drivers of inequality by mitigating the most significant adverse impacts of recruitment practices, improving access to high-level competition for athletes in smaller and geographically dispersed programmes, and supporting athlete welfare by reducing pressure to relocate at a critical transition point. The policy operates through objective crew composition requirements at defined competition points and does not restrict individual eligibility or movement.

Option 3 addresses the identified issues in the following ways:

- It is expected to mitigate the harm to small clubs and volunteer programmes arising from unchecked recruitment, addressing urgent concerns relating to integrity and long-term sustainability.
- It expands opportunities for low-resource and geographically dispersed athletes by enabling local collaboration, fulfilling the aim of fair access to competition and counteracting exclusion resulting from the restriction on composite crews.
- It respects individual choice: athletes may still move programmes or remain local and participate in composite crews, aligning with the objective of supporting athlete welfare and informed decision-making.
- It upholds core principles of fairness without unduly compromising the club-based nature of the sport, with composites limited to a local context rather than creating unrestricted “free-for-all” arrangements, thereby maintaining community identity.

**Mitigations in implementation:** alongside Option 3, the following are recommended (as set out in Phase 5):

- Communicate the changes and their purpose clearly to all stakeholders to support understanding, buy-in and engagement;
- Safeguards to be put in place, to support a fair and effective transition and reduce the risk of unintended disruption;
- Issue clear definitions and guidance to support consistent and transparent eligibility decisions;
- Promote good practice to support effective and appropriate use of composite arrangements; and
- Monitor recruitment practices to guard against circumvention and unintended consequences.

This recommendation is evidence-based and directly informed by the equality impact analysis set out in this assessment. It represents a proportionate response to the identified issues: sufficiently robust to address the drivers of inequality, while avoiding unnecessary restriction by continuing to support legitimate transitions and individual choice. The approach

aligns with the views expressed across the rowing community and with British Rowing's commitments to protect grassroots programmes, ensure fair competition, and support athlete welfare.

The assessment recognises that the preferred option entails trade-offs, including constraints and transitional impacts for larger and well-resourced programmes and for some athletes developed within them; these impacts have been considered and judged proportionate in light of the legitimate aims pursued and the relative severity and distribution of existing inequalities.

The legitimate aim of the proposed approach is to protect the integrity and long-term sustainability of junior rowing by improving fairness of access to competition and reducing structural inequalities within the system. The measures identified are proportionate, operating at crew and programme level rather than restricting individual eligibility, and are supported by targeted safeguards to manage exceptional circumstances and mitigate unintended consequences.

British Rowing is committed to monitoring and reviewing the impact of any changes over an agreed period, using available evidence to assess equality effects and to refine the approach where necessary.