



BRITISH ROWING

Junior Rower and Crew Eligibility Task & Finish Group

Final Report and Recommendations

January 2026

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Introduction

The recommendations in this report are the product of a structured and considered process. A Task & Finish Group with a range of experience and perspectives were convened to examine the issues in depth, informed by engagement with clubs, schools, coaches, volunteers, athletes and parents through submissions, focus groups and discussion. Evidence and stakeholder views were tested through deliberation, alongside analysis of potential impacts using an Equality Impact Assessment framework. This approach has supported transparent consideration of trade-offs and mitigations, and provides confidence that the recommendations are proportionate, evidence-based and grounded in a fair and balanced assessment of the issues raised. This provides a sound basis for making recommendations in an area where views are strongly held and trade-offs are unavoidable.

This report sets out what the T&F Group heard from the rowing community, and what we recommend British Rowing and national competitions could consider next. The aim is to protect fair competition and the long-term health of junior rowing, while still respecting individual choice and safeguarding young people. As part of this process, we have been able to place a clearer spotlight on equity within our sport, and on how rules and regulations (both directly and indirectly) shape accessibility, fairness and the choices available to athletes and families.

This Final Report and Recommendations is one of five documents published by the Task & Finish Group:

Primary documents	1. Terms of Reference
	2. Final Report and Recommendations
Supporting documents	3. Summary of Submissions
	4. Pre-reading for Focus Group Discussions
	5. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Junior Rower and Crew Eligibility Task & Finish Group Members

The Review Panel:

- **Nathaniel Reilly-O'Donnell (Chair)** - Director of Development - British Rowing, previously Performance Development Lead at UK Sport, Lottery funded athlete on GB Rowing Team 2006-2016.
- **John Layng** - Chair Junior Rowing Committee, National Schools' Regatta Committee, U19 Team Manager, Vice President of Bedford Rowing Club, previously a Director of school rowing and coach.
- **Miriam Luke** - President Henley Rowing Club, Steward HRR, Chairman HWR 2013-22, GB Rowing team 1990-2000.
- **Heidi Hackett** - North West Regional Rowing Council Chair, domestic and international umpire, coach and formerly a member of the senior leadership team at a local Independent School.
- **Thomas Garnier** - Former Head of Pangbourne College 2005-2024, previously a rowing coach 1995-2005 and now a governor at Abingdon School, National Schools' Regatta Committee
- **Liz Pulford** - President and Junior Coordinator Leicester Rowing Club, coach and coordinator of the Castle Mead Academy Rowing programme
- **Helen Brown** - Performance Transition Coach at British Rowing focusing on U23 coaching and supporting athletes with their transition into the Senior GB Rowing Team. Director of Rowing at Twickenham Rowing Club.
- **Andrew Crawford** - Current or past Chair of Race Cttee (Chief Umpire) National Schools Regatta, Schools Head, BUCS Regatta and Heads, Past Chair BR Sport Committee and HRR Rules Group.

Summary of what is recommended:

- For national junior U19 competitions, introduce a minimum ‘developed within the programme’ requirement at crew level, set at 75%.
- Implementation to include transitional safeguards, ensuring that no child is left at a detriment due to decisions taken before these recommendations were made.
- The rule does not apply to singles, doubles or pairs.
- Enable local composite crews (as an exception) to be endorsed as a protected route into competition, allowing programmes that cannot field a full crew on their own to participate.
- Both movement and composite crews are permitted, but are managed differently because one concentrates advantage while the other is designed to unlock access.
- Apply clear, nationally consistent criteria for composite crews and exemptions, supported by a simple, light-touch approval process and clear decision-making responsibility.
- Strengthen British Rowing’s transition and recruitment guidance to support safe, respectful and child-centred movement between programmes, reducing pressure on families and encouraging consistent practice.
- Monitor the impact over a 24 month period, paying particular attention to unintended consequences.

These recommendations reflect a considered response to the impacts of the current status quo, seeking to support fairness, access and sustainability while recognising that trade-offs exist under both the current and proposed approaches.

What this would mean for junior athletes:

- You can still change club or school. These recommendations do not ban movement. It is recognised that movement is often a positive welfare choice and the framework supports this.
- For national competitions, crews would need to show that most of the athletes in the boat were already part of their programme before the key transition point (Year 11 → Year 12).
- If your programme is too small to make a full crew, a local composite would be a legitimate and supported option (subject to criteria).
- If you move for non-sporting reasons (for example, family relocation or school closure), there would be an exemption process.

Why this review happened:

Junior rowing in the UK is highly respected. In recent years, however, British Rowing has received increasing representations about two connected issues: (1) a rise in movement of junior athletes around the Year 11 to Year 12 transition, often linked to scholarship and bursary offers; and (2) unequal access to ‘Tier 1’ competition for smaller or geographically isolated programmes, particularly when composite crews are not permitted.

British Rowing’s role is to establish default eligibility frameworks for competitions operating under its Rules of Racing. Decisions on how those frameworks are applied rest with individual Competition Organising Committees. It is down to club and school programmes to determine their own membership, admissions, recruitment and funding decisions.

The Task & Finish Group was commissioned to hear representations from across the community 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.

What the Task & Finish Group did:

The Group gathered written submissions and tested themes through engagement and focus group discussions. It then assessed five policy options against an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) framework, using the current rules as the baseline.

What we heard from the rowing community:

Across submissions and discussions, several themes were consistent:

- A strong appetite for change, alongside sincere views in favour of the status quo.
- Concern that concentrated late-stage recruitment can damage smaller programmes, volunteer retention and trust in fair competition.
- Recognition that scholarships and bursaries can be life-changing opportunities, albeit that the terms are used inconsistently and that financial aid is often partial.
- Concern about the impact on athletes at recruiting programmes who may feel displaced.
- A clear call to improve access to competition for smaller clubs/schools, including greater use of composite crews where numbers are tight.
- A desire that families and coaches can navigate transitions safely and respectfully.

Headline consultation figures:

- 266 written submissions were received, representing 57 unique programmes.
- When aggregating the net position of each club, 80.7% were in favour of change.
- Across respondents, 72% supported a change to the current approach.

While not statistically representative of all junior programmes, the volume and consistency of submissions provided a strong qualitative evidence base for identifying systemic issues.

Summary of findings:

Community consultation shows strong support for reform, driven by concerns about the impact of current arrangements on smaller programmes, competitive fairness, and perceptions of elitism. The Equality Impact Assessment identifies that change is merited to protect the integrity, fairness, and sustainability of junior competition. Implementing “Option 3 - A min. of 75% of athletes developed within the programme; local composite crews permitted”, alongside the identified safeguards, provides a proportionate and evidence-based response that aligns with British Rowing’s commitment to equal opportunity and a more inclusive future for junior athletes. The recommended approach reflects established practice in other sports where eligibility frameworks are used to balance individual choice, competition integrity, access and sustainability.

At the heart of the framework is a clear principle that programmes develop a meaningful proportion of their own crews. This reinforces sustained athlete development and reduces incentives for high levels of recruitment that have contributed to inequality. Eligibility is assessed at clear, known points using objective crew composition, rather than informal assurances, and operates at crew level rather than placing responsibility on individual athletes.

Feedback highlighted that representing your school, club or local area is a long-standing and valued part of rowing’s culture and identity. Concerns exist regarding the volume of transfers or national composites because they are seen to move the sport away from its traditional emphasis on local club development and the importance of progressing together within a programme. In this context, local composite crews were viewed as a constructive alternative; they can provide access to competition where programmes cannot form complete crews independently, while still preserving local identity. This approach reduces pressure on athletes to change programmes in order to compete, while continuing to encourage single-programme entries wherever possible.

What are the next steps?

The Task & Finish Group was entrusted to make advisory recommendations, it will be for each of those bodies receiving recommendations (British Rowing and the individual Competition Organising Committees) to consider their response and possible implementation of the recommendations. Together, these measures are simple, transparent, and consistently applied across clubs, schools, and regions. A small number of clear recommendations reduces complexity, improves confidence and compliance, and supports constructive collaboration between neighbouring programmes. In doing so, this framework promotes long-term competitiveness in junior rowing through access, sustained development, and shared regional strength rather than concentration of advantage.

Recommendations:

Recommendation	To be considered by:	How the change may be implemented:
<p>1) Crew eligibility: Junior crews at national level competitions to include a minimum of 75% of athletes developed within the programme; local composite crews permitted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition Organising Committees • British Rowing 	<p>An implementation with transitional safeguards to 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.</p> <p>See Appendix B for detail on how the recommended eligibility framework could work in practice.</p> <p>Individual Competition Organising Committees to review entry criteria with consideration of recommendations proposed here and the published EIA.</p> <p>British Rowing to consider including the recommendation to be the default within the Rules of Racing, permitting events to deviate from the default where justified.</p>
<p>2) Align national eligibility assessment deadlines to promote within-season stability;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club membership taken as of 15th November. • Composite crew applications submitted by 15th April. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition Organising Committees • British Rowing 	<p>Individual Competition Organising Committees to review eligibility assessment deadlines to consider alignment with a national standard.</p> <p>British Rowing to consider including the recommendation to be the default within the Rules of Racing, permitting events to deviate from the default where justified.</p>
<p>3) British Rowing to create a Junior Eligibility Assessment Sub-Committee to centralise eligibility questions and report as required into the National Competitions Committee.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Rowing • Competition Organising Committees 	<p>British Rowing to amend Rules of Racing Rule 2-3d to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a sub-committee dedicated to review eligibility questions • This sub-committee to include individuals with direct and current experience managing event entry processes to support rule application. • Designate the sub-committees remit to assess all junior eligibility questions (over-age; crew composition concerns; composite endorsement; exceptions/exemptions) <p>This is intended to provide a single, accountable route for interpretation and consistency, reducing the burden on individual competitions.</p> <p>Competition Organising Committees to endorse and apply decisions by the Junior Eligibility Assessment Sub-Committee.</p>
<p>4) British Rowing to monitor the impact of these changes over the first 24 months.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Rowing 	<p>British Rowing to schedule a review of the impact of these changes after 24 months.</p>

Recommended supporting actions:

- British Rowing to strengthen transition and recruitment guidance.
- Regional Rowing Councils consider it's role in supporting programmes manage athlete transitions and composite crew development.
- Competition Organising Committees to consider the equality impact of higher 'per seat' fees for small boats which currently have greater impact upon smaller clubs and less affluent participants.

Questions to aid understanding:

Does this ban moving club or school?

No. Athletes can still move club or school. The recommendations apply at crew level for national competitions entry criteria, not to individual movement.

What is the key transition point?

The focus is the Year 11 → Year 12 transition, because that is where a lot of the reported movement and pressure occurs.

Why were both crew composition and the role of composites considered?

Recruitment and composite crews both bring together athletes to form competitive crews, but they are treated very differently. Recruitment is largely unrestricted, while composites are tightly limited. This imbalance allows programmes to concentrate athletes through transfers while restricting controlled composite options, effectively leaving young people with little choice other than to only race in smaller boat classes or move.

Why allow composite crews at all?

Because without composites, smaller or isolated programmes can be locked out of larger boat classes even when their athletes are competition-ready. Local composites are intended as an access route, not a shortcut to advantage.

How will applying to be a composite crew work?

Programmes wishing to enter a composite crew will be required to apply in advance, demonstrating that the arrangement supports participation and access rather than competitive advantage. Applications will be considered against published criteria, with decisions taken centrally to ensure consistency, transparency and fairness.

What if we genuinely cannot meet the standard straight away?

These are recommendations not announced rule changes. Transitional safeguards are proposed to be met before full introduction. Exceptional circumstances and rationale may be considered by the Junior Eligibility Assessment Sub-Committee where structural or non-sporting factors make compliance temporarily impracticable.

What if a move is for non-sporting reasons?

There should be a clear exemption process for situations such as family relocation or school closure, and for structural transitions linked to how schools are organised.

How will this be enforced?

Eligibility should be checked at crew entry using objective information, supported by published definitions and an approval route for composites and exemptions.

Appendix A: Evidence base used by the Task & Finish Group

This report is informed by:

- Terms of Reference (August 2025).
- Submissions from the rowing community (November 2025).
- Focus Groups (November - December 2025).
- Equality Impact Assessment (December 2025).

Appendix B: How the recommended eligibility framework would work

Definitions:

<i>“Developed within the programme”</i>	An athlete whose primary training, coaching and competitive environment has been within their programme prior to the Year 11 → Year 12 transition.
<i>“Programme”</i>	A club or school that trains, selects and enters junior athletes under a single recognised identity.
<i>“Club membership”</i>	All club membership taken as of 15th November each year. This includes as a track of previous programme membership and season to season transitions.
<i>“Local composite crew”</i>	A crew made up of athletes from more than one but no more than 3 local programmes, permitted to enable access to competition where a full crew cannot be boated by one programme alone.
<i>“Local”</i>	Programmes are within a British Rowing junior inter-regional region, judgement applied proportionately for remote areas or close to regional boundaries.
<i>“Where a full crew cannot be boated by one programme alone”</i>	Programmes eligible are required to demonstrate they have insufficient members competing at a regional and national level to field a full crew of the given age group.

Governance

- British Rowing:
 - Sets default eligibility frameworks within the Rules of Racing
 - Establishes the Junior Eligibility Assessment Sub-Committee
 - Provides guidance and consistency tools
- Competition Organising Committees:
 - Retain discretion to adopt, adapt or justify deviation
- Schools and clubs:
 - Retain full autonomy over admissions, recruitment, bursaries and internal selection

Core Rule

For national junior U19 events:

- A minimum of 75% of the athletes in each crew should have been developed within the programme they represent.
- Eligibility should be assessed at a clear and known point (at crew entry), using objective crew composition information.
- The rule does not apply to singles, doubles or pairs.

Implementation to include transitional safeguards, ensuring that no child is left at a detriment due to decisions taken before these recommendations were made.

The Junior Eligibility Assessment Sub-Committee to be delegated the remit to assess all junior eligibility questions (over-age; crew composition concerns; composite endorsement; exceptions/exemptions). This is intended to provide a single, accountable route for interpretation and consistency, reducing the burden on individual competitions. It is anticipated that within the first two years of rule implementation that this Sub-Committee will improve the relevant guidelines based upon the learning from the eligibility questions it receives.

Aligned national eligibility assessment deadlines

The intention is to promote within-season stability, and that crews may seek an eligibility assessment at any point in the season up to the deadline. Proposed deadlines:

- Club membership taken as of 15th November
- Composite crew applications submitted by 15th April

Composite crew endorsement

Local composite crews should be permitted where they enable competition access that would not otherwise be available. To protect fairness and club-based racing, composites should be subject to an endorsement/approval process with published criteria.

To avoid misuse of composites to form “super teams”, British Rowing should introduce a simple endorsement process. Recommended features:

- Application made no later than the published deadline.
- Joint submission by the programmes involved, with a nominated lead coach(es).
- Assessment against published criteria, with decisions issued within a defined timeframe.
- Endorsement is season and crew-specific, declared openly in entries, and reviewable if circumstances change.

Endorsement process to consider:

- Programme development: supports (does not undermine) the development of the programmes involved.
- Locality: programmes are within a British Rowing junior inter-regional region, judgement applied proportionately for remote areas or close to regional boundaries.
- Enables access: the composite exists because a full crew cannot be boated by one programme alone, and the number of clubs involved should not exceed 3.
- Athlete welfare: coaching responsibility, training load and communication are clear and appropriate.

Decisions should be recorded to support consistency and inform future review.

Exemptions and exceptional circumstances

There should be a defined exemption process for changes that are primarily non-sporting, such as:

- Family relocation;
- Athlete did not take up rowing competitively until after year 11;
- School or club closure or merger;
- Sixth-form-only institutions and schools that are not fully co-educational, where transitions are structurally unavoidable.

Exemptions should be timely, consistent, and recorded in order to develop a published criteria.

Monitoring and review

British Rowing should monitor implementation and publish a formal review after 24 months. Suggested indicators to monitor:

- Transfer patterns around the Year 11 → Year 12 transition (currently c.20% of GB U19 trialists)
- Participation and entries from smaller programmes (including use of composites).
- Distribution of finalists/medal positions across programmes (competitive balance).
- Athlete and parent feedback on pressure to move, and experience of composites.
- Evidence of behaviours or practices emerging ahead of the Year 11 → Year 12 transition that may undermine the intended emphasis on athlete development within programme-based settings.
- Signals of volunteer coach retention and programme sustainability.

Worked examples (illustrative)

These examples show how a crew-level threshold would work:

- **Example 1 - Eight (Year 2 standard)** - A club enters a J18 8+. Six athletes have been with the club since before the Year 11 → Year 12 transition; two joined afterwards. $6/8 = 75\%$, so the crew meets the standard.
- **Example 2 - Quad (Year 2 standard)** - A school enters a J18 4x. Three athletes have been with the school programme since before the transition; one joined afterwards. $3/4 = 75\%$, so the crew meets the standard.
- **Example 3 - Local composite eight** - One local club has 3 rowers, and another has 5 rowers and a cox, all of whom have been developed within their club programmes. They apply for endorsement as a local composite to boat a J18 8+. The composite is access-enabling (neither club can boat an eight alone) and all athletes are developed within their programmes, so would meet the intent of the rule.

Appendix C: Strengthen transition and recruitment guidance

British Rowing should review and strengthen its [existing guidance \(section 6\)](#) on recruitment and transitions for children and young people, focusing on practical enforceability and safeguarding. Guidance should be clear about responsibilities, privacy, timeliness and the principle that the child's welfare comes first.

Suggested principles for revised guidance:

- Child-centred first: welfare and long-term development take precedence.
- Shared responsibilities: do not place families in the role of messenger/negotiator between programmes.
- Recruiting coach accountability: Recruiting coaches are accountable for leading appropriate transition discussions, engaging professionally with existing programmes where relevant.
- Respectful transitions: professional, courteous practice that recognises prior coaching investment.
- Transparency: clear information about commitments, expectations and any financial support.
- Privacy and safeguarding: clear boundaries for information-sharing.
- Consistency: applied consistently across clubs, schools and regions.