

Chair's Report to the 2018 ACM

Despite snow, drought and torrential rain we have (almost) delivered a full domestic programme for paddlers of all abilities, and all volunteers should be proud of that achievement.

Other reports to this ACM have covered the terrific year that our GB paddlers have had across all age categories, and I won't delve into further details save adding my congratulations. The excellent performances at Junior and U23 level with more boats getting to finals and coming away with medals continues to demonstrate our strength in depth with the promise of more to come. The Home Nation development programmes continue to support aspiring paddlers and their success is evident in the rising standard of paddling amongst our junior competitors with many pushing towards GB squads; U23 and Senior as well as the Junior team. The strength and breadth of our domestic competition structure, delivered by individual canoe clubs, continues to provide excellent opportunities for competitive racing for all abilities and across all ages.

In terms of participation, paddler numbers are slightly down but overall entries are stable, further reinforcing the view that paddlers, in general, compete more often. I reported last year that we had seen a steady decline in numbers entering Division 4 competitions and that trend has continued. This is of great concern as failure to attract more paddlers into the sport has the potential to impact long term viability of some lower division events which we can't afford to lose from the calendar. This issue cannot be addressed just by running more Div4 competitions and, amongst other things, we need to look closely at the structure of the calendar to support an effective entry pathway. This will be a committee priority for the forthcoming year.

Volunteers are the bedrock that supports the sport and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all volunteers for their efforts throughout the year. However, everyone experiences changing circumstances in their lives and we cannot rely on the same people being there forever and recruitment of new participants is critical in ensuring the sport thrives in the future. On that note, I would like to mention officials that are standing down this year - Penny Scaife, Tanya Gibbons and Michelle Grudzinski – thank you for your dedication and support. It is encouraging to note that calls for volunteers to support the 2019 World Cup at Lee Valley have attracted over 300 applications.

The theme of the British Canoeing Strategy is “Stronger Together” and this can be witnessed in several areas. This year the Slalom Committee have committed to actively support the development of coaches by providing funding for slalom specific training elements using the modules developed by British Canoeing. A group from HPP have been supported this year and we hope more will come forward so that we can expand the base of Slalom coaches. Another example is the Discipline Chairs Group. This is a forum that brings together the Chairs of all competition disciplines to share experiences and seek approaches to issues that are experienced across the sport.

We continue to focus on improving the procedures and processes necessary for the administration and smooth running of our sport. This is not made any easier by the seemingly constant introduction of additional rules and regulations, however these are responses to past issues and failings and we must be prepared to readily embrace change. We will seek to do this in a manner that minimises additional work on already busy volunteers. Using technology is key and we have been fortunate that volunteers continue to support tools that are now seen as commonplace; results database, online entry and website. Thanks to Duncan, Nick, Dee Alan for all their efforts.

During the year we were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Ken Trollope. Ken dedicated a great deal of time and effort to supporting Slalom through coaching, judging, committee work as well as developing and supporting Simply Slalom. He will be missed but I'm sure he will live on in fond memories.

We also witnessed how sudden extreme weather can bring destruction with the flooding at Llandysul. What has been remarkable is the Herculean effort to replace and repair what has been lost and the speedy return to a semblance of normality. There is, undoubtedly, much more that needs to be done but we can all acknowledge and admire the enormous effort from Gareth and the team and extend our best wishes as they rebuild what has been lost.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee for all their efforts and dedication in supporting Canoe Slalom. We always welcome new faces and value the different viewpoints and experiences that new members bring to the table. Occasionally, someone manages to escape and this year it is Andy Koszary who is stepping down as Treasurer after many years of managing our finances. We are hugely grateful for Andy's dedication and guidance and on behalf of everyone I would simply like to say, "Thank You".

David Spencer
Chair, Slalom Committee