

Officials Working Group

Firstly, we would like to say a big thankyou to all of the officials and volunteers who give so much time to the sport. We appreciate that the time you give is not limited to on the ground race support at race weekends, but for many of you extends to admin time throughout the year to keep the sport functioning. Without your continued support and dedication, we would not have a sport.

Premier & Division 1:

Currently, the races at prem and division 1 level are organised by clubs (with the exception of GB Selection and the British Open) and supported by the officials who facilitate key roles within the race. These roles include section or transmission judges, timing and scoring and often the chief judge. At such events, the timing is facilitated using Canoe123 and electronic timing beams and timed to 0.01 seconds, in accordance with rule 10.5.3.

As well as these officials, the organising club and other volunteers from within the sport facilitate other roles at the races, including gate judging, practice administration (div 1 only) and providing support on start and finish and in control.

To maintain the expected standard at prem and division 1 races, the sport relies on a number of (approx. 60) officials who support these races in a judging and timing capacity. However, whilst this may seem to be a large volunteer base on the face of it, the sport relies, arguably, too heavily on a small number of key officials to continue to facilitate these events across the UK. These officials were required for 28 days of racing in the 2023 season, with the current 2024 calendar this is set to increase to over 30 for next year.

Division 2, 3 & 4:

The races at division 2, 3 and 4 are entirely facilitated by the clubs and wider volunteer base in the sport. There are some exceptions to this, namely where an event has been organised as a division 1/2 race, the structure of officials mentioned in the previous paragraph facilitate certain roles.

The timing and scoring used at division 2, 3 and 4 races varies across the UK, with the majority of the clubs using the tutti system, which is maintained under the BC Slalom Committee.

Suggestion of a Training pathway:

Currently there is a perceived barrier between the officials who are already involved and people in the wider sport. It is considered by some that the officials can come across as detached from the sport and, at times cliquy.

A clearly laid out training pathway could go a long way to fixing this perception. From the start of the 2023 season, there has been a system in place to help with this, providing people the chance to shadow an experienced judge and then be shadowed by an experienced judge throughout a (or more than one) event. This has proved to be a successful training pathway, providing a number of new officials for the 2023 season.

For gate judging and lower division judges, a presentation has been used in Scotland with rule explanations and a diagram/picture to show what this looks like in action. This has

proved successful. There have also been more regular gate judging exams across the UK through 2023.

Looking towards 2024, a clearer pathway and judging education programme is being explored and it is hoped this could be rolled out early in the 2024 season.

Potential Barriers for People:

There have been a number of barriers identified this year as reasons why people are not coming forward and volunteering within canoe slalom. It is worth noting, that many people will volunteer at lower division events (division 2/3/4) and not at higher level races (Prem/division 1). The below is a roundup of widely raised barriers:

- Whole sport ethos towards volunteering.
- Paddle Ups.
- Fear of failure.
- Abuse from paddlers/parents (including on social media)
- Poor role models from the team paddlers.
- Poor role models from squad coaches.
- Lack of governing body appreciation/support.
- Sense of entitlement from a large enough minority of paddlers/parents.
- Financial implication of volunteering (Particularly at Lee Valley)

Potential solutions:

Below are some potential solutions to the volunteer problem that faces the sport, that have been discussed at various points throughout 2023. These are just suggestions and are here to provide a point for discussion, not as cast-iron solutions:

- An ethos change within the sport as a whole, with more emphasis placed on volunteering within the sport.
- Enact a similar system to Canoe Polo, where each club/group has to provide officials at races throughout the year.
- Make the coaches fully aware of how their behaviour and/or the behaviour of their paddlers & associated adults impacts on the volunteers.
- Paddlers should have to judge/officiate in some capacity at any event throughout the year to earn their points (although this could be challenging to administer, it could go a long way to solve the current issue).
- Support from top paddlers and coaches.
 - Coaches/Athletes/Paddlers on GB programmes should show more support for the sport in the UK.
- Consider reversing P/1 races over 2 days (single prem, single div 1) and run the Div 1 on Saturday and prem on Sunday, possibly incentivising some prem paddlers to take an officials' run on Saturday.