

Eastern Region Rowing Council

Annual General Meeting – 25th November 2022

Chair's Report

This report is my last as Chair and seeks to capture the state of affairs in the region and nationally at the end of 2022.

Remembrance

Before we move on to these matters we must remember those who have been lost to the sport regionally and nationally in the last year. I ask that the Meeting observes a silence to reflect on the lives and contribution of all those gone ahead and in particular:

Peter Barron – Cambridge 99 RC
Paddy O'Brien – Peterborough City RC
Nigel Ramsden – Sudbury RC

National Picture

British Rowing appointed a new permanent Chief Executive Officer in Alastair Marks. Although this appointment started formally on April 1st 2022 he had been in post as interim CEO since the Autumn of 2021 and has had a significant impact already.

A new structure has been deployed and heads of department appointed with further employments due. The new structure appears 'leaner' than the one it replaces and the appointments show more domestic rowing experience than existed before.

It has been encouraging to see the beginnings of a new approach to the delivery of coaching materials and courses, the availability of really useful content on the BR website(s) but we still await a new membership offer and/or a complete digital strategy. We also welcome the provision of free places on entry level coaching courses which generated a lot of interest in this region.

The annual accounts for the last year show a broadly balanced outturn which is very creditable as the period will have included many months when membership income was significantly reduced owing to the pandemic. On which note BR membership recovered very rapidly in the last quarter of last calendar year but then plateaued and even declined over the late Spring and Summer. As noted below this pattern is replicated in our Region, where there are tentative signs of renewed growth in numbers.

In parallel with this, many clubs and competitions have reported challenge in retaining volunteers or having enough volunteer time.

Regional Picture

Recovery from the pandemic has been strong across the region. Clubs have been active in running Learn to Rows and have been keen to develop their own resources as evidenced by the interest in developing new coaches.

Initiatives to increase the diversity of the rowing population have continued across the region.

At Lea RC the I-Belong programme aims to have greater representation of our local ethnically and culturally diverse communities and the I Am A Rower exhibition was conceived when we were asked to take part in National Sporting Heritage Day 2022, in recognition of their diversity work as a club and commitment to increasing access to rowing.

The East Anglia Youth Rowing programme is now operating across schools in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk following a very successful summer camp.

Broadlands RC having secured significant funding for infrastructure continue to develop their plans to engage with those 18-25 year olds who are at risk of disengaging from the local community. These are a particularly challenging group to reach but the club is determined to reach them and have engaged with the NGB, as well as every other avenue they can, in order to get support.

As noted above, numbers of those holding memberships of British Rowing have gone through various oscillations over the last 15 months – the following numbers are drawn from data held by BR and ***I believe*** reflect the numbers of memberships held by individuals who declare an Eastern Region club as one of their clubs (though not necessarily their primary one):

Date	Race	Row	Total
08/09/2021	2,953	199	3,152
21/09/2021	2,989	205	3,194
19/10/2021	3,202	211	3,413
02/11/2021	3,205	216	3,421
28/11/2021	3,303	223	3,526
07/12/2021	3,316	220	3,536
07/01/2022	3,410	220	3,630
18/01/2022	3,492	220	3,712
06/02/2022	3,915	218	4,133
17/02/2022	4,037	219	4,256
28/02/2022	4,130	219	4,349
06/03/2022	4,185	219	4,404

31/03/2022	4,329	220	4,549
08/04/2022	4,348	220	4,568
27/04/2022	4,321	224	4,545
04/05/2022	4,318	226	4,544
15/05/2022	4,199	221	4,420
22/05/2022	4,124	224	4,348
26/05/2022	4,164	222	4,386
10/06/2022	4,152	223	4,375
29/06/2022	4,066	224	4,290
18/07/2022	4,013	226	4,239
03/08/2022	4,043	223	4,266
14/09/2022	4,019	211	4,230
02/10/2022	3,965	226	4,191
13/10/2022	3,971	225	4,196
24/10/2022	4,030	215	4,245
28/10/2022	4,091	213	4,304
19/11/2022	4,132	208	4,340

The highlighted row appears to represent a ‘low’ with numbers showing growth since then.

In parallel with these numbers we have seen a very uneven attendance at competitions. Some within the region, and especially outside have been massively over-subscribed and others have had small entries or even not run owing to insufficient crews.

Reasons for this pattern are largely speculative and mine are that this pattern represents a combination of:

- Pent up demand following the pandemic which dissipated after a few months
- A genuine decline in numbers of rowers in clubs – natural wastage without normal replacement
- The new perspectives we all gained from the pandemic, that there are other important things we want to do and thus being ‘fussy’ over which places to go.

As numbers continue to recover, and the sport to grow as a whole (as we all hope it will) then competitions, and the competition ‘structure’ will need to evolve to take account of the differing aspirations of rowers and clubs. Some of this adjustment will be difficult.

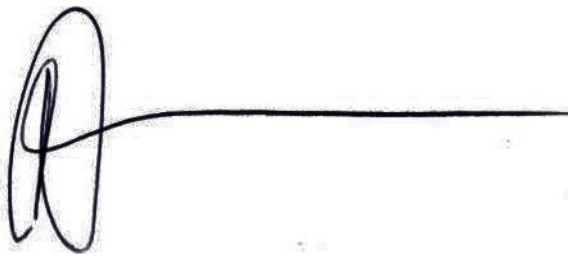
It will also require significantly more volunteer time and more volunteers (not quite the same thing). Existing volunteers are an ageing resource and the population requires refreshment as well as growth.

Regional Office

On which note I am stepping down a year early from the position as Chair of the Region. I am a great example of an ageing resource who is due... It has been an enormous privilege to take this role for the last 7 years. I have tried to make the Region useful for our clubs and competitions. Along the way I have learnt a huge amount from other regions, from our clubs and especially from the senior volunteers I have met. I hope that we have harnessed the energies of our experienced club volunteers and contributed both the regional and to the national picture.

The colleagues I have worked with on our Executive have brought wisdom, insight and goodwill in great quantities to our endeavours and I urge everyone to thank our Officers at every opportunity.

I am sure that my successor will take the region forward in exciting and new ways and I very much look forward to supporting them for as long as they want me to.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'A' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andrew Blit
November 2022