

South West Regional Water Polo Meeting

SASP - Wellington

10.12.19

Key Discussion Points

Participation & Club Development

Concerns were raised about the cost of hiring pool time. For fixtures this was compounded by wider fees associated with game hosting. For mixed clubs, issues arise where swimming can look to take primacy of pool time over Water Polo.

More needs to be done to support the transition of players from swimming programmes into the club environment. This needs a variety of interventions but crucial is addressing the perception that Water Polo should be considered as equal and / or complimentary to swimming. The value of the team sport aspect needs also to be respected and amplified.

Participation opportunities are crucial to the sustainability of local clubs. This does not have to be directly linked with talent but there has to be a clearly defined pathway connection.

Swim England and partners need to do more to raise the profile of the sport – be it competitions or national teams. This would serve to raise the value of the sport and support greater engagement with local providers – be they facility providers or other. Swim England also need to work to influence 'partners' (ie facility providers) to alleviate some of the challenges which clubs and local competitions / groups face.

Competition Pathway

It was recommended that all stakeholders, principally competition providers, work around a common framework for athlete development that potentially sees compromise on what currently exists.

There was a suggestion (for subsequent inclusion in the Minutes) that an extra age bracket is introduced to the Inter Regions at U12. This should be explored from a performance and capability perspective.

For 'participation-based' competitions other models should be explored – central location models which cater for various age groups for example.

The need for a co-ordinated and consistent competition calendar is essential. This is not just for structural reasons but also for parents / players to budget and to maximise venue hire opportunities. There needs to be clear leadership and accountability on this.

Coaching / Officials Development

The balance of the content coach education courses needs reviewing. Practical elements are key, especially to support engagement. Tactical content is notable by its absence. The cost of courses is seen as prohibitive and is a major barrier to entry alongside the length of time it takes to complete. The current set up for courses and awards was questioned. Is it the most efficient mechanism for future activity? Clarity on the cost breakdown would be welcome so people can understand the value.

Recognition of prior learning needs to be considered as does the need for tailored qualifications based upon target audience.

There could be greater opportunities for people to engage with national squad coaching to support their CPD – especially methodologies. However, this is compromised by cost, time and geographical issues. This could be supplemented by videos and digital programmes to aid learning and understanding.

A mapping exercise could be undertaken to fully ascertain the needs of the community around what workforce development should look like. There are opportunities for support from the counties / regions. However, this is not always equal or well-known.

Talent Pathway

The talent pathway needs to be clearly defined. Work needs to be undertaken on British Swimming working with the Home Nations to identify and raise standards. This needs to be underpinned by clear roles and responsibilities between British Swimming and the Home Nations.

There needs to be greater structure to support performance athlete development - thresholds, best practice on strength and conditioning and wider sport science and lifestyle support. Even if not funded, this can provide parameters which set a culture and standards.

Part of the focus could be looking at ensuring a strong cohort of young players with well-developed exit routes to club and competition environments in Europe / NCAA. Potentially those players could come back and form the next generation of senior teams. For those currently in system (currently graduating from universities in the US and similar) there does need to be a consideration of how we can provide them with an opportunity. This needs a focus from the renewed British Leadership Group.

It was noted that there can be a tension between competitions and performance programmes on player time. This requires sensitive resolution.

The equal distribution of player allocation to the National Academy is a concern. The Inter Regions could be a platform for talent identification. Ensure coaches are in place a year in advance to support this. Clearer information on how players can access the programme later when considering maturational versus chronological development was requested.

More emphasis on data-driven talent identification and selection needs to be considered – ensuring that there is the appropriate balance between objective and subjective routes. With an entry-level focus could there be a greater link with the Club Awards / L8-10 LTS framework.

Leadership / Governance

Any plan of activity needs to carefully consider strategic priorities, balancing performance and participation. Any plan also needs to take into account regional considerations – especially geographic constraints. One size fits all will possibly be problematic.

This plan requires clear layers for activity – regional to national, and clarity as to how each stakeholder can play their part. A mapping exercise can identify key themes – opportunities and challenges.

British Swimming need to do more to drive standards and provide a stronger platform for the development of the performance side of the sport. This will require clear leadership.

At times, there appears to be / is a vacuum of leadership. Clubs have taken the lead on many issues to ensure that the sport remains viable. Ambition and intent are also key drivers which are required from the Governing Bodies.

Part of the value of Swim England should be in its lobbying of providers and partners to make their offer stronger for Water Polo (ie scaled water access costs based on the time the facility is hired).

Regional leadership exists, using local intelligence and supporting cross-club and cross-discipline working. This is at professional (Swim England CDOs etc) and volunteer level.

The need for regional engagement with the new Leadership Group is required on a structured basis.

Communication is central to the future, from Board level down. This is also required of British Swimming. There needs to be clarity as to the structure of the organisations with clear communication on how it operates for supporting Water Polo.

The website does not do justice to the equality of the disciplines within Swim England nor meeting all the needs of the community. The structure of the site needs to be clearer with key touch points for certain topics / resources.

Are elements of the county / regional structures an anachronism and need review?

With the Leadership Group being created before the plan there needs to be a recognition that the outcomes detailed in the plan may require the Leadership Group to have a degree of flexibility in their approach to accommodate these.

AOB

None raised