

Scottish Rowing community meets with sportscotland to discuss vision, priorities, plans

Sportscotland and the SARA Executive co-hosted an independently facilitated ‘Springboard conference’ on 6-7 August to lay the foundations of the sport’s next 4-year development plan. Rowing was selected by sportscotland as one of the first sports to receive funding for such an exercise, based on past progress and future potential.

Scottish Rowing has benefited from over £1.5 million in funding from **sportscotland** sources in recent years, and future funding is contingent on the development of a forward strategy which addresses the needs of the sport against a background of the Scottish Executive and **sportscotland** development policies.

“It would not have been enough for the Executive alone to meet with **sportscotland**,” says SARA president, Mary Massaro. “We needed to draw on ideas from people from a wide spectrum of the sport, and the use of a facilitator released both **sportscotland** and the SARA Executive to contribute as participants without having to lead the discussions.”

The result was wide-ranging discussion, from ‘blue-sky’ visions to here-and-now priorities.

Taking part were:

SARA Executive: Mary Massaro, Mike Haggerty, Ronnie Goldie, Alison Harrison, Paul Mackie, Iain Somerside
Sportscotland: Lindsey Anderson (case officer, rowing), Neil Kilgour
Scottish rowing centres/sectors: Duncan Patterson (Glasgow), Jo Wherret (Edinburgh), Carol Wallace (Aberdeen), Peter Barton (Lanarkshire), Jim Ferguson (juniors)
SARA committees etc: Ailie Ord (regattas), Sandy Walker (racing control), John McKinney (racing control), Terry McNeill (SARA web site)

Facilitator: Morgan Buckley

Balanced view

Finding the balance between building performance and widening participation emerged as a key theme, with wide agreement that both clubs and the association have tended to prioritise one or the other at any given moment - without truly finding the appropriate balance to support progress on both priorities all of the time.

Frameworks described in the **sportscotland** Sport 21 plan for Scottish sport in the 21st century reflect this need to encourage ‘activity’ (recreational rowing, for example) just as much as ‘performance’ – the Home International Regatta and, particularly, pathways to selection for GB crews. Programmes and funding from **sportscotland** are available to support both these priorities – both nationally and at local level.

Stopping the leaks

Other pathways were identified for attention too – in particular the need to develop links between junior clubs and universities, and between universities and senior clubs, such that rowers are retained in the sport as they move from secondary to higher education and then into their careers.

Proposals were discussed, to encourage coaches of juniors to actively put athletes in touch with coaches at the university of their choice before they even arrive: rowing needs to pre-empt the ‘freshers’ fayre’ by encouraging junior rowers to sustain their involvement through university.

“We also saw a need to make it easy for graduates to progress into senior clubs,” says Mary Massaro. “Student

debt and career demands make the years between graduation and age 25-27 difficult ones in which to fund and find time for sport – yet these are some of the most important years for prospective high performers. If they can row through finals at university, this graduate drop-out problem is not insurmountable – but we need a plan to address it.”

Not many people know that!

A common theme of the event was the number of projects – at both SARA and **sportscotland** levels – of which delegates from outside the SARA Executive were completely unaware. Although channels such as Rowing Action, the SARA website and reports distributed to clubs were in place, there was scope for better use of all of these.

“Communication came through as possibly the biggest opportunity for early improvement,” says Mary Massaro.

“Simply sending SARA Executive minutes to club secretaries telling them the Executive as reviewed a paper on this or a agreed a plan on the other does not mean we are communicating effectively” says Mary. “We have to communicate an understanding of the opportunities open to rowers directly to as many members of the rowing community as possible.”

Next steps

A more detailed report on the discussion will be prepared by the SARA Executive for circulated to clubs and made available on the SARA web site. Thereafter, the Executive will move ahead with detailed plans to address the various priorities the wider group discussed.

“Some are longer term projects with realistic delivery dates in 2005 and beyond,” says Mary Massaro, “but I will be giving particular personal attention to the immediate need for improved communication.”

“In addition to the required SARA secretary’s minutes to clubs, we have other good channels – the web site and Rowing Action – and effective people running them”, Mary continues. “But we’re not even communicating as effectively as we should be with those people - so means it’s no surprise they can’t help us communicate with the wider rowing community. That needs fixing right away.”

Once it is fixed the rest of the community will be able to know what we’re doing on the other priorities – indeed the president hopes to introduce new means by which individual rowers can contribute directly to the Executive’s discussions and planning.”