

Water Polo Leadership Group

Minutes of the meeting held on 07.12.21, 6.30pm via Zoom

Present: Toby King – Chair
Ben McDonald - Volunteer Lead
Chris Stephens – Officials Lead
Ian Mackenzie – SOC Representative
Fiona Pearson - Communications representative
Mike Hesketh – Competition Lead

Regional representatives present:

Mike Coles – South West
Nigel Greenwood – West Midlands
Fiona Conway – East Midlands
Mike Dixon – North West
Dawn & Richard Cousins – North East
Jon Lane – East Midlands
Dean Walker – East
Peggy Etiebet -London

Ad Hoc:

Elliot McHugh – Youth Representative

Staff:

Rachel Bayley – Head of Performance Operations
Claire Coleman – Head of Development
Ekaterina Boyd – Head of Events
Norman Leighton – Talent Development Officer
Becky Walker – Club Growth Manager
Chris Jones - Administrator

(Members are identified by initials)

Apologies: Craig Figes, Adam Older

1	Welcome & Apologies
2	Regional Managers:
2.1	National Events Calendar and 2022 Competitions Recurring question raised by RM's – why are we not putting in competition and event dates in for the next two years so people know when events are. TK explained that the WPLG is conducting a competition review and whilst the ambition is to set two years with dates, doing so now would delay the introduction of any changes. Not yet in a position to decide the optimum competition structure. Further clarity is needed on the full talent pathway. This is imminent with the recruitment of the Water Polo Technical Lead (post currently being advertised.) EB update for 2022. Venue secured for U17 and U19 National Age Group (NAG) finals which will be Liverpool Aquatics center on 7-8th May 2022. NAGs

	U15 will be held at Ponds Forge on 17th & 18th December. Inter-regionals are not under swim England remit. NAGs U15 will be held at Ponds Forge on 17th & 18th December 2022. TK advised that the inter-regionals organisers are meeting later this week (WC 6/12/21). TK unsure what stage they are at but did thank them for holding a good set of events this year. IM competition review update - these will continue in current format in 2022 until talent team are in place and we can develop an overall competition structure that meets both the talent pathway needs (fitting into the 4 year cycle) and also widening participation. IM is clear that we need to include U11 and U13 competition if we are to succeed, both for talent and participation. For context RB added Waterpolo programme lead coming in as a technical expert to develop an athlete development framework to give clear detail as to what is required technically at each age and stage of an athlete's development. This will drive the potential restructure of the competition pathway. TK added the purpose of each competition we have is not clear at present but the idea is that each competitions will have a very specific purpose of either helping develop the athlete pathway or being aimed at increasing participation. From 2023 onwards each competition will have a clear purpose and hopefully a name to match.
2.2	RM raised a question over what message should be relayed to parents about selection in 2022? What are they training for when the dates of the inter regionals (IR) are not known? TK clarified that the inter regionals is a volunteer run programme and that parents should be patient \and the children should keep training as best they can. We are still in the grip of a global pandemic!
2.3	RM noted that having the NAGS dates was a positive step forward but questions when the dates of the preliminary rounds would be available. EB clarified that we are in need of the competitions conditions which are managed by the WPLG. The competition is still on its expected timelines for entry (when event is in May) entries open in Jan and close in Feb. IM offered to support the group with drafting of the conditions - (Post-meeting note: Both Ian Mackenzie and Mike Hesketh have kindly agreed to give up more time to put these together imminently). It was noted NAGs finals date and venue on the Swim England calendar are incorrect these were down as TBC but will be amended. Action 1: IM to draft conditions for NAGs, circulate to MH as Competition Lead and submit to EB as the event promoter. Action 2: NL to ensure the calendar is up to date, and to ensure that the RMs are informed when it has changed.
2.4	RM asked could the calendar be made more prominent on the website. NL confirmed he has been working with the web team and the calendar is more accessible.
2.5	RM raised a question with regards to the proposal in the minutes of the previous meeting relating to the Competition review - where do the regions

	stand on vetoing a competition review proposal if it's something they do not want to do? TK clarified that regions are stakeholders in the process so should submit what they feel is a suitable alternative through the WPLG for consideration. CC commented that a competition review would need to be agreed within WPLG and once agreed by the group any regional requirements would feed into the regional agreement. Each region would then by virtue of the regional agreement be able to outline how they would or would not support that competition structure.
2.6	Progression on WP Vision, Mission and Objectives TK outlined progress made on the strategy which was published in April 2020. It was acknowledged that progress has been impacted by COVID 19 Pandemic. At the end of 2019 there were 6,600 registered Waterpolo players, as of last week there are 6,448. There are 178 fewer Waterpolo players than at the end of 2019. Target at the end of 2019 was to increase participation by 10%. By comparison with other disciplines Waterpolo would probably be second in terms of retention for 2019 to 2021. This should be viewed as a positive position. Five areas of the strategy: 1. Widening participation – subject to an ongoing discussion of a Leadership sub group (including Craig Figes and Ben McDonald) with Becky Walker, Club Growth Manager 2. Competitions – previously outlined in response to a RM question 3. Coaching – Delivering coaching courses and recruiting 100 new coaches. TK highlighted the success of courses in the south East region. CC advised the success in this region was related to a regional policy and a focus from the region on achieving a higher number of water polo coaches - such options are available to all regions. IM provides data: • 122 on assistant coach course with 72 still to do practical. • 32 coach course with 19 to do practical. IM noted that the Institution of Swimming (IOS) is encountering difficulties – they set up practicals but then candidates have not done sufficient work so they are not ready for the practical. TK noted the goal for 2020/21 was to enroll 100 new coaches so that looks to have been achieved but there is room for improvement. 4. Officials – TK outlined the goal was to reinstate referee courses and make them relevant for the desired levels of competition. In addition, there was a goal to ensure there is a calendar of officials courses. - CS outlined that – Club and Regional referee courses are now available to the regions. This is the same for the table officials. It was agreed that it is essential for the regions to put on the courses and attract the candidates and look after their development. The framework is there, just needs to be utilised.

	5. Talent Pathway – RB will cover at a later point in the meeting 6. Commitment to Waterpolo – TK - some things have been done but there is room for improvement. We will be looking to put these improvements in place going forward.
2.7	Communications NL outlines the process put in place to communicate updates to the calendar. Notification of calendar update will be sent via the regional emailer. Any regional manager not receiving these should speak to their Region. CC outlined the recent challenges faced with administration in Swim England and outlined the process now agreed. This process will continue to be monitored to ensure that the obligations and the WPLG Terms of Reference are met. Action 3: TK to review and, if content, approve paper for circulation outlining calendar update process. CJ to circulate this with the minutes
2.8	Commonwealth Tournament Plans EB confirmed an announcement was made last Friday to confirm Swim England are currently conducting feasibility studies in terms of staging a Water Polo tournament for senior men's and women's teams from Commonwealth countries 24th November – 4th December 2022. A team has been working hard behind the scenes to secure funding and get host city support. Hoping for more news early in the New Year. Format will hopefully be 8 teams of each sex. 10 day tournament. Teams travelling from a long distance may be looking to be provided with a training venue and some warmup games. At the right time, approaches may be made to the regions to support with this.
2.9	Talent Plan – (for full update see RBs WPLG – Performance Update attached) RB provided an overview of the Talent Plan. £375k investment secured over four years from UK Sport with funding being granted to British Swimming (BS). BS have appointed SE to deliver The financial details are outlined below:- Funds provided to appoint a technical position and support competition • Women's Programme - £124,000 (33% of the funds) • Men's Programme - £106,000 (28% of the funds) • Central Programme - £145,000 (39% of the funds) • Swim England Funds = £80,000pa (Subject to annual review of SE capability) Difference between men and women allocation due to the support for the Danube league which isn't available to the men). SE does not receive Sport England funding for Water Polo, so SE invests funds into the talent programme to ensure that the pathway operates. These

funds are primarily to reduce the cost of National domestic training camps and support projects in 2022-2025.

Current facility costs for the 10 squads that are run (seniors, U19, U17, National Academy – Boys & Girls) is costing in excess of £100,000 per annum based on fluctuating facility charges across the country, post-pandemic. SE has taken the decision to pool resources and set a standard £40 per camp fee for every athlete (the only exception to this will be if a squad wishes to run a 4-5 day camp this will be more but the cost of these will be calculated on a case by case basis). If SE does this for 12 camps per squad, it leaves the facility bill at around £40,000, which SE will offset through its investment.

The remaining £40,000 funds is in the process of forecasting against the new Sport England plan, but in brief areas being considering investment in are:

- Hardship Offer
- Athlete Management and Performance System
- EU Nations and England only event support
- Coach Development

This pot of funding remains agile based on facility hire fees. If they go down SE will reduce the costs to players, if they go up we will need to use to offset the loss, resulting in less additional activity being able to happen.

Key competitions

RB outlined the benefits of the Danube league to the senior women. It provides an opportunity to compete against pro league teams in Hungary, a higher level competition to show the players where they are on the international level. This has overall been a positive experience for the players which was echoed by Peggy Etibet, one of the Senior coaches.

Men's senior programme completed a selection process in September – 27 selected and they were focusing their return to international competition around the EU Nations. Unfortunately there was a clash between this and BWPL which put players in a position where they had to choose to compete for their club or country. As a consequence of this and other difficulties around international travel at present it was more of a development squad which was taken to EU nations. England finished 10th out of 11 with the U19's finishing 8th. Matt Holland awarded Goalkeeper of the tournament which was a notable achievement

WUGs – The Women have not qualified. There is a small chance they may still get in if other teams drop out but it is looking unlikely

U19 Boys Squad have been out to Hanover on a training camp.

U19 Girls Squad were due to go to Athens next week, but this has been postponed until the new year given COVID 19 and the new variant.

Appointment of the Technical Lead

This is out to advert with a closing date 12th December (possible extension due to the Christmas break)

Interview date scheduled for 16th December, there is a degree of flexibility if candidates cannot make this date.

	Selection Criteria A final draft has been created of a full pathway selection policy. It contains both selection into National Training Squads for England and GBR, as well as England and GBR international representative teams. We are working through some final internal checks, particularly around appeals procedures and will launch in January 2022.
2.10	Regional Managers Departed the Meeting at 7.50
3	Implementation Plan for 2022
3.1	A template implementation plan was circulated prior to the meeting. CC developed this based on the strategy. With the exception of growth it covers what was outlined as goals for 2022 and gives a level of clarity as to what support the Development Team can provide. Growth has been set aside as BW was not in post when the Waterpolo strategy was written. She is also working with BM and CF to progress growth. CC is looking for feedback from the group as to what may have been missed, what needs to go on there and what additional content for Waterpolo so CC can allocate the resource needed. TK raised the question of whether or not the Development team have the resources to be able to deliver what is currently on the implementation plan and what tradeoffs may need to be made. CC clarified that the current plan was written with resourcing in mind and the structure of the team would support delivery. CC gave the example of Helen Akers who was the swimming technical officials coordinator but has become the officials technical coordinator and has been working with CS to get this into a position where CS is happy with delivery. CS confirmed this is working well. BW is currently recruiting another growth officer to expand the capacity of that team. In terms of tradeoffs CC does not believe there are any at present but reserved judgement for a three month period to confirm. Talent sits with RB and events with EB so in effect the whole sport is looked after by the relevant parts of the sports directorate rather than one team. CC clarified that the main reason for the plan for 2022 is if it is not on the plan it is going to be really hard to resource it and will therefore not be able to happen. Action 4: All group members to review the draft plan and provide feedback to CC as soon as possible.
4	Officials Update
4.1	British Water Polo Delegates Group CS has been lobbying Fergus Feeney to establish a group and it is now set up so there is a representative from each of the home nations. The purpose of this group is to appoint or reappoint international referees to LEN and FINA and the other is to start work on identifying the next set of potential international

	referees, as there is potential for a British Swimming funding to support the development of the next generation.
4.2	FINA/LEN Appointments Three international referees (Max Gerasimov, Damien Taylor and Mike Jukes) have been re-nominated. These are all Swim England referees. CS is hopeful in future we will be nominating referees from the other Home nations
4.3	Swim England Referee and Table Official courses – These are starting to get underway. Some of the new developing referees and table officials will officiate at the NAGs. They will receive mentoring and get the opportunity to referee with some of our senior referees. Some of them will be completing assessments to be signed off for their regional grades.
4.4	Swimming Trust funding for Referee workshops CS has had some discussions but not progressed with anything. This is still aspirational at present. TK thanked CS for the work that has gone in to getting the officials to the point it is at now with lots of new officials at club level. NL added that when the national academy gets up and running there will be opportunity for up and coming referees to officiate the scrimmages. CS asked for as much notice as possible on this as referees book up well in advance. Action 5: NL to provide CS with details of opportunities for officials.
5	Minutes of meeting of 07.09.21 and Matters Arising/ Progress from Action Log
5.1	Minutes previously circulated and approved. In the interest of time TK ran through the Action Log Action 6: CJ to remove completed items from the log
5.2	Filming (3.1 on action log from 7/9/21): taking place on 30 th Jan. TK will put BW in contact with the company producing the film. This one will focus on 14-16yr olds. Action 7: TK to provide BW with dates, location and company who will be conducting the filming.
5.3	Competition calendar (3.3 on action log from 7/9/21) date says 18/12/20 Action 8: Update date on Action Log.
6	Development Team Update
6.1	Andy Jack (AJ) has worked with Swimming to create a water usage toolkit. This supports clubs to maximise the water they have and to facilitate discussions with operators. It has proved to be very successful in the swimming discipline. There is an opportunity for Water polo to have a similar toolkit. If this is something Waterpolo would be interested in, AJ would like a group of 4/5 coaches with a good knowledge of the requirements of differing levels from development right up to elite to support AJ in creating this. BW asked the group to provide a list of names and contact details that AJ could approach to sit on this focus group and produce the tool.

	TK initial thought is that every Waterpolo club wants more time and is usually unable to get it and when they do it is usually an undesirable time. He suggested it would not be an insignificant amount of work to do this, a possible (likely?) outcome would be that all Waterpolo clubs need more time at every level. BW clarified that without a guiding document it is difficult to advocate for more water. IM added that it does seem to work and has worked for Artistic swimming and the Group as a whole were thus supportive of the exercise. TK suggested to go to coaches at big clubs and suggested 5 coaches that NL agreed would be good to start with. NL added there is currently a document (LTPD) that sets out the number of hours needed to achieve each level. FP raised the point that how do you ensure all disciplines start on a level playing field as it will likely be the case that there isn't enough pool time and some disciplines seem to take precedence over others. BW this is a challenge that Swim England cannot control but in having a document like this allows us to have the necessary conversations. Action 9: NL to share LTPD document with BW who will send on to Andy.
6.2	Tutor Training Sarah Green (SG), Head of Educator Training is planning their 2022 tutor training dates and wants to understand what the tutor need is for Waterpolo. They have the following questions: • Is there any specific technical knowledge or experience for the sport that they feel is missing from the person specification? • Do they have any recommendations for potential future tutors in their sport? • Are they ok supporting the advertisement and recruitment process for 2022? • Whist dates cannot be guaranteed does the sport have a time of year where training maybe best placed? TK commented that Waterpolo received funding from the Swimming Trust to help fund the tutor training through COVID and it is his understanding that the tutor level is now sufficient. IM advised that unfortunately the issue is that some of those that embarked on the qualification have dropped out and some of the established tutors are not responding to requests to run courses. BM noted that there are very few active tutors which is the main issue in getting people qualified. Those that went through the process last year have disappeared. BM believes it is difficult to have a full time job and complete the training. So if Swim England are seriously looking to increase the number of coaching courses then a different approach may be needed. CC has emailed TK with summary of the three funded through the Swimming Trust The additional issues IoS are facing is that those who are qualified tutors are not responding. The IOS cannot book courses if they do not have tutors to facilitate them.

	Action 10 : TK to link in with Sarah Green around tutor training to be facilitated by CC
6.3	SE Comms team are looking to develop a google docs spreadsheet that can be accessed by the chair of the leadership group and also the comms lead to create a plan of content. Can the group provide the contact details of the comms lead for the swim England internal comms team so that they can work together to populate the document. TK - sadly we are going to have to defer this as FP is too busy to continue in post so the WPLG needs to recruit a new communications representative. As and when this person is appointed TK will pass contact details to BW. Action 11: TK to pass contact details of Communications representative to BW when appointed.
7	Update from the SOC
	IM covered this will all other parts of the meeting only thing to add is that Sarah Dunsbee has been incredible with everything she has done keeping things going. TK wishes to acknowledge and thank Sarah Dunsbee for the work she has done.
8	Social Media update
	The aforementioned google doc referred to by BW is one part of the drive to get more access to social media. By COP this week CC should have the new social media guide for volunteers. This will include templates and wording etc Swim England want volunteers when they have access to social media channels. CC has agreed with Kate Rudkin that once it is filled out on the google doc we can empower a volunteer to run one social media channel for the sport. Each discipline will need to pick one channel only. The Comms team keen to point out if they are not provided with information they cannot publish the information.
9	AOB
9.1	Communications representative on WPLG TK – a huge thank you to FP for the work she has done. Sad to see her go but understands her reasons. Need a replacement to do Comms, someone close to the Waterpolo community would be ideal. TK would also like to thank Joanne, Mike and Mike for the work they have done putting on the inter regionals. The groups are hopeful they are willing to run them again next year. Action 12: CC and TK to pick up around recruitment for communications representative

9.2	2022 Meeting Dates Action 13: TK to pick 4 dates which are realistic and circulate them with a target of one face to face meeting