

Water Polo Leadership Group with Water Polo Regional Managers

9th April 2025

Time: 18:30 – 20:30

Attendees:

- Ian Mackenzie – Water Polo Leadership Group Chair
- Claire Coleman – Swim England Head of Development (meeting chair)
- Ally Whike – Swim England Sport Development Director
- Paul Metcalfe – Co-opted Member
- Chris Stephens – Officials Lead
- Gareth Picken – Swim England Sport Development Team Administrator

- Simon Tomlinson – South West Regional Representative
- Sarah dunsbee – East Midlands Regional Representative
- Terri Halstead – West Midlands Regional Representative
- Ally Whike – Swim England Sport Development Director
- Adrian Wood – London Regional Representative
- Mike Aish – West Midlands Regional Representative
- MILTON, Ben – East Midlands Regional Representative
- Luke Brown – North West Regional Representative
- Dean Walker – East Regional Representative
- Tim Whitwham - East Regional Representative

Minutes	
25.13.	Welcome
IM welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the key agenda items for the meeting. IM explained that CC be chairing the meeting and presenting on behalf of Craig Figes who has sent his apologies ahead of the meeting.	
25.14	Apologies
Apologies were received from Tom Wall, Gabby Williams, Craig Figes and Mike Coles	
25.15	Conflict of Interest
There were no conflicts of interest declared throughout the meeting.	
25.16	Regional Water Polo Discussion
CC presented on behalf of Craig Figes a proposal relating to the new Swim England Strategy and discussing the role of regional activity in relation to Water Polo.	

The presentation included membership numbers for 2023 and 2024 which highlighted a trend of losing members and small levels of growth.

The group discussed the issues they perceived in Water Polo and related it to how a philosophy could be developed.:

1. The drop off of members isn't surprising. There is poor communication by Swim England and high cost between club train and club compete.
2. The issue is with the pathway and communication and clarity around the talent centre events and competitions.
3. There needs to be more support for clubs to support the athletes to progress. The talent centres seem to not fit in.
4. The impression of the talent centres offering better coaching for players, which was a slap in the face for coaches as there were no coaching development opportunities.
5. There is no feedback between the talent centres and the clubs to progress players and strengthen clubs.
6. The focus of coaching qualification is wrong – technically the courses are not good enough but on a participation basis, it lacked fun.
7. There seems to be a lack of fun throughout the sport which might be an answer to the drop in member numbers.
8. Many clubs don't start players until they are over the age of 10 which might explain the low in number for the under 9's category.
9. The sport should have a tiered competition alongside certain clear standards that players and clubs can work towards.
10. Once players are finished with the talent centre, there is nothing to support players' progress further; they can't all enter the GB team.
11. Competition clashes between the Talent Games and the finals of the national conference forced players to decide between competitions. This is an ongoing issue in Water Polo
12. A clearer competition structure is an absolute must
13. The communication regarding events and when they are booked in for needs to be improved.
14. Parents need clarity on what being a member of the Talent Centre is – it is not a direct path to a GB squad.

CC proposed that the regional approach could be;

- 1) Encourage growth in participation of water polo in all regions.
- 2) work towards creating new entry routes into water polo.

The group discussed what principles would be needed to activate this approach with the following being put forward:

- Stronger clubs for continued experience in sport.
- Aligned opportunities across all the Regions
- Avoid duplications when possible.
- Reduce the burden on volunteers' capacity.
- Reduce the cost, travel and time commitment for the athletes
- A fun, sustainable and structured competition

During the discussion the following competition considerations were raised;

1. A review into the National Age Groups to support club development and club loyalty, not a win at all costs mentality
 - a. Works for larger clubs but not engaging for smaller clubs

- b. Ability to use players from other clubs prevents development of players.
- 2. The role of the Inter-regionals – the competition was popular among the group and provided players with the first opportunity to travel away however it was recognised that regional support for the competition was difficult.

The group also discussed coaching in water polo with the following points being made:

- 1. the cost of the coaching courses during a cost of living crisis has had a direct influence on the number of coaches in clubs across the discipline.
- 2. The group was unaware of the free poolside helper resource
- 3. The format of the current courses is difficult
- 4. A preference for a national theory course followed by local practical assessments was discussed.

CC asked whether, from the experience of the group members, the WP community is ready for change.

The group agreed but explained that it would need to be an impactful and sustainable change for the sport rather than another change in 1-2 years' time.

The final part of the discussion focused on the changes to the talent progression diagram and where the group believes the regions and talent centres should be placed in that progression.

- 1. There was some disagreement with the placement of regional academies below talent centres with a strong feeling that only those who lived close to centres or has the money to attend were able to access the centres. regional academies provide a more local solution.
 - 3. It was agreed that there needed to be clarity between what the regional programme is delivering and to whom in comparison to the Talent Centres. the two pool of players should be different
 - 4. There was a request for more joined up thinking in terms of layer development – one syllabus all coaches could work from and adapt to their player needs was highlighted as an opportunity.
 - 5. Irrespective of who went where in the diagram, clear selection criteria was needed.

25.17	Regional Managers Round Up /Questions submitted
-------	--

Ahead of the meeting several questions were received, and these would receive a written response. All responses would be shared with those who provided their email address. Further as CF was unable to attend the meeting, CC suggested that the Regional Water Polo Managers should email CF with any questions or updates they would like to share with the organisation to add to the question stack.

25.18	Close of meeting
-------	-------------------------

CC thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.