

## **A Plan for Water Polo – key points from stakeholder consultations**

The following points present the amalgamation of the main discussion points raised by attendees at the eight regional meetings to discuss a future plan for water polo that took place in December 2019.

They will ensure that the plan produced in 2020 is reflective of the needs of the sport as outlined by its key stakeholders – clubs, players, coaches and officials – who will be integral to helping deliver the proposed outcomes.

### **Participation & Club Development**

- Need to address the perception from swimming coaches that water polo damages a swimmer's stroke.
- Water polo can help with the churn of swimmers to prevent them leaving aquatics and keeping them as members of a club.
- Need to promote the longevity of water polo players compared to swimmers within a club environment.
- Potential to identify water polo “ambassadors” that can be used to raise the profile of the sport amongst target audiences and demonstrate that an individual can combine competitive swimming and water polo.
- Explore opportunities to share best practice between clubs to highlight successful development activities.
- Advice and guidance to be provided on how to develop membership growth and support volunteers within clubs.
- Cost of pool hire can be prohibitive and times allocated for water polo are not conducive to bringing young players into the sport.
- Need to work with pool operators to look at pricing strategies for off peak hours for water polo.

### **Competitions**

- Need to develop and publish an annual competition calendar for water polo that contains all the major events and leagues including BWPL, SE events, ESSA, Talent Pathway activities and key meetings with stakeholders to help all involved in the sport to plan ahead. Calendar should cover a period of two to three years.
- Opportunities for more competitions at regional level need to be explored, especially at junior levels in order to make it easier for people to take part at the outset.
- A clear competition pathway should be produced so that all those involved can see how players can progress through the different stages.
- There needs to be a review of existing competitions to understand their purpose and relevance in the future – this is especially the case with NAGS and IRs.

- All competitions need to have clear entry regulations to ensure fair access (postcode of club rather than postcode of player for example) and to deal with any safeguarding concerns (setting a minimum age of player for open age competitions for example).

### **Coaching/Officiating development**

- Cost and duration are prohibitive for some people to be able to access courses especially at entry level.
- A review of the current course structure and content needs to be carried out to ensure that they provide more practical guidance for attendees.
- Part of the review to look at a shorter (three hours) technical course aimed at teachers to help with the delivery of water polo in schools, especially with regards to the GCSE curriculum. Also, increased focus on game-related skills and drills as part of the LTS framework.
- Potential to explore more opportunities for CPD for aspiring coaches linked to activities such as regional/national academies, national squad training and more use of online/blended learning to make things more accessible.
- Increasing the use of a Recognition of Prior Learning process will also help to grow the number of coaches as those with qualifications from overseas will not have to retake lower level SE courses and teachers could also receive credit for existing knowledge.
- New process of delivering officiating courses to meet demand at a regional level should be rolled out ASAP and regional associations enabled to organise courses as required with the support of local presenters.
- A wider programme of tutor development should be instigated to provide more resource at a regional/county level.
- Mentoring of new officials is also important to support their development – using a range of regional and national events to help them gain experience and work with more knowledgeable officials.
- Is there a need for a “respect” campaign?

### **Talent Pathway**

- A clear performance pathway that outlines progression routes and expected standards for players needs to be developed and published.
- Pathway documentation should also include clear information on selection process which focuses on a threshold approach rather than regional allocations in order to ensure the best players are selected.
- The process of, and opportunities for, talent identification need to be clearly defined so that players and parents know when these take place and the recruitment of coaching staff can be completed in a timely manner to ensure they are in place for selection sessions.
- A review of the current regional/national academy system is required to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the sport and the players. This should include looking at the starting point of talent ID and whether this should start at an earlier age.
- A review of how funding is allocated to the talent system should also be carried out to ensure that investment is made in the areas/levels where it will provide the most effective return – i.e. for national team provision to inspire younger players?

- Need to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of Swim England and British Swimming with the latter putting out a clear vision for national teams so that those involved in the talent pathway are aware of what the elite performance opportunities might be and provide a purpose to the entire performance system.
- There needs to be consistency across all levels and locations with regards to handling players within the talent system especially when it comes to supporting them in dealing with the outcome of selection decisions.

### **Leadership/Governance**

- There needs to be improvement in the communication across the water polo community and this starts with the SE website which is not particularly easy to navigate when it comes to locating information about the sport.
- Amendments required to the website to improve communication and touch points with target audiences such as players, parents, coaches and clubs.
- An updating of the contact details for water polo representatives at all levels needs to be carried out so that the dissemination of information can be improved.
- SE needs to set out a clear vision for the sport which is backed up by the plan that is developed with measurable and realistic objectives that can/will be delivered. Water polo needs parity with other disciplines.
- The new WPLG needs to have a clearly defined role which needs to be communicated externally so that people involved in the sport are aware of its purpose and its members. It needs to be representative of the sport and involve key stakeholders.
- The WPLG also needs to be visible in the community and communicating regularly with stakeholders.
- SE needs to strengthen its role in lobbying local authorities and leisure operators when it comes to presenting the case for water polo to be given access to pool time in existing and new build facilities