

# Leadership group sets pace for achieving strategic water polo goals

It has been a few months since the Water Polo Leadership Group **published its five-year strategic pathway to the UK water polo community**, and the response to that document has been overwhelmingly positive. Despite the constraints of Covid-19 and the frustrations of not being able to get players back into competitive match-play, much work has been undertaken and progress made on its strategic goals.

Toby King, the chairman of the leadership group, said: “Obviously 2020 has been a frustrating year for players. But we are really pleased with the progress we are already making to ensure that water polo appeals to a broader community and is in good health when we get the go-ahead to resume competition. There is plenty still to do, but we have made a promising start.”

## 1. Widening participation

- We have secured agreement from the sport’s governing body to reduce the minimum age for competition from 12 to seven, and for schools to have Swim England affiliation, so that they can enter teams into low-level competitions (including those involving Swim England clubs) without every child needing to be a Swim England member.
- We have begun work on mini-polo / Habawaba initiatives to attract more U12s into water polo, as well as looking at how to attract former competitive swimmers who have decided to leave that discipline.
- We have made an application for funding for various initiatives to widen participation in water polo.
- We have clarified the rules to ensure that only Category 1 membership is needed for low-level competition, so that players in local or junior leagues only need Category 1 status.



## 2. Competition

- A review is being undertaken into competition structure, in terms of which competitions are run by Swim England and what the purpose is of each event.
- We have started work on a competition plan for 2021, which includes the possibility of running a multi-discipline festival to incorporate the finals of a junior competition.

## 3. Coaching

- A coaching forum has been setup that meets regularly and is focusing on how best to deliver consistent coaching through the age groups.
- Sean King is leading work to ensure that player selection processes throughout the country are consistent at all levels of attainment.

## 4. Officials

- In the South East region, 23 participants have completed the theory section of the two-part table officials course. BWPL have run three further courses.
- We have sought funding for refereeing masterclasses, to be run with BWPL.
- A review of the refereeing course content has been completed. This now features an online theory section and a face-to-face practical session, thus reducing the cost of the course. This is ready to roll out.

## 5. Talent Pathway

- Rachel Bayley has been recruited as Head of Performance.
- Work has begun on the overall talent strategy.

## 6. Other

- We are negotiating a partnership deal to help athletes access sports scholarship to US universities – watch this space!

