



BRITISHROWING

# HRSA Monthly Report

August 2021

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

## Rowing - Everyone's Sport

Last month I explained that a general lack of swimming ability could make it difficult to deliver on this initiative. I wrote that:-

*“Clearly rowing has something for everyone but, if we apply our current guidance rigidly then not everyone can access all of rowing. Not everyone can swim, and this is a barrier that we will have to work together to remove. I would like to hint at a solution, but first I would like to explain the concerns. The key points are:*

- *Many people cannot swim*
- *How do we define our current swimming expectations?*
- *How can lifejackets and buoyancy aids help?*
- *How well do rowers really need to swim?*
- *What do other sports do?*
- *What comes next?”*

... and expanded on each of these points. The July report can be found [here](#).

The response has been mixed with some people being supportive and some suggesting that it would be unsafe to relax the swimming standards currently outlined in RowSafe.

I think that those people who have been supportive all agree that:-

1. In general, rowers do not need to be able to swim particularly well. There may be some venues where the ability to swim is more important but these can be identified by clubs' risk assessments.
2. The definition of what level of swimming ability is appropriate in most venues may consist of:-
  - (a) confidence in water, i.e. not to panic if you fall in
  - (b) the ability to float in deep water
  - (c) the ability to move through the water for a short distance (a few metres) in order to get back to your boat
  - (d) the ability to climb onto the boat or stay with it until rescued (normal capsize drill stuff)
3. Everyone should wear a buoyancy aid (whether they can swim or not) in the early stages of their rowing career and we should work on the cultural inclination against the use of buoyancy aids
4. We should signpost sources of support for people learning to be confident in deep water and clubs should be encouraged to provide a swimming pool based experience for new rowers and lessons for those who need them. We look for ways to help non-swimmers to be confident in the water. Some established rowers may not actually be able to swim as well as they would like to believe.
5. We need to take extra care with the wording of swimming declarations so that they describe an opportunity rather than a barrier (e.g. If you can't swim please tick and we'll work with you and others and provide you with the support you need.)

The National Rowing Safety Committee discussed this and concluded that this initiative “could work and would allow the sport to encourage more new rowers to take up the sport”. It also recommended that the “If you capsize then Stay With the Boat” message should be reinforced (I am drafting a Safety Alert on this).

Some of those who feel that all rowers should be able to swim well, have referred to the risk of rowers drowning. My responses have typically included the following:-

In rowing, we tend to get fixated about drowning but this is not supported by the facts. There is also a tendency to believe that the ability to swim will protect against drowning, this is not true either. The RNLI advice to people who fall into water is to float and not to try to swim. A quick look at the [Respect the Water](#) campaign materials will demonstrate this, have a look at the [float to live](#) videos.

Worldwide few rowers drown, many more die in collisions with motor vessels, some die afloat from heart attacks, some die on-land from heart attacks (hence my belief that every rowing club should have an AED of its own), and a few die as a result of cold water shock. Being able to swim better would not help them.

This century, two British rowers have drowned accidentally following capsizes. One in 2000 and one in 2005. Both were competent swimmers and both chose to swim away from their boats. Had they chosen to stay with their boats then the result may have been different.

The [National Water Safety Forum](#) has a database of UK drownings. Each year more people die in the bath than die due to the use of manually propelled boats. I find attending the NWSF meetings to discuss the drowning prevention strategy embarrassing as rowers do not drown. In fact, most years, they rescue people who would otherwise drown (about half of the UK drownings are due to suicide).

If we support the British Rowing objective to make Rowing Everyone's Sport then we are left trying to solve the problem that by requiring an unnecessarily (in my view) high standard of swimming ability, we will make it impossible for half of the population to take up rowing. We have to be more intelligent and require the level of swimming ability that will be achievable and enable people to row safely. This is why I have suggested that all rowers need to do, at most venues, is stay calm if they enter the water, float to the surface, and continue to float until they have grabbed the boat and then stay with the boat. I am planning to provide training material to help clubs to work with their members to achieve this. Rowers can use buoyancy aids for the first few months, or as long as they need.

Rowing venues differ and the safety provision required is often very dependent on the venue. For example, there are clubs where the instructions to rowers are "If you fall in then stand up and wade to the bank holding your boat".

Imagine that you were a single parent with little income and three children. Where would you find the time and money to take them to the pool and teach them to swim? We want to make "Rowing, Everyone's Sport" and not "Rowing, a Sport for People who Can Swim".

Appendix I lists the relative advantages to rowers of Lifejackets and Buoyancy Aids.

## Incidents in August

### Rower seriously injured in the gymnasium

A 13 year old rower slipped and fell during a weight circuit session. Balance was lost on the edge of the 'drop zone' flooring in the gym. She landed very awkwardly and lost grip control of the single weight plate. The rower suffered a dislocated patella. (Partially sheared away from the thigh and shin bone). She was taken to hospital by ambulance. The report also indicated that *“there have been multiple incidents and accidents in this part of the building and gym area in the past”* and *“the gym area has many trip hazards and 'furniture' like objects taking up a limited amount of floor space”*. The club will hold a stakeholder meeting to establish details of any measures to be taken to prevent recurrence. It will declutter its gym. I suggested that it may be better to use weights with handles (e.g. the kettlebell type) rather than trying to handle disc type weights.

This cannot be the only gym where there is an opportunity for improvement. Please review the housekeeping and equipment used in your gym. Also, please consider how many people can safely use your gym at any one time.

### Look out for swimmers

An Incident Report contained the following:-

*“J14 double paddling (firm) downstream were shocked when a swimmer's head appeared under a rigger. There was no warning; he was not trailing any buoy; the river was very busy with all kinds of boats at that time on a Sunday morning. It was close to some moored boats and he had probably emerged from between the boats without looking. He offered no apology and disappeared quickly, but the crew were quite shocked and disconcerted at the possible consequences.”*

Please take extra care, for the next few months at least, in areas where there could be swimmers

### PRI Capsize

A PRI (arms and shoulders) rower capsized at a competitive event and was assisted by the rescue boat. There is more specific information on this incident [here](#) and more general information on capsizes of boats with safety pontoons [here](#). This has been discussed with people who have expertise in this area and several learning points have been identified.

It understood that the rower had recently conducted a capsize drill and had no problems getting free of his boat.

The rescue boat was equipped with guard rails to help to prevent the crew from falling into the water. Unfortunately this increases the relative freeboard of the boat and makes the retrieval of a casualty from the water more difficult. It would have been better if these had been removed. This applies in all rescue situations.

It was thought advisable that launches supporting rowers who use straps should carry hook type safety knives (seat belt cutting knives) so that straps can be cut safely if necessary.

## **Take care around motor boats**

There was an incident where “*the crew noticed a wide barge approximately 500m further downstream towards the centre. The crew tucked in to the bank on the correct side and continued to row. The barge then veered further towards the crew and a head-on collision occurred. The owner of the barge confessed to not being able to see past the end of his vessel and refused to give any further details. The incident was reported to the Canal and River Trust bridge keepers who indicated that the canal boat driver had previous history of dangerous driving.*”

There was another incident where an 8 that was on the correct side of the river, moving at paddling speed, was hit by a motor boat that swung fast around the apex of an island and collided with the riggers. Two riggers were sheared off but there was no damage to the hull of boat. Witnesses indicated that the 8 could not have avoided the collision and that they were doing nothing wrong.

In another incident a 2x was rounding a bend and a barge was proceeding in the opposite direction. Both boats were in the correct place on the river. The barge suddenly veered across the river at almost 90 degrees, forcing the 2x to stop. There was a collision. The helmsman of the barge said he thought that the 2x was crossing over so he decided to do the same. This made no sense as both boats were on the correct side and he could not cross without colliding with the 2x.

In yet another incident a 4x had to turn, perform an emergency stop and shout to avoid a more serious collision with a motor cruiser on the wrong side of the river. The motor cruiser had not seen the 4x even though it had been on a straight course for 300 metres. The Cruiser was also shouted at by people in a nearby garden.

## **Who gives way to whom**

There was a comment in an Incident Report that “*the rules of navigation clearly state that motor gives way to oar power*”. The incident involved a minor collision and a series of near misses with several small pleasure hire motor boats.

The only mention of vessels under oars in the COLREGs the relates to navigation lights (Part C, Rule 25).

Rowers would be well advised to be prepared for the unexpected when in the vicinity of motor boats. They should not have to but it is prudent to do so.

## **Asthma incidents afloat**

There were two reported incidents where rowers suffered asthma attacks afloat and their inhalers were administered when they came ashore. Please note that RowSafe recommends that rowers with asthma carry their inhalers with them when they go afloat so that they can use them immediately should they need to.

## **Please do not forget the cox**

The crew of a 4x+ climbed out of their boat when it came alongside the pontoon leaving their cox in the boat. The boat then half tipped (riggers under water) towards the pontoon leaving the cox with an inflated lifejacket and still partially seated in the boat. He was quickly rescued by other rowers on the pontoon.

## Names in Incident Reports

It has become increasingly common to include names in incidents reports. This could cause a problem as the names could be associated with personal information, there could be additional issues if the names of juniors are included. The only name that should be included is that of the person submitting the report.

Please do not identify the people involved in incidents by name. If you need to identify individuals, perhaps to facilitate further investigation by your club, then please only include their initials.

## Confidentiality of Incident reports

We recently had a request from someone who did not identify himself, other than by name, who wanted to be able to inspect our Incident Reporting Register. We explained that this information is confidential but that I may be able to provide anonymised summaries in response to specific requests. I explained that the learning points in some reports are included in my Monthly Reports. These are in the public domain [here](#). We also publish an annual Analysis of Incident Reports and the latest one is in the public domain [here](#).

He responded by suggesting that he could make a Freedom of Information request in order to gain access to the Incident Reporting Register. I checked and found that here is information [here](#) that lists the types of organisation to which these requests can be made. This does not include British Rowing and neither we nor our clubs are susceptible to these requests. I invited him to phone me but he is yet to do so.

## Double reporting

Someone wrote concerned that there may be double reporting if incidents are reported by a Competition and by the Club(s) involved. I replied to say that I quite like double reporting. It is good to read different perceptions of the same incident.

When this happens then we link the various reports for ease of reference. It is better for an incident to be reported several times than not at all. However, there is little point in reporting an incident, that someone else has reported, unless you can include some additional information.

## Dogs on Launches

Someone wrote to ask whether British Rowing has a view on dogs in launches generally, or is it something we can just include in our own club's risk assessment?

My response was that as far as I know British Rowing does not have a view on dogs in launches.

Whether or not this is advisable depends on the launch, the people in the launch, the number of people who may need to be rescued, the place where the launch is used and the nature and temperament of the dogs. In other words it is a matter that a club should consider taking into account all of these factors and, possibly, others.

## Wash from coaching launches

Someone wrote to ask for information on best practice when driving a coaching launch in the presence of other rowers. He commented on the excessive wash produced by the coaching launches at his club. He had been told by the club captain that it was not appropriate for the launches to slow down.

I replied to say that we expect launch drivers to be considerate and not cause inconvenience to others by creating excessive wash. The following text appears in RowSafe in relation to safety boat driving at competitions:-

*"Safety Boat Drivers are expected to:*

- *Hold the appropriate qualifications and be competent to provide safety cover for the type of competition.*
- *Understand how to provide assistance to rowing boats.*
- *Understand what is required of Safety Boat Drivers at the competition:*
  - *Areas to be patrolled.*
  - *How to summon assistance, including medical attention.*
  - *Where to take casualties.*
  - *The need to keep wash to a minimum, except in an emergency."*

This is not included in the more general guidance for Launch Drivers (but it will be considered at the next revision of RowSafe) because we did not think that it was necessary to provide guidance to encourage people to behave in a normal, considerate manner.

Considerations of common courtesy, and common sense, should be sufficient to encourage launch drivers to act responsibly. However, there was also an Incident Report from another location where a launch a coaching launch *"came past full speed whilst our crews were boating, navigating between an 8 that had just launched and a sculler who had also just pushed off."*

If you drive a launch, then please do so with due consideration for other water users.

## Newsletter article - Get help to buy your own AED

Some weeks ago, I wrote an article for the British Rowing Newsletter. It is reproduced below just in case you missed it.

*"What would you do if someone at your club collapsed and was not breathing? If your answer includes all of "Shout for Help", "Dial 999" and "Open the Airway" and "start CPR, preferably in relays" then that's great, well done. If it does not then have a look at the interactive films [here](#), there are versions for various devices.*

*Now what about a Defibrillator? Does your club have one? Do you know where it is? Do you know how to use it? If you need help with any of this then talk to your Club Rowing Safety Adviser (CRSA).*

*If your club does not have an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) then read the Safety Alert [here](#) and show it to your coach, CRSA or Chairman. AEDs save lives - every Club should have one."*

## What constitutes a disability?

There was an enquiry about what constitutes disability and whether someone could be refused membership of a club based on the difficulty getting in and out of a boat. There was concern that doing so could constitute a breach of the Equality Act 2010. The writer explained that the Act states that discrimination arising from disability is unlawful unless there is objective justification.

The person involved is a very quick learner and was able to follow instructions well. However, she is significantly overweight, and lacks agility and flexibility; she is also blind. The club felt that it should not offer her membership because of her weight and lack of flexibility and the risk of her being unable to be recovered safely in the event of a capsized.

Their view was that the straightforward facts of the matter are that her blindness (which the club considered to be the only disability at issue) is irrelevant. They felt that they cannot and should not offer her membership because it would be unsafe to do so given her mobility problems. The club would be more than happy to reconsider her application if in the future if she is able to address these issues. The club would then be glad to make whatever reasonable accommodations are necessary to cater for her visual impairment.

I was asked whether I thought that this is a reasonable and lawful approach?

My response was that I think that the club is correct to decouple the visual impairment from the weight and lack of flexibility. There will be some interaction between these issues, for example in the event of a capsized but, at this time, they can be treated separately.

As I understand it, the [Equality Act 2010](#) defines protected characteristics in section 4. "Disability" is further defined in section 6. Section 6(1) states:-

*(1) A person (P) has a disability if—*

*(a) P has a physical or mental impairment, and*

*(b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.*

It could be argued that this lady has a disability in relation to her weight and lack of flexibility, as well as her visual impairment.

Section 20 of the Act requires that "reasonable accommodations" are made. Schedule 15 (Associations; Reasonable Adjustments) also applies. Part 14 of the Act, General Exceptions, includes section 195 Sport. This does not refer to disability but only to age, gender, and gender assignment.

If a club is a Registered Charity then its constitution must include a statement that it will welcome everyone as members.

There is a government publication [Quick Start Guide for Private Clubs and other Associations](#). This contains the following:-

*"Reasonable adjustments for disabled members, associates and guests*

*Private clubs and other associations must make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled people to become members or associates and for them and any disabled guests to participate in their activities. A club may need to make adjustments to a policy or practice, such as relaxing a ban on animals for people who use assistance dogs. It may have to provide an auxiliary aid, such as providing information in accessible formats. It may have to make physical adjustments to parts of its premises. A club is only required to make*



*adjustments that are reasonable in all the circumstances. What is reasonable will depend on factors such as the practicability and cost of making the adjustment. A private club is not required to do anything that will alter the fundamental nature of the club and what it does."*

I feel that the club probably has a legal duty and certainly has a moral duty to think again about what it can do to help this person.

It should consider helping her to address her weight and flexibility problems. This can start with on-land exercise including indoor rowing. It would be prudent to have a private and very gentle conversation with her about her ability to do these exercises safely and she may offer information about any other medical conditions that could be relevant. The club should ensure that she exercises well within her capabilities and let her extend her capabilities at her own pace but with supervision and guidance. It would also be prudent to ask her to discuss this with her doctor.

I imagine that a person with a visual impairment would feel comfortable exercising on an indoor rowing machine as she is seated and not in any danger of falling. Coaches could also talk to her about exercises to improve her flexibility and suggest exercises that she can do safely, perhaps with the support of her family.

Once afloat then her blindness becomes a concern but the club has already identified a way that she can row safely. It should consider the use of a lifejacket or buoyancy aid just in case she capsizes. I believe that many clubs use adaptive rowing floats with new rowers, we find them very effective and acceptable.

The club responded with thanks for what they thought was a very helpful response. It has produced a risk assessment, and plans to try to work out ways in which they might be able to accommodate her.

## **Rower with balance problems**

There was a request for support from a club with a rower who has a hearing impairment in the right ear and looking over her right shoulder affects her balance so she looks over her left shoulder when sculling. Unfortunately this means that she finds it difficult to see the water ahead and on the side from which boats approach.

The response was that the cap mounted mirror works if you train yourself to use it. I tried it and it was a bit confusing but if you remember to find the bow canvas and bow ball of your own boat then you can relate everything else to that. If your sculler goes out in company then her friends may be able to help her. Someone ahead can shout warnings. A spotter on the bank can also help.

We discussed this issue with the National Rowing Safety Committee and their suggestions were:-

- Video camera -easier than a mirror but expensive, however, screens are difficult to mount and can be difficult to see
- Can a buddy rower help
- GoPro linked to a phone
- Cheap camera used by cyclists
- Cycling accessories

It has also been suggested that a buddy, launch, or cyclist supervision are all very good options too, if available, and can provide information with arm gestures.

It is understood that the CRSA is trailing the use of a cap mounted mirror.

## Rower who had seizures

I was asked by a coach whether he should continue coaching a rower who has been assessed as autistic with severe learning difficulties. The rower is now 27 years of age. He has had a seizure at home. It is understood that these are infrequent and only occur before or after bedtime. He is on medication to prevent seizures.

It was agreed with his parents that he always wears a self-inflating lifejacket. In addition to that the closures of the shoes in the boat have always been left loose – i.e. the fastenings are effectively left open. He has capsized three times as a result of the usual mistakes and each time the lifejacket has performed as designed. Subsequently he has brought himself and the boat to the bank. On one occasion that involved him swimming with the boat.

Based on our experience with this athlete and the mitigations in place to address the assessed risk, the coach hoped that he can be allowed to continue to develop his potential as a rower.

My reply was as far as I can tell from your note, you have done a wonderful job in keeping this rower safe and engaged in a sport that I expect he has come to love. I expect that rowing has given him a focus in life and this has helped him enormously.

Our Medical Panel has issued guidance on "Rowing and Epilepsy", this can be found [here](#). It includes the following:-

*"Asleep seizures (nocturnal seizures) are seizures that occur whilst falling asleep, when asleep, or on waking up. Rowers, launch drivers and coxswains who have an asleep seizure should not row, drive a launch or cox until they are seizure-free for one year. Those who continue to have only asleep seizures should contact their General Practitioner or medical specialist to be assessed as to their suitability to row, drive a launch or cox."*

I would suggest that you consult his doctor or medical specialist and use the information they provide to complete "a special individualised risk assessment of the individual and the event", as stated in the medical panel guidance. This should focus on the probability of him suffering a seizure when afloat, the severity of that seizure, and the severity of the consequences of such a seizure. This should not be difficult; they are undertaken routinely in these circumstances.

Please ensure that his lifejacket is correctly fitted, routinely checked and properly maintained. Routine checks of lifejackets have found that a surprising proportion had defects, however, the one that he uses has been shown to be effective. There is more information [here](#) and [here](#).

## Port and Starboard

There was an incident in which three highly experienced paddleboarders were surprised to encounter several rowing boats on the “wrong” side of the river. They paddleboarders kept close to their starboard bank as the rowing boats passed close to them. A little later they were even more surprised to be told by a rower in a 1x that they should keep to the left!

They subsequently emailed the club secretary, this was her reply:-

*“Rowing all over the world rows their boat on the left of any water (i.e. to the rowers right side). This rule applies everywhere so that any other rowers are not likely to crash into another boat that they don’t know is on the water. You may be aware that rowers row backwards i.e. they are not facing the way they are travelling, so have to regularly look around for others. This is why we, and all rowers worldwide have this rule.*

*In rowing, ‘left’ and ‘right’ are referred to as ‘port’ and ‘starboard’, but the key here is perspective. “Port” is the left side of the boat from the rower’s perspective facing the stern. “Starboard” is the right side of the boat from the rower’s perspective.*

*Apologies that you were unaware of this rule, and apologies for what may have appeared to be our outspokenness. It would purely have been a safety concern as we had many young novice rowers on the water and great harm could have come not only to them but to yourselves also should a collision occurred.”*

**This is, of course, 100% wrong.**

The quote in black was published by USA Today, the error was discovered and a correction was published [here](#).

I subsequently provided the following information to the club secretary even though this is information that we all take for granted as being self-evidently correct:-

*“Port and Starboard are defined in relation to the boat and not by the persons in it. This is fundamental to all navigation. This definition appears [here](#) in Wikipedia:-*

***Port** and **starboard** are [nautical](#) terms of orientation that deal unambiguously with the structure of vessels, referring respectively to the left and right sides of the vessel, seen by an observer aboard the vessel looking forward.*

You will find this on the International Register of Shipping website [here](#).

*As port and starboard never change, they are unambiguous references that are independent of a mariner’s orientation, and, as a result, mariners use these nautical terms instead of left and right to avoid confusion.*

There is a long and detailed explanation on the Royal Museums Greenwich website [here](#).

I don't know how you found contradictory advice (highlighted in black above) but it is simply wrong. If this definition was to be used then the port and starboard would change if there was a cox in the boat.”

The paddleboarder has sent a similar email to the club.

The secretary has since responded saying that the club will discuss this new information and the Club Captain will write to us both soon. I am looking forward to hearing what he has to say. To be fair to this club, I understand that it rows in an isolated location so may not see many other boats.

I know of one stretch of river between weirs, where there is little or no water traffic other than the boats of the two rowing clubs. The clubs have agreed to navigate on the port (left hand) side of the river so that they can leave and return to their landing stages heading into the stream without having to cross the river. Unless you have agreed a similar convention (or row on the Tideway) then please take care to keep to the starboard side of your waterway.

## Appendix I

### The relative advantages of Lifejackets and Buoyancy Aids

Relative advantages of Lifejackets	Relative advantages of Buoyancy Aids
Provides high levels of buoyancy	Provides some buoyancy
Will keep an unconscious person afloat face up	Will help a conscious person to float
Can be less bulky than buoyancy aids	Usually free of straps and entanglements
Keeps the face out of the water in choppy water	Relatively inexpensive
	Require little or no maintenance, inspection and testing
	Easy to fit
	Allows the wearer to climb on top of an inverted boat