



The Future of Small Boat Sailing and Youth Training in Ireland

Background Notes

The recommendations of the Board have been compiled in a relatively short space of time, based on the feedback received from a number of members who attended the AGM and the subsequent forum held in the National Yacht Club, and also from those who contributed on the various on-line forums. The Board acknowledge that whilst it is important to respond in a timely manner, it is equally important to ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the outcomes hence the need to seek wider consultation.

Volunteer Groups

One of the casualties of eliminating the Committee structure of the organisation and replacing the volunteers with professional resource is the engagement of dedicated people with skills and experience that can help the organisation to grow and develop. Over the years we have found it increasingly difficult to identify people with the relevant expertise to sit on working groups. The ISA currently has four standing committees; the Olympic Steering Group, the Race Officials Advisory Group, Racing Rules Appeals Board and the All Irelands Steering Group all of which provide extraordinary levels of support. One of the key changes in strategy resulting from the process is to engage with a wider stakeholder group by introducing more groups to support the work of the organisation.

Strategic Plan

The ISA has operated within a strategic framework since 1998, and is now implementing its third strategic plan ('2020 Vision'). Each plan has been developed in consultation with, and signed off by the membership, and as the activities within the clubs have grown and developed so the role of the ISA expanded to support these activities.

The current plan was developed and launched in 2008, in what we all know to be a very different climate. There have been some comments questioning the relevance of a number of the strategies currently being pursued in the current climate, and whether we have sufficient resource to achieve the goals without compromising the core activities of the association.

Class Coaching

In the past the Irish Sports Council (ISC) provided funding for sailors travelling to international events. This was subsequently changed to fund coaching for non-pathway classes in order to prepare for international events. ISC also have provided funding in the past for organisations hosting international events. This funding is no longer available, and we need to look elsewhere in the future.

The pathway classes enjoy coaching support from the ISA, however there is currently no funding available to support non pathway classes. There was significant enthusiasm for the reintroduction of financial support for coaching of non-pathway classes to help improve the standards of sailors competing at international events.

SBSS Structure & Syllabus

The SBSS evolved as a result of integrating the scheme the Commercial Centres were operating with the Youth Sailing Scheme being run by the clubs. The youth sailing scheme was a five level scheme which essentially provided a racing pathway feeding into the junior class championships.



Within the current SBSS structure there is opportunity for progression into day sailing skills (Adventure 1 & 2), Advanced Boat Handling and Kites & Wires (1 & 2), without the need to go racing. The current structure of the SBSS was developed based on feedback that the old scheme was too racing orientated and as a result we were losing numbers who are not so competitive.

The SBSS is a more modular approach which in theory, has the flexibility to be adapted towards a progression that suits the ethos and sailing environment of individual clubs and training centres. Whilst commercial Training Centres appear to have adapted to this approach, the feedback is that some clubs that prefer a more 'linear' progression through the schemes are still struggling with it.

A large proportion of those contributing to the debate feel strongly that within the club environment, racing should be introduced earlier within the SBSS syllabus. Currently the Go Racing 1 Course is not introduced until the fourth or fifth year of sailing in some clubs. Any changes to the scheme requires the development and publishing of new logbooks and certs, the retraining of instructors and the education of the Training Centres – it is not possible to make regular changes as this process takes time. Because of this the scheme is reviewed in a structured way on a four year cycle.

It is recognised that the needs of a commercial centre looking to run shorter more condensed courses for their customers, differs significantly from the 'summer camp' environment of the longer sailing courses run by voluntary clubs. The flexibility of the current SBSS is an attempt to facilitate this.

Joe Soap Sheets

Joe Soap reports were a system used in the old Youth Sailing Scheme to track the progress of the course participants to ensure the skills had been covered to a sufficient standard before they were allowed to progress. It also meant the youngsters and their parents understood their progress on the course. This is a system that has been developed within the Small Boat Sailing Scheme as a means for Senior Instructors to check the Instructors are covering all aspects of the syllabus, however the feedback is that Joe Soap Sheets are not being used in many centres in practice.

SBSS Logbook Requirements

Logbook requirements were a strong feature within the Youth Sailing Scheme (the predecessor of the Small Boat Sailing Scheme). The value of this system from the perspective of developing racing sailors is that it ensures practical experience of participation within racing events to compliment the coaching given. It also ensures sailing takes place outside of the training environment in club and/or class activity.

The Logbook requirements are introduced within the SBSS at the Go Racing 1 level, where course participants are required to take part in a number of club races and an inter club regatta. It is the responsibility of the organisation issuing the certificates to enforce this. Course participants are required to log racing experience in Class Regional Championships in the Go Racing 2 Course.

There appears to be a lack of appreciation of many of those present at the meeting, that logbook requirements still exist for the Go Racing Levels, and there is a section in the log book that needs to be signed by the race officer before the certificate can be issued. The real issue is the stage that logbook requirements are introduced within the scheme (ie. in year four or five).

Certification

Certificates are used to benchmark standards achieved to allow a structured progression through the scheme. It has been flagged as an issue as it allows for 'failure' on what should be a fun and



enjoyable experience. Learning to sail is a progressive skill which needs a structure and assessment before moving on to the more advanced skills.

Adult Training

There is a perception that the Small Boat Sailing Scheme is a scheme for children, and is not suitable for Adults. The reality is that the SBSS may be run in dinghies, small keelboats or multihulls for people of all ages. The predominance of instructors delivering the training are student generation, however a number of clubs and many commercial centres use adult instructors, and successfully use the scheme to teach adults also. The introduction of Cara Na Mara will help to highlight the fact that the SBSS is not simply a junior scheme, however there is a need to promote the scheme as an adult scheme also, and facilitate the training of more adult instructors.

Cara na Mara

The Cara na Mara Scheme has been introduced as a result of demand for the introduction of a sailing programme to cater for younger sailors (7-10year olds). This scheme has focussed more on the marine environment and water confidence, introducing youngsters to the hard skills of sailing in a more relaxed environment, and it dove-tails into the existing small boat sailing scheme. It provides the opportunity to be introduced to the basic sailing skills in a non-competitive environment.

It was designed with a distinct educational element with the view of introducing it into the school curriculum. It also has the added advantage of requiring knowledgeable adults (as opposed to qualified instructors) to teach many elements of the programme, thus having the potential to reduce costs.

Instructor Training

There has been a good deal of discussion relating to the training of instructors, the quality, the consistency of skill levels and the costs associated with qualifying. Currently the system for the training of instructors is managed by the ISA Training Manager supported by a select group of Instructor Trainers who help to develop the instructor training programme. As the training schemes have developed (in particular dinghy sailing), the views of the instructor trainers have diversified as younger trainers have come into the system. This diversity makes it difficult to maintain a consistent approach to the training of instructors.

There has been much debate in respect of the demand for better quality instructors which needs to be balanced against the costs associated with training them. All instructors need a basic set of supplemental skills (pre-requisites) before they can teach sailing (powerboat, VHF, first aid etc). They also need to be experienced, knowledgeable and up to date at the skill level they are teaching at. It is simply not possible to up skill instructors whilst at the same time reducing the training required to qualify, although there may be ways to ensure they have a better standard of sailing coming out of the training scheme.

The ISA has been encouraging clubs in recent years to include the pre-requisite training required for instructors within their junior training programmes and the regional development officers have helped some clubs to source funding for this training. If the club doesn't provide this training, the other option is to access it through the commercial centres at a commercial rate.

There has been feedback that there are too many instructor qualifications and endorsements necessary to teach all levels of the training programme and the system needs simplifying. It is essential however that instructors have proved competency in the skills they are qualified to teach. The concept of the current SBSS is that once a club has established the training programme best



suited to their environment, they would train their instructors with the appropriate qualifications to teach those modules. In practice, particularly for the smaller clubs this has proved to be difficult.

Role of the ISA vs Role of Clubs and Classes

The role of Clubs and Classes is to organise and run the activities that will help to achieve their objectives, and encourage participation within our sport. The ISA's role is to guide, support and facilitate this. The ISA held regional meetings a number of years ago to explore the options for establishing a National Watersports Centre, at which the ISA could provide the facility to organise coaching, training and racing events. The strong feedback from clubs and classes at the time was that the ISA had no role in organising activities; that is the business of the clubs and classes.

Junior Progression

There is a strong belief that we need to find a way of making sailing more 'fun' and to develop a pathway for young sailors transitioning into senior classes. The ideas presented included the promotion of double handed sailing, getting disused boats back on the water, club boats, family sailing, open days for non- performance pathway classes, hosting multi class events etc.

We have seen with the ISA's Performance Pathway, how a structured and coordinated partnership between the ISA the clubs and the classes can deliver success, and we need to adopt a similar approach to develop a similar progression for club sailors.

Even within the performance pathway classes, only a very few of the elite squads aspire to Olympic success leaving the vast majority of sailors with no direction or structure to feed them into the domestic classes. The ISA has done some work in this respect with the 'Key Club Scheme'. The original objective of this scheme aims to grow membership and implement best practice within clubs, however for a number of reasons was never implemented. With a little tweaking it may be possible to integrate the classes into the scheme and use it to develop a club pathway.

Performance Pathway

The Performance Pathway is by definition an elitist programme that has the single aim to win a medal at Olympic Games. The Olympic programme is funded by the Irish Sports Council (ISC). The recent successes of the programme have allowed us to attract some commercial sponsorship to boost the programme.

The ISC funding is 'ring fenced' for the Olympic Programme and is not available to be spent on other programmes within the sport. The Olympic Programme is closely monitored by the ISC, and performance is reviewed and spending against the Performance Plan is agreed with them on a quarterly basis. The funding is only made available as long as the Olympic Programme continues to improve and deliver results at Olympic level.

Because (in Olympic terms) the funding is not sufficient to run a complete programme involving all classes, we are obliged to channel our resources on a focussed programme, limiting the pathway classes and indeed the senior squads supported. Of the five boats that qualified for the London 2012 Olympics, only three of the campaigns were supported by the ISA's Olympic Programme.

Because of the hype around the Olympics, this programme generates the most media coverage within the sport, and as a result is seen by some to be the main focus of ISA activities. The reality is, that the Olympic Programme is a stand-alone programme that compliments the core activities of the organisation, and benefits club and class sailing by supporting the (few) classes within the pathway, and raising the profile of the sport nationally and internationally.



Knowledge Sharing

There was a great deal of feedback in respect of communication and knowledge sharing between ISA, the clubs and classes. Currently the main forum for this is the ISA Annual Conference held in the spring, and more latterly the regional meetings held in the Autumn. The continued resource available to Clubs to facilitate this is the regional development programme which has two Regional Development Officers supporting clubs with the development of their activities and providing information on the initiatives of other clubs.

There is currently little or no opportunity or forum, for Classes to communicate with each other and/or collectively with the ISA.

Interaction with Clubs & Classes

We have received a number of comments in respect of the ISA's visibility within clubs and our direct interaction locally. In 2012 the ISA staff (CEO, Training Manager, Racing Manager and Regional Development Officers) clocked up 100,000km between them visiting clubs. The main issue is the visibility of those visits, as different staff members will meet with different people in the Club depending on the issue being discussed. These meetings more often than not take place without the knowledge of other committee members and/or club members.

The only really visible presence is at events and prize giving's where Staff and Board members welcome invites from event organisers, and will make the effort where possible to attend.

Every club has an ISA Liaison Officer appointed, whose role it is to communicate relevant information from the ISA to the relevant individuals within the organisation. In some clubs this system works very well, and in some clubs this is non-existent. There is currently no such system within the Class structures.

Second Hand Boat Market

A number of suggestions related to the development of a second boat sale/exchange section on the ISA's website. This would help to facilitate the transfer of boats, and help clubs and classes to source available craft for newcomers.

Statistics

What has been highlighted during this process is the lack of hard data and statistics to support many of the arguments presented. This is an issue that needs cooperation and commitment from event organisers and activity providers, and is a difficult task to collate as inevitably once an event is over, filling out forms to record statistics relating to the event and sending it to the ISA, and/or recording the data on-line is low on the list of priorities for event organisers.