

Chairman's Report to 2008 WYA AGM

It is only 10 months since I took on the role of Chairman, and I am pleased to report that the Association has continued to make considerable progress on several fronts.

It is difficult to single out any one of these areas, so in no particular order of priority I report on the following topics.

1. Finances.

The accounts to the year end of March 2007 show that the Association maintains a healthy balance, but when considered in the light of the increased activities in all areas, indicate that a bare minimum of funds are available to continue our programmes. The Directors are very aware of our reliance on grant assistance from the Sports Council for Wales, and that continuance of these monies depends on continuing to deliver the agreed programmes.

We have been fortunate in the last year to co-opt David Vickery to our Board Committee, bringing in his expertise in the management of our accounts. Working closely with our Office Manager, Ceri Yeomans, he has introduced systems and we can now say that the management of our finances has never been better documented. As technology has been introduced, the role of the Treasurer has changed, and with Ceri doing most of the work, book keeping and such like has disappeared. The Directors are aware of this change, and will be bringing forward proposals to reflect them at the next AGM.

2. Performance.

The Association continues to offer training programmes to young people, which have resulted in a large number of Welsh youth and junior sailors being offered places in GB and Olympic development squads. I will be asking our Director of Sailing to report to this meeting on these in more detail, but I am delighted that last year saw an increase on an already successful 2006, and am confident that we are now seeing the benefits of actions taken over the last 5 years or so..

3. Development.

Our three RDOs have operated in their respective regions with success, but also worked together to produce our Coaching Plan, to provide training for volunteers and sailors. This plan releases funding to part fund training for our volunteers and the challenge in the coming months will be to ensure that all such training is delivered in an effective manner.

Our RDOs are now roughly 2/3rds of their way through their 3 year contracts, and one area still causing considerable difficulty is the provision of accurate data to SCW on participation, membership and growth. Their role is to grow the sport of sailing in Wales, and, quite rightly, SCW require figures to demonstrate success or otherwise. The RDOs are dependent on the information coming from you, the members, and have been fighting a difficult battle in some cases, as clubs do not record the figures required. They will personally therefore be visiting each club in their regions this year to assist in collating these figures, which will help improve their accuracy. Interestingly, RYA are now starting to look at ways to collect the same information, and I am sure that they will be making this data available in future years, easing the burden on our staff.

4. Staffing

The Directors recognised some while ago that the Association had been very fortunate to have Bob Lowe as Chairman at a time when he was able to conduct the day to day management of the WYA. Notwithstanding his willingness and effectiveness in carrying out this role, it was not sustainable to ask a volunteer to continue to give up so much of his free time. Therefore we resolved to seek funding to appoint a part time business manager, and approaches were made to RYA and to SCW. The latter were

always appreciative of the situation, but it took some months to convince RYA to part fund a post, but by now this had evolved to a full time position. This was finalised in June of last year, and we were extremely pleased to be able to appoint Tim Hall to the new post of Director of Sailing at the start of October.

Consequently, his old role of Welsh High Performance Manager was advertised and Iwan Basten, our RDO (South) was successful in his application. Finally, the RDO (South) post has been filled by Ben Smith, formerly running Llanishen Sailing Centre.

I know that all three will be doing an excellent job for the Association, bringing new views and enthusiasm to sailing in Wales. With a team now comprising 6 very dedicated people, I am positive that we will continue to improve on our delivery, both in terms of development and performance.

Ruth Sharratt, our Green Blue Project Officer continues to spread the message on environmental matters, and is available to talk and to mentor clubs and sailors in helping to protect the world we live in.

During the year, Robert Dangerfield, our RYA Regional Communicator had to stand down, and I would like to thank him for all the work he has done over the years in publicising our successes and guiding us through the pitfalls of dealing with the media. He was always going to be a hard act to follow, but I am delighted that Hamish Stuart has taken over and built upon success to a tremendous degree. He has excellent contacts with many journalists and broadcasters, so if your club has a news story that you would like to see given wider coverage, please contact Hamish via our office.

5. Sports Council for Wales.

It would be invidious not to mention the role our Sports Council has played in the successes of the last twelve months. Their support, both practically and in other ways has always been available, and we have grown in confidence as an Association over the years. Before I was elected Vice Chairman, it always appeared to me that the attendance at a meeting of our Development Officer was an occasion to be very careful about what we said in front of him/her. Now, as trust has grown, we are disappointed when Steve Morgan, our current DO is unable to be with us, and there is now a never ending two way flow of information, ideas and, sadly, paperwork between us which all benefits sailing in Wales.

On the subject of SCW staff, I would also wish to express our thanks to Alan Williams, for his continuing support and wise counsel; to Clare Heydon, whose patience with us whilst we produced our Coaching Plan was much appreciated and to Steve Morgan, again, for his overall support. There are many other SCW staff who have contributed to our successes, too many to mention, but they know who they are.

6. Royal Yachting Association

Taking on the role of Chairman, I was expecting to find meetings with the RYA different, and I have not been disappointed. Their support to us, both financially and practically has been exemplary and I was pleased to welcome their CEO, Rod Carr to Wales on two occasions.

I am happy to report that a very successful pilot of the RYA OnBoard programme, introducing children to the sport was run at Llanishen Sailing Centre by Ben Smith. Following meetings with the RYA's Jon White, limited funding has now been agreed to introduce OnBoard to up to three other commercial centres, and if the results at Llanishen can be used as a guide, over 2000 children may have the opportunity to try sailing as a sport in the coming year.

The RYA are also hosting our new website, the lack of which has been lamented for some time. Much work on the site has been done by Christine Stanley, and I must thank her for her efforts. However, the site cannot work without information and all WYA staff will be looking for news and pictures to fill the site with content that will attract more people into our sport.

7. Volunteers

Perhaps I am leaving the most important part of this report to last, but we are under no illusions that without our volunteers, we would not be delivering even a small part of our programmes. We have attempted to recognise their value by assisting them to gain professional qualifications in our sport through training programmes, but I do not think that we can ever repay them sufficiently. We will continue to improve our provision for them through the Coaching Plan, and continue to offer our grateful thanks for all their efforts.

Some volunteers can be mentioned by name, especially as they are standing aside after many years service. This year sees our Treasurer, David Shepherd, stepping down after seven years in the role. He has brought a different vision to our finances, and we are extremely grateful for all the work he has done. He is not completely clearing his desk, as he will be carrying on until a successor comes forward, but as mentioned above, the Treasurer's role has changed as technology has moved forward, and there is a lot less for him to do now than when he started.

I would also like to thank Bob Lowe, for his continuing efforts in North Wales, managing the business until October and continuing to provide much help to myself and to Tim Hall as he takes on his new duties.

The Board also co-opted two other members at the start of the year, Dave Vickery has been already mentioned, and Bill Jackson joined to provide valuable management and marketing experience. My thanks to both of them for the hours they have given to the Association. As an aside, it occurs to me that Bill is the only Board member doing any sailing.....perhaps he has not enough WYA work to do!

Our company secretary, Laurence Roberts continues to keep us on a legal path as and I must again thank him for all the hours he puts in, long may it continue.

8. Other matters

Because I know that he will not mention it, I offer the Association's congratulations to Tim Hall for two outstanding successes. Firstly becoming Flying Fifteen World Champion with Mike Hart in April, and secondly being voted Welsh Coach of the Year in November. I had the honour to attend the awards, and apart from being on tenterhooks before the announcement, was delighted and proud in the way that Tim apportioned his success to all the other coaches who have worked with WYA over the years. He reminded all present that success is a team effort, and it is a motto that serves us well.

I am also pleased to report that the Public Enquiry of the proposals to change Llanishen Reservoir into 325 houses came out firmly against the plans, with agreement with our case that the much reduced sailing area would be unviable. Sadly this is not the end of the matter, but we continue to monitor the situation closely and will support any proposals that will improve the opportunities to learn to sail on the water area.

Congratulations are also due to Blake Shaw of Tenby Sailing Club for his RYA Regional award in November. Blake was the long term chairman of the Training Committee, and it was under his guidance that many of the successful practises we continue to use came to be adopted.

9. Summary

The Association continues to progress and develop sailing in Wales. More success is apparent in certain activities, such as performance, but we are aware of the areas in which we need to improve, and have

taken steps to address them, with the appointment of a full time Director of Sailing, to manage the staff more effectively than volunteer directors can do.

We will continue to promote, develop and mentor volunteers to the limits of staff and finance, as we strongly believe that this is the only way in which our sport can continue to grow.

In the next 12 months, we will address the requirements of the next four year plan, to take us from 2009 to 2013, and include the priorities identified in the Springboard review held in October. This maintains our focus on club and volunteer development, which has served us well and proved to be the correct direction to move.

At present, sailing is the most successful sport in the UK, and I believe that we are certainly one of the top, if not the top, performing sport in Wales. To maintain these standards and to improve on such results is a greater challenge than getting there in the first place, but with the commitment of staff and volunteers that we have, it is not an impossible goal, but one which we can and will achieve.

Chris Basten
Chairman
January 2008