

Written evidence submitted by the Royal Yachting Association (RYA)

DCMS Committee Inquiry – Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS Sectors

About the RYA

The RYA is the national governing body for all forms of sailing and power boating within the UK. Originally formed in 1875 to bring some form of organisation to yacht racing the organisation has evolved significantly since then and now covers a wide range of areas across both leisure and commercial boating. It is a not for profit members organisation with a membership in the region of 112,000 people who have interests in all forms of boating on the coast and inland waterways. We have nearly 1,500 affiliated clubs and classes.

The RYA manages the British Sailing Team and is responsible for one of the UK's most successful Olympic medal winning sports.

In very broad terms the RYA has 4 main areas of focus:

- Training – The provision of training and certification to both the leisure and small commercial vessel sectors, supported by the provision of a range of world leading publications and training resources. RYA Training is a global operation with 2,400 recognised training centres and 25,000 RYA trained instructors.
- Participation – Our Sport Development team encourage opportunity and access for all to be able to participate in all types of boating and water sports activities
- Performance – To identify, support and retain the best competitors and volunteers across all forms of racing. Our coaching and development schemes actively support our country's top sailors from talented juniors to Olympic and World Champions.
- Membership – To understand, represent and promote the interests of RYA members and the British boating public in general.

Evidence Requested by the DCMS Committee

1. What is the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector

The RYA has been impacted directly both financially and strategically which presents a threat to the future health of the organisation. Unlike many other NGBs the RYA is not predominantly reliant on grant funding with 60% of income being self-generated. This financial independence means that the organisation has been more badly hit with our diverse revenue streams being impacted and our major training related revenue experiencing a 90% reduction. The association is operating with staff predominantly working from home and 43 staff are currently furloughed. Government

business support and the flexibility on future funding from UK Sport and Sport England has been helpful and appreciated.

The RYA represents a diverse and varied range of interests and Covid-19 has impacted dramatically across the RYA community. Key impacts have been:

- Cessation of any boating activity since the start of lockdown and absence of any RYA organised events and activity
- Immediate closure of affiliated sailing clubs and recognised training centres with severe business interruption consequences (lost revenue streams and continuing overhead costs)
- Interruption of the British Sailing Team's medal winning preparations for the Olympics (now rescheduled for 2021)
- The need to develop a strategy for the restart of boating activity and managing the expectations of personal members and affiliates as it has been implemented

The RYA has had to support the differing needs of our members through providing advice and guidance and making representations to Government and other stakeholders. Communication has been a key issue with the need to understand Government guidance and apply it to the differing needs of our membership. The RYA Coronavirus hub can be accessed at <https://www.rya.org.uk/knowledge-advice/current-affairs/Pages/coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>.

Our work has gone through a series of phases and we have had to manage key issues as they have emerged and developed. These have included:

- Understanding Government business support schemes and how clubs, recognised training centres and the many in our community who are self-employed could benefit
- The closure of marinas preventing boat owners accessing their property to undertake security and maintenance checks
- The resumption of elite athlete training
- The restart of recreational boating and limited recommencement of club activity
- The ongoing absence of a resumption of training activity.

The RYA has Home Country organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Our challenges in managing the crisis have been complicated by the differing approaches taken and guidance issued by the Devolved Governments. It is recognised that this will also have presented issues for DCMS.

Overall, we are grateful to DCMS and UK Sport for the approach that they have taken in respect of elite sport and protecting the interests of elite athletes. In respect

of the Olympic team we are very concerned about the funding implications of the next Olympic cycle with two Olympics within a 3 year period. Any certainty that could be offered by DCMS beyond March 2021 would be a great help. An economic recession would also likely impact sponsorship both of individual athletes and of the overall GB Sailing Team. It may become harder for individuals to feel that they can make the financial and personal commitment to elite sailing.

2. How effectively has support provided by DCMS, other Government Departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs

The diversity of the RYA family and the issues that we have faced has seen us interact directly with a number of Government departments including DCMS, DEFRA, DfT and interpret guidance coming out of others including BEIS, Treasury, Cabinet Office and DfE. We have engaged directly throughout with UK Sport and Sport England. Wider stakeholder engagement has had to take place with marine industry trade bodies and port and harbour authority representative bodies. We have worked in partnership with other NGBs and the Sport & Recreation Alliance to share best practice and maximise representational activity.

We would like to record our respect for the officials that we have worked with in DCMS, UK Sport and Sport England for the professionalism and responsiveness that they have demonstrated in their management of the issues for sport and recreation arising out of the crisis.

DCMS

Of all the Government departments that the RYA has interacted with DCMS has been the most responsive.

The inclusion of watersports as one of the first activities to be permitted to restart was fundamental to our 'Return to Boating' strategy and a great boost to our affiliated clubs. DCMS listened to our representations (working closely with the Sport and Recreation Alliance), particularly in respect of the definition required to avoid any ambiguity that all types of boating activity could legitimately recommence.

DCMS's rapid support of the 'return to training for elite sport' has also been really helpful to get our elite athletes back training again.

It would be helpful if DCMS could build and demonstrate a broader understanding of all sporting sectors in addition to the mass participation and high-profile sports.

UK Sport and Sport England

Our Racing and Sport Development departments have worked closely with both agencies and have been impressed and appreciative of the support provided with clear direction from the outset, good communication and focus on financial support. The rapid response of UK Sport (confirming funding until March 2021) and Sport England (confirming roll over funding for 12 months) was a great help and gave much needed stability. The emergency funding provided by Sport England has been important to the survival of some clubs.

Other Government Departments

The financial support provided by Government has been essential. Understanding the various schemes and providing advice and guidance to all in the RYA community who can benefit has been a major task for the RYA throughout the crisis.

Government has been responsive to addressing deficiencies in support, for example for the self-employed which was vital for many RYA coaches and instructors. It is estimated that there are in excess of 20,000 self-employed individuals engaged in the boating and watersports sector. We have experienced three significant issues in respect of business support schemes:

- Some sections of our community not being able to access any support e.g. organisations with no ratable value but who have still had to meet financial commitments. We have made representations with other NGB's and the SRA on behalf of those who have 'fallen through the cracks'
- Funding is being administered at a local authority level and we have seen differences in interpretation across the country
- It has become apparent (and not made clear at the outset) that grants paid to sports clubs could be taxable

A major issue, which is not limited to experience during the Covid-19 crisis, is poor inter-departmental communication and liaison. We have experienced this in respect of representations that we have made on specific issues and lack of consistency and timing issues related to advice being issued by different departments (Cabinet Office, DCMS, DEFRA, and DfT).

The RYA has written to Government ministers on four occasions during the crisis and not received a timely response that specifically addressed the issues of concern. This included a letter to the Sports Minister on an urgent issue that did not receive a response for four weeks.

3. What is the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 on the sector and what support is needed to deal with those

The RYA has concerns about the future of our sport and recreation in respect of participation, training, volunteering, and the viability of clubs. Analysis of relevant KPIs and feedback received during the first two months of the crisis indicate negative impact on RYA activity and programmes relevant to all of these areas. All of these issues will have an impact on the RYA as an NGB and membership organisation and the marine industry that services the market.

Participation - the economic impact of predicted future unemployment will see many households have less disposable income for participation in sport and recreation. There is concern that older generations who will continue to be Covid vulnerable will not return to their former activity. We are concerned that successful RYA

participation programmes will be negatively impacted for some time. Our OnBoard programme which introduces young people (8-18 year olds) to the sport will be impacted until school children resume normal life and RYA Sailability which enables people with every type of disability to have a sailing experience will be greatly affected by ongoing social distancing measures. Continuing Sport England support for participation programmes such as the RYA's OnBoard scheme and Sailability will be vital.

Training – Training businesses have been closed since lockdown started in March which coincided with the annual start of the boating season. Commercial operations have been unable to function and individuals have been deprived of income anticipated at this time of year. Continuing restrictions on numbers that can be involved in outdoor activity and social distancing measures have prevented any meaningful resumption of boating training activity. RYA recognised training centres have been decimated and there is serious concern that many training related businesses will not survive a prolonged period of closedown. Sailing schools, holiday companies, charter businesses and sail training charities are considered to be vulnerable and many trained individuals may leave the industry to seek more secure employment. It is considered that it could take two years for RYA training income and our recognised training centres to see sustainable recovery.

Volunteering – All sports need willing volunteers to make organised activity happen and many clubs rely on older members to perform key roles in the management and governance of their organisations. The need to shelter elderly and at risk groups is having an impact and the concern is that many may not return to their volunteering roles.

Clubs – the recovery of clubs will take months and there is concern that some will not survive. The reality for many clubs is that revenue streams have been turned off whilst some overheads have continued. Return to full operation will be gradual as restrictions carry on and ongoing social distancing requirements will continue to adversely impact revenue generating bar/catering facilities when they are able to reopen. The recovery of more commercial clubs will mirror the challenges to be faced by all businesses in the leisure and hospitality sector. The issues related to participation referred to above will impact on club membership. Many clubs collected membership fees prior to the start of the pandemic and therefore the true impact on operations and membership numbers may not be seen until spring 2021. Government business support measures have enabled the continuation of some clubs and consideration needs to be given to ongoing support. Additionally some clubs have faced the issue of insurance underwriters not paying out on pandemic business interruption claims.

Other Issues

We fear that Covid-19 will set back our work in respect of diversity and inclusivity. Support for our work to encourage more participation in boating from BAME communities, children from non-sailing families and lower income groups could be affected. Continued support from Government for this work and RYA participation programmes are going to be key to rebuilding momentum in these areas of our work.

Junior and youth sailing has stopped with no events since March. This has been hard on this group of promising young sailors who are likely to have missed their last year as youth sailors. We need to be careful that this does not create a 'missing generation' of potential elite sailors.

4. What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19

We believe that Government departments and agencies could take more of a 'partnership approach' with NGBs who play a key role in advising their communities who participate in sport. DCMS should trust NGBs and provide more advance notice on key announcements that would enable NGBs to prepare accurate guidance before issues appear in the public domain.

There needs to be much more and improved coordination and liaison between Government Departments. A number of Departments have interests in the boating and watersports sector. DCMS, the Department for Transport (ports and harbours) and DEFRA (inland waterways) should have been much more joined up throughout the crisis. There have been a number of occasions when this has gone badly wrong with conflicting advice leading to public confusion and massively increased workloads for NGBs.

Lessons can be learnt from the approach taken by Sport England who took clear and decisive action and focussed on a small number of key objectives

5. How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges

The crisis has demonstrated that sport and exercise is key to the wellbeing of the nation and keeping individuals physically and mentally healthy. We hope that Government recognises the ability of sport to reach out to every corner of the country, regardless of ethnic background, sex, religion, financial ability etc. and that it reinforces the need for future continued support to encourage participation from grass roots clubs upwards.

Covid-19 has accelerated some evolutions in our sport and recreation. We have developed digital engagement with our clubs and personal members through e-sailing competitions that have proved to be extremely popular. We hope that going forward, DCMS will better support and help us to capitalise on these opportunities.

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