



Chief Operating Officer Report October 2020

Introduction

I was delighted to join Waterski and Wakeboard Scotland as Chief Operating Officer in April this year. At my interview and pre-appointment discussions, I saw a friendly and dedicated group of volunteer Directors who are all dedicated to the sport and are very keen to implement change and re-establish its popularity in Scotland. They were honest with me about the challenges of the past and those that lie ahead, but I was excited to hear them describe their exciting vision for a sport with a strong community, and that made me really keen to work with them.

They had made great strides to laying the foundations for change, but then COVID-19 came along and threw a spanner in the works.

When I took up post Scotland was in the thick of the COVID-19 lockdown – no sporting activity (other than individuals walking, running or cycling once a day), face to face meetings or travel more than 5 miles were allowed. The initial strategies and plans that the Board had worked on had had to be put on hold, and even the targets agreed in relation to our funding from sportScotland had been suspended. The priority had, quite simply, to be survival – trying to ensure that clubs and venues would not face permanent closure due to the financial pressures resulting from lockdown. Almost everything else had to be put on hold.

Each of the Directors and our sportScotland Partnership Manager, Barry Cook, were all fantastically supportive and each spent a lot of time in virtual meetings with me, helping me understand the various structures in the sporting sector. I'm really grateful to them all for their help, and for their continued support.

My initial weeks were spent reading through various documents and doing desk research – I needed to try to get up to speed with the set up at sportScotland and BWSW and, of course, find out about the clubs and venues around Scotland. It was difficult not to be able to get out and meet people in person but, through the 'magic' of tele and digital communications, I was able to introduce myself and start shaping a picture in my head of how everyone and everything inter-linked.

During this time there was a fairly intense period of dialogue and engagement with sportScotland and other Scottish Governing Bodies (SGBs) regarding how sporting activity could safely be reintroduced.

I found myself attending regular digital meetings with them and the Minister for Sport as we tried to find a way to establish a collective, safe and carefully managed approach to reintroducing sporting activity. I immediately saw the importance and benefit of this collective approach. Sub-committees were formed – I represented WWS on the water sub-group which included sailing, sub-aqua, rowing and waterskiing/wakeboarding.

We discussed and worked through the challenges facing our sports to try to find a consistent approach. This was hugely important as it provided the Government, and the public, with confidence that careful consideration had been given to all aspects and that a collective, managed

and safety-first approach was being taken across similar sports. This cohesiveness, under the invaluable guidance of sportScotland, persuaded the Government that some activities could be carefully reintroduced – and waterskiing and wakeboarding were privileged to be among the first who were allowed to offer an “extension to exercise”.

Once the general guidelines had been agreed, these needed to be turned into tangible procedures for clubs and venues – for example, what actual measures needed to be put in place to ensure the 2m distance was maintained at all times. It sounds simple, but when you work through all the implications, there was certainly a lot to consider – no indoor facilities (for storing kit or changing in), single-crewed boats, no sharing of equipment, no physical paperwork or handling of money – to name but a few.

Over the coming months, some restrictions were eventually able to be lifted – but this required regular and ongoing contact with sportScotland and the SGBs and guidelines needed to be frequently updated and re-published. Although it was quite pressurised at times and I needed to issue communications and revisions frequently, I cannot over-emphasise how important that carefully managed and coordinated approach was – giving us all the confidence that we were protecting the wellbeing of our participants, staff and volunteers. I was glad to be able to help our clubs and venues by coordinating all the communications with sportScotland and the production of guidelines – and I’m reassured that it provided a lot of reassurance to many.

Throughout this period, I set up weekly video calls with club/venue representatives – mainly as a vehicle for me to get to know my key contacts, and also for folks to touch base with one another and share their current experiences/discuss any emerging issues. The feedback is that clubs are really enjoying feeling more connected with one another – so this is definitely something that we’ll keep going.

I suppose in some ways I’m lucky I joined when I did, as I immediately experienced the brilliant level of support and guidance that is available from our volunteer Directors and sportScotland, and the power of what working collectively and thinking strategically can achieve.

With the gradual easing of restrictions, I was eventually able to get out and about and visit most clubs and venues – including Loch Lomond Waterski, Foxlake Dunbar, Kyle, Glasgow Wake and Aberdeen. It was great to be able to see real (and friendly!) faces, be able to see their facilities and locations, and meet with their members - this really helped me to understand the individual and collective challenges and opportunities.

Here’s a brief summary of other things that have happened this season:

Communications

As above, the focus has been very much on providing a centralised and coordinated vehicle to cascade updates, advice and guidance regarding COVID-19 guidelines. Getting to know existing clubs and venues has also been a priority – through digital meetings and site visits - and I have also made contact with clubs who have been less involved with WWS – such as Lochearn and Perth, to discuss opportunities for us to re-engage. I’ve also had conversations with some exciting potential new ventures – including a wakepark in central belt Scotland and a waterfront regeneration exercise in Stranraer.

The Board and I have been very keenly aware that wider communications need to be increased – we are conscious that many members don’t really have visibility of the raft of work that is being undertaken. A draft communications and social media plan was produced, however COVID-19 again meant that we had to divert priority away from here, and we made the difficult decision to hold off

finalising and implementing it. Over the winter months we will be re-writing the plan, ensuring that it aligns with our emerging strategic plans (see below). We did, progress a slight re-branding, separating the logos and social media for WWS and NTS. This has given us a better platform to build on in terms of more effectively targeting our communications – it will be much clearer to folks if the message relates to NTS/Townloch or the national governing body. There will be much more SGB communication next year and we will make a much better job of keeping everyone updated about all the hard work that's being done.

As you'll see from the Governance section in this report, I've also been engaging with BWSW and establishing relationships with key contacts there, including the COO and Operations Manager. I was meant to visit them in September, but unfortunately this had to be postponed. I hope to be able to meet them in person soon though, as I have a lot of ideas about how we can work more closely together. I also recently met with their Communications Manager and she has given me some great tips on how we can start to increase media activity next season. The sportScotland communications team have also been very helpful – they've provided some brilliant training courses and advice on managing communications.

Another really useful set of connections I have made have been with the very small group of female CEOs/COOs of other SGBs. The number of females in senior positions in the sporting sector is woefully low, and we are looking to work together to see if we can think of ways to support and encourage other females to join us. I'm delighted that WWS currently has 3 women standing for Director positions this coming year – I understand that that's a really unusual position for an SGB board.

I also arranged for the prizes from the 2019 Wake Series to be issued – there had been an unfortunate delay to getting these issued due to a combination of COVID and the resignation of the Development Officer. We're be looking to gather feedback from participants to shape future competitions and events – but the time hasn't been right to do this this year due to COVID restrictions.

Financial

Most of the focus has been on keeping a look out for, and communicating information to clubs, on grant and funding options during the COVID crisis. We've also been providing updates to sportScotland regarding the financial impact of COVID for our clubs.

Fife Council contacted us earlier in the year to request that we engage with them to negotiate potential changes to our current lease for the National Training Site. Preliminary discussions with the Council were held and we have now engaged legal advisors to guide us through any future negotiations.

Governance

Yet again (it's impacted everything!) COVID has very much shaped activity in the area of governance. We've worked with clubs and venues to support them understand the guidance and produce their Standard Operating Procedures and that they have completed Risk Assessments, implemented COVID-19 communications and signage, appointed trained COVID-19 Officers and are up to speed with the helpful sportScotland guidance "Getting Facilities Fit for Sport".

Away from COVID, I've been working to establish relations with BWSW (see above) and have been invited to attend a number of their Committees to ensure that there is representation from Scottish clubs and venues.

As you will all be aware, we have also been engaging with our legal advisors to update the WWS Articles of Association and these have been issued to the membership vote.

We have also been reviewing the WWS Policy Tracker and updating policies where appropriate. Much more work will be done on this in the coming months.

As part of the preparation for the AGM, I've been gathering information on the membership across Scotland. Even in such a very difficult year, our overall membership is sitting just below 130 – which I don't think is far off previous years and is a testament to the hard work undertaken at each of our clubs. We are really looking forward to working with you all to advance this number further in the coming years.

People

WWS received funding from sportScotland for 2 roles – the COO and a Development Officer (DO). We made the decision to hold off recruiting for the DO role (again, mainly due to the situation with COVID) and instead used the time to further refine our thinking about the role.

From discussions with clubs/venues and participants, it has become more and more evident that one of the key priorities to develop for the sport is coaching. Funds are limited and so, after further discussion with sportScotland, we made the decision to move the DO role to part time and create an exciting new Development Coach role. We have now received applications for both roles and we are hoping to hold interviews shortly. Exciting times – watch this space!

We've also been doing some preliminary thinking about volunteer engagement, creating volunteer pathways and a Scottish register of volunteers. I'm hoping to work closely with the DO and clubs/venues to develop this further in the coming months.

Strategy

As I mentioned above, the current Board of Directors had done a lot of work on future strategies for the SGB which, unfortunately, had to be shelved due to COVID. But we are excited to now be able to start moving this forward again. It's really important that the SGB delivers what clubs/venues and participants need it to – and so it's critical that these groups have input to defining the strategies. We launched an online customer survey and are running an online strategy event to consider the responses and start shaping the strategic plan. All clubs and venues have been invited to bring representatives along to the meeting and we are really looking forward to the event. Again – exciting times – watch this space! (Note: by the time of the AGM, the Strategy Event will have taken place and we will be able to provide a verbal update).

Summary

It's been a challenging year - and there are many more challenges for this sport and our clubs/venues to come. But I really do believe that exciting changes are on the horizon. We will all need to think differently – how to work together, attract newcomers and deliver great customer experiences effectively and efficiently. We need to focus on the future. I'm really excited to be working with the Board, our clubs/venues and participants to help get the popularity of our sport back up again.