

SPRINT PERFORMANCE STRATEGY 2021-2028

Feedback from the first community-wide consultation
August 2020

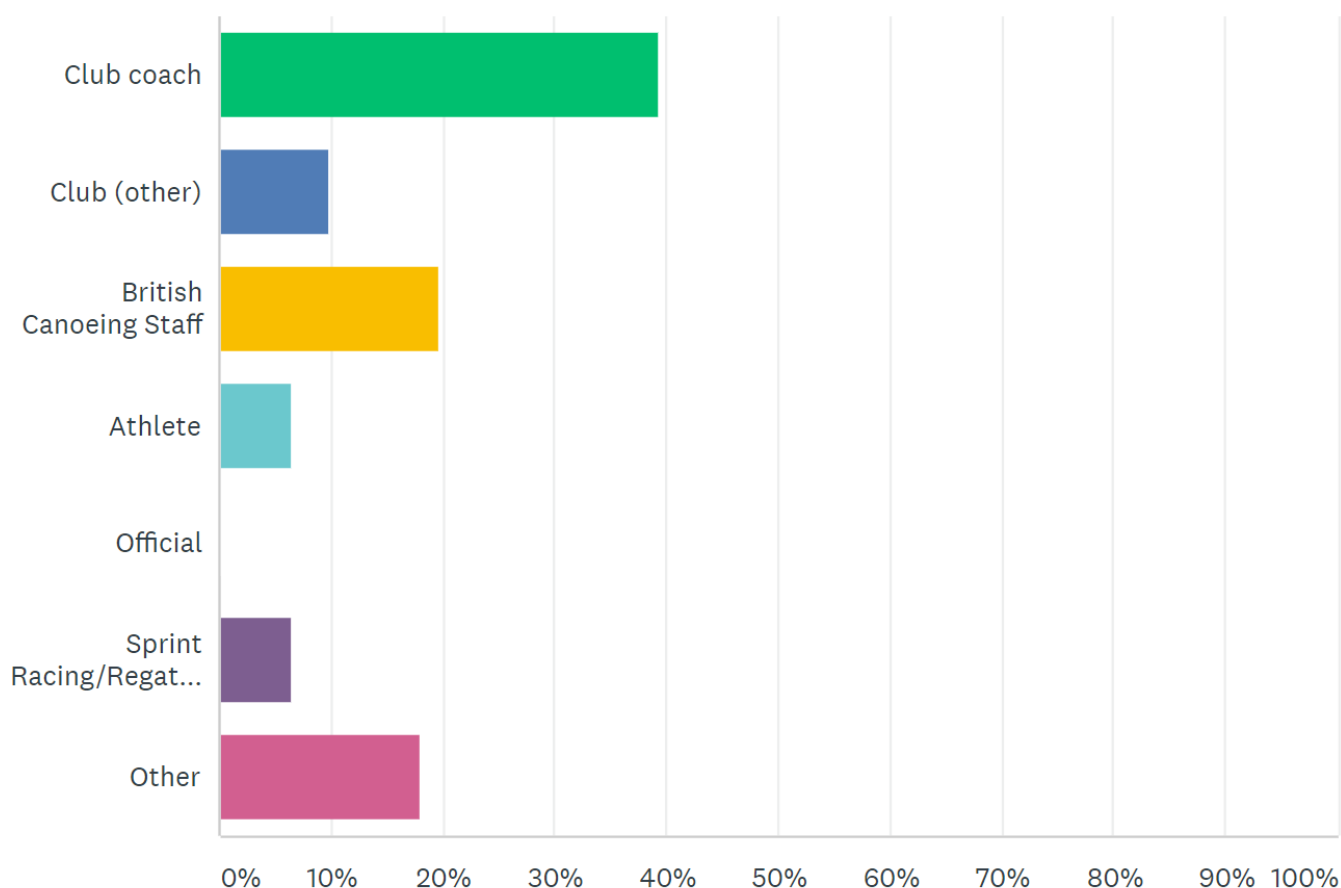
A : Process

In the third week in July 2020, a link to the first Draft Strategic Framework was posted on the British Canoeing website. The Sprint Canoe community (staff, athletes, Board members, England Talent athletes and parents, committees, home nation leads and Sprint Racing Club representatives) were direct-messaged and encouraged to feedback via an electronic 'survey monkey' survey, asking a range of quantitative and qualitative questions designed to elicit what the community were thinking and feeling about the strategy. Responses were anonymised to encourage greater openness and honesty.

The quantitative questions asked the community to score their thoughts and feelings against a particular element of the strategy on a 5-point scale. Scores of 1 or 2 were interpreted as being 'negative', a score of 3 was interpreted as being non-committal, and scores of 4 or 5 were interpreted as being positive.

Additionally, 'focus group' meetings were held via online platforms with groups representing athletes, British Canoeing performance staff, community clubs (attended by approximately 25 representatives of 16 clubs), British Canoeing senior leaders and independent, external experts.

There were 61 responses to the electronic survey, with respondees broken down as follows:



This report will set out a breakdown of both the quantitative and qualitative feedback.

B : Quantitative feedback

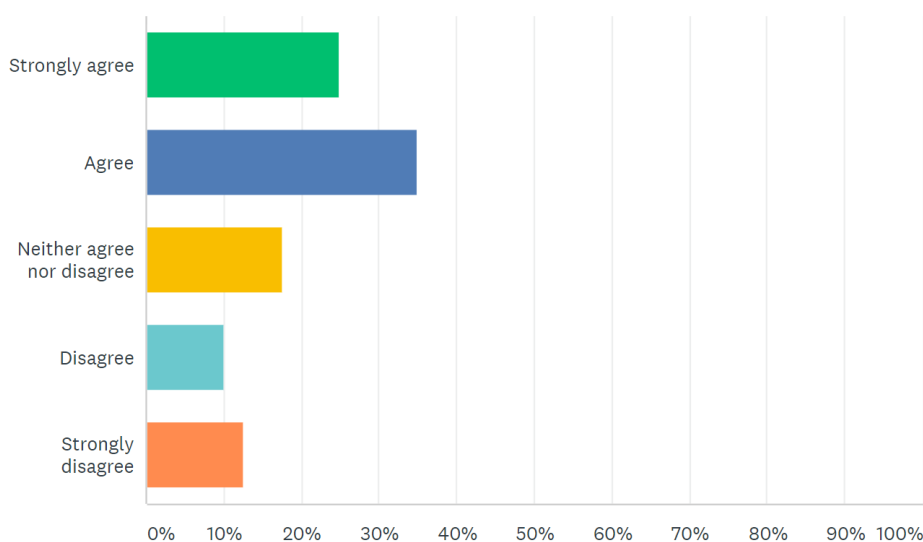
Summary

There was a majority of positive responses to the questions that encouraged the community to consider what they thought about the draft strategic framework (Questions 1 to 9 below), with an average of 66% of respondents responding positively against just 12% of respondents responding negatively. However, when asked what they felt about the framework (Questions 10 to 15 below), the balance of positive and negative responses was closer (42% positive v 28% negative). In both cases there were in excess of 20% of respondents that were non-committal and neither positive nor negative.

A breakdown of the responses to each individual question is shown below.

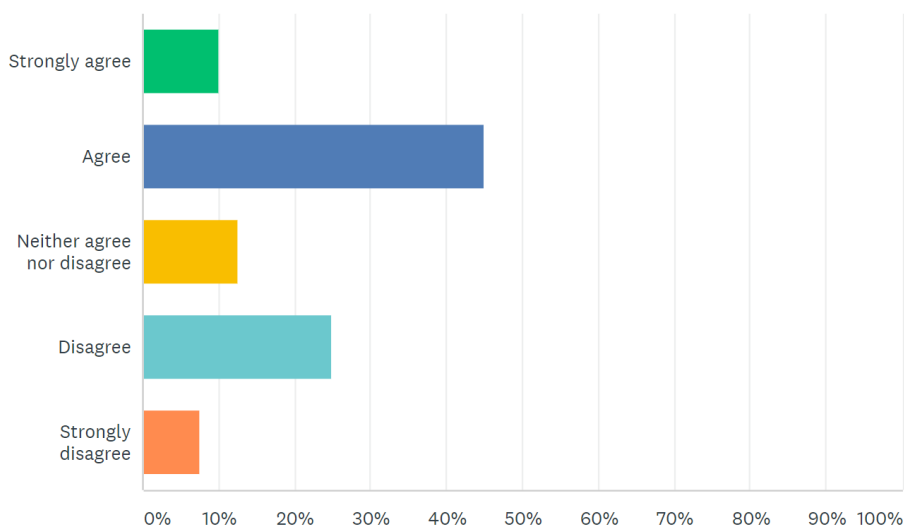
To what extent do you agree with the Vision for the Strategy?

Answered: 40 Skipped: 21



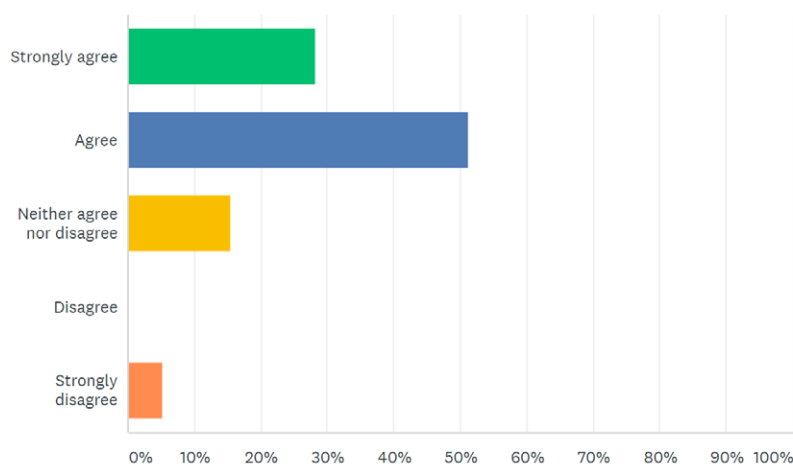
To what extent do you agree with 'What We Will See' by 2032/2028/2024?

Answered: 40 Skipped: 21



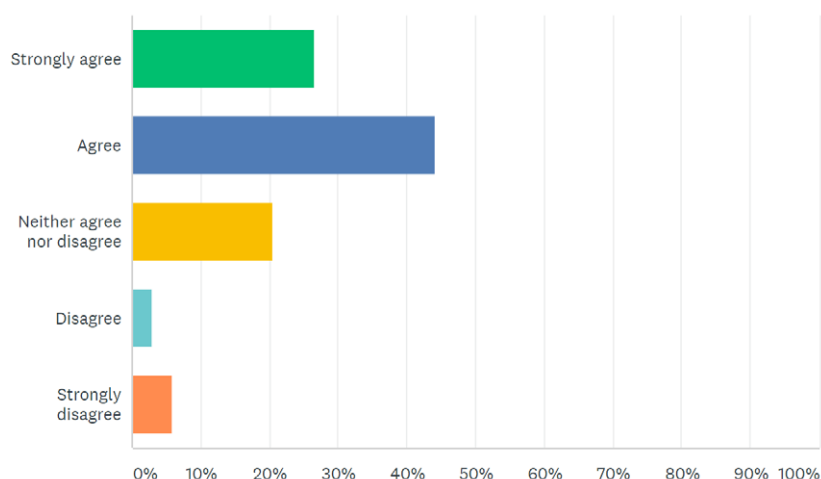
To what extent do you agree with the content presented within the section on Values and Culture?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 22



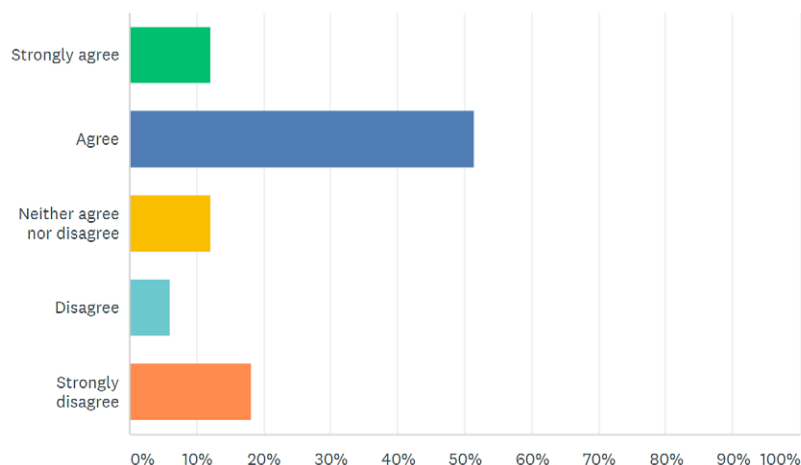
To what extent do you agree with the strategic direction of the 'World Class Programme and Performance Athletes' area?

Answered: 34 Skipped: 27



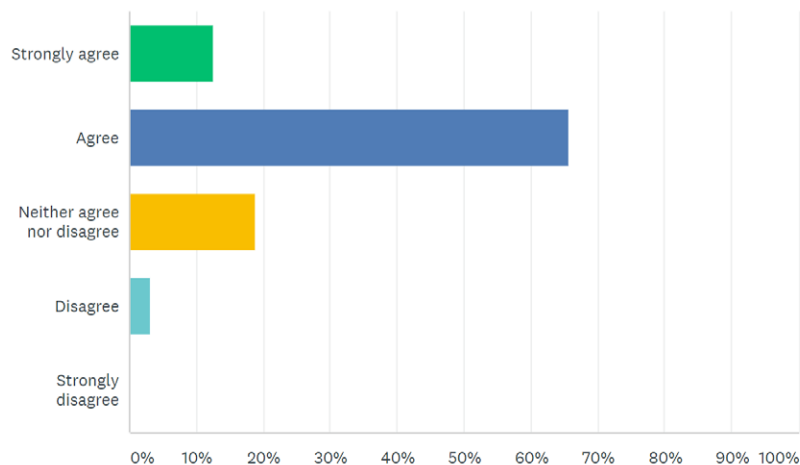
To what extent do you agree with the strategic direction of the 'What it Takes to Win and Progress' area?

Answered: 33 Skipped: 28



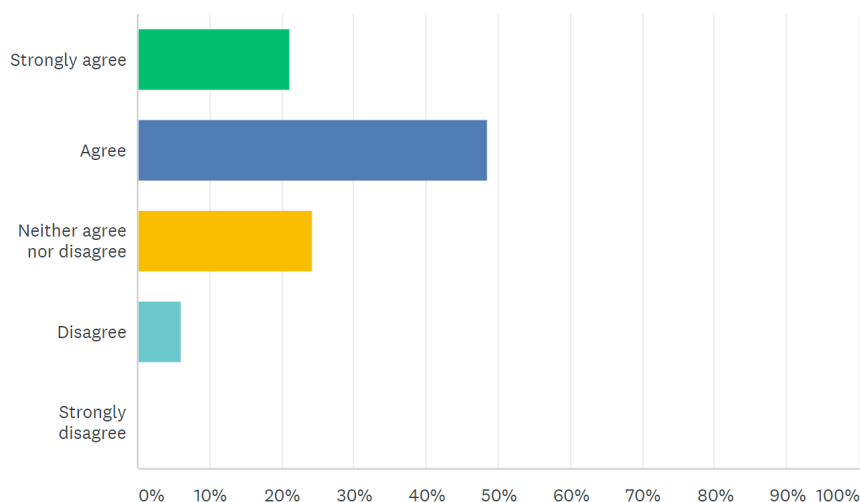
To what extent do you agree with the strategic direction of the 'Competitions' area?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 29



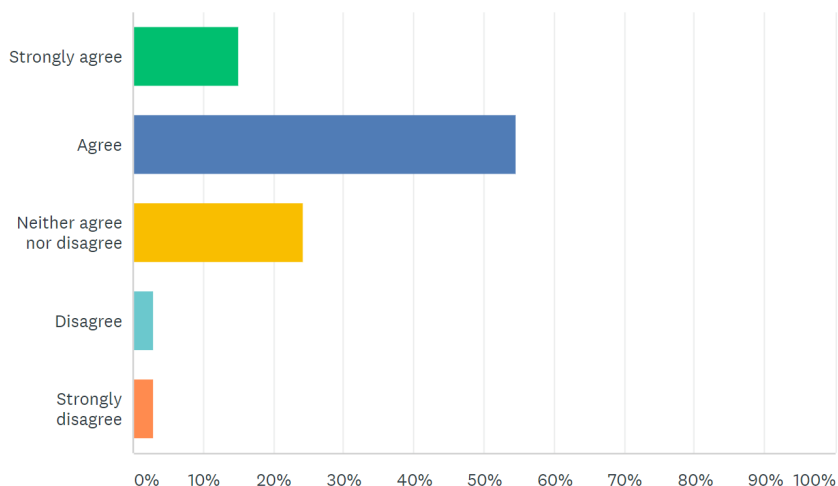
To what extent do you agree with the strategic direction of the 'Coach Development' area?

Answered: 33 Skipped: 28



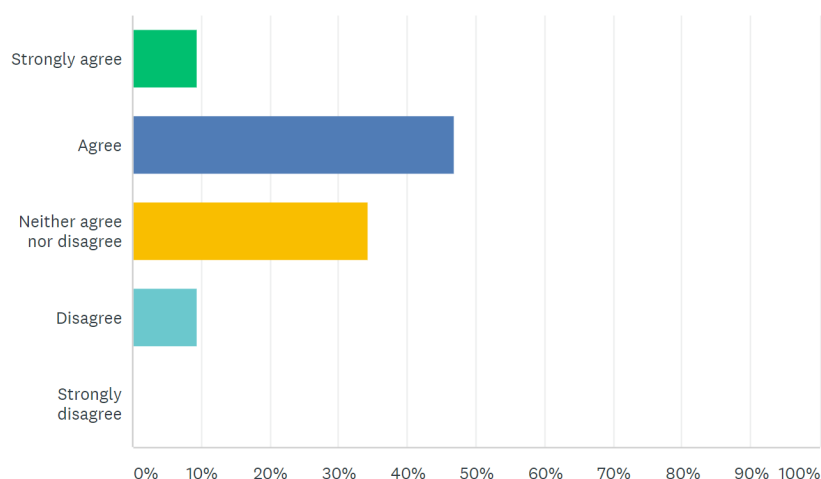
To what extent do you agree with the strategic direction of the 'Club Programmes and Talented Athletes' area?

Answered: 33 Skipped: 28



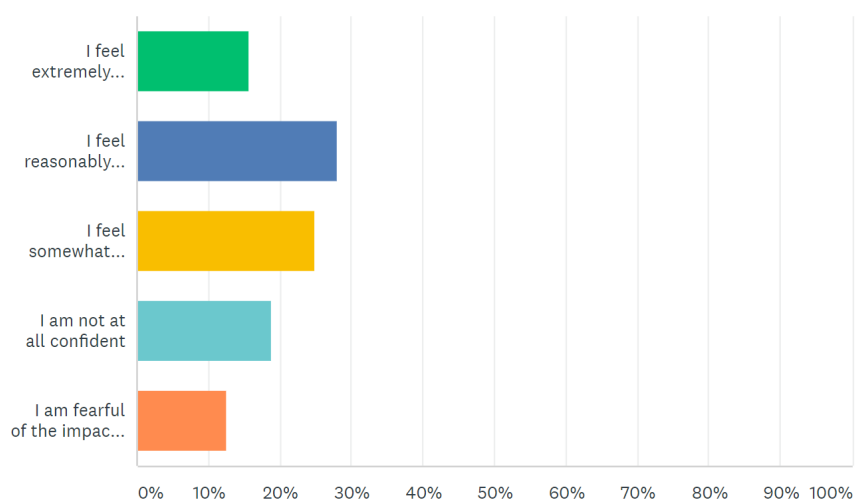
To what extent do you agree with the strategic direction of the 'Facilities' area?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 29



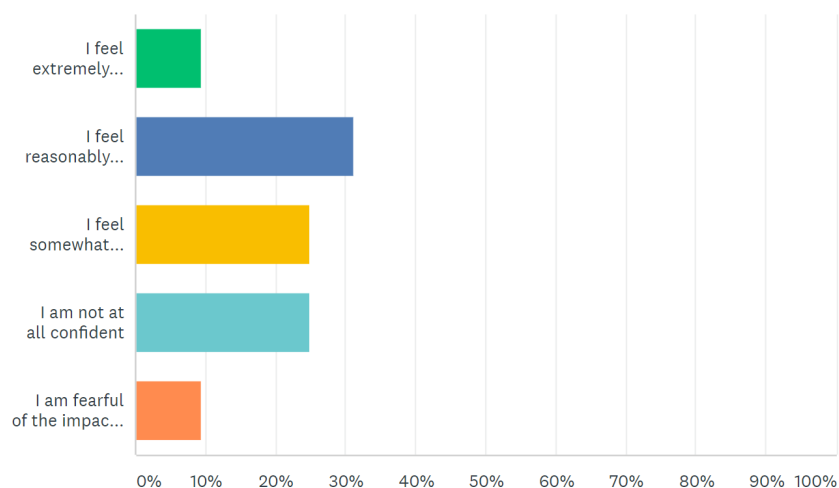
How confident do you feel that this Strategy Framework is laying the foundations to enable athletes to achieve World and Olympic success?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 29



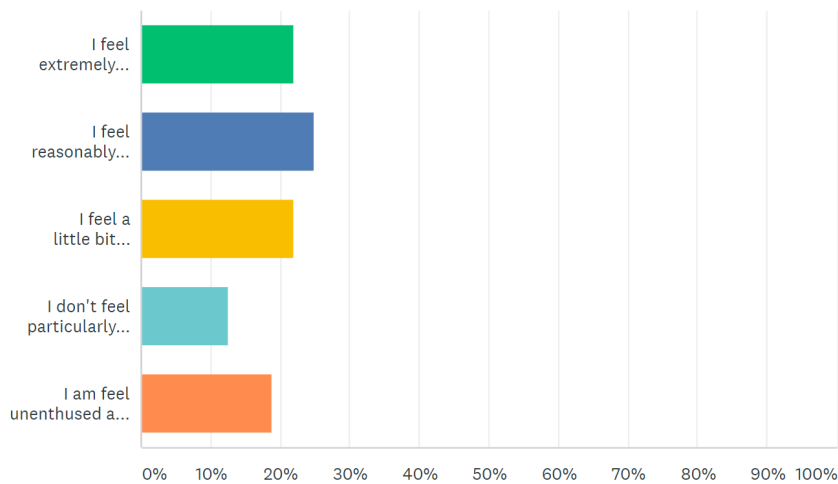
How confident are you that this Strategy Framework is laying the foundations to help unite and inspire the paddlesport community?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 29



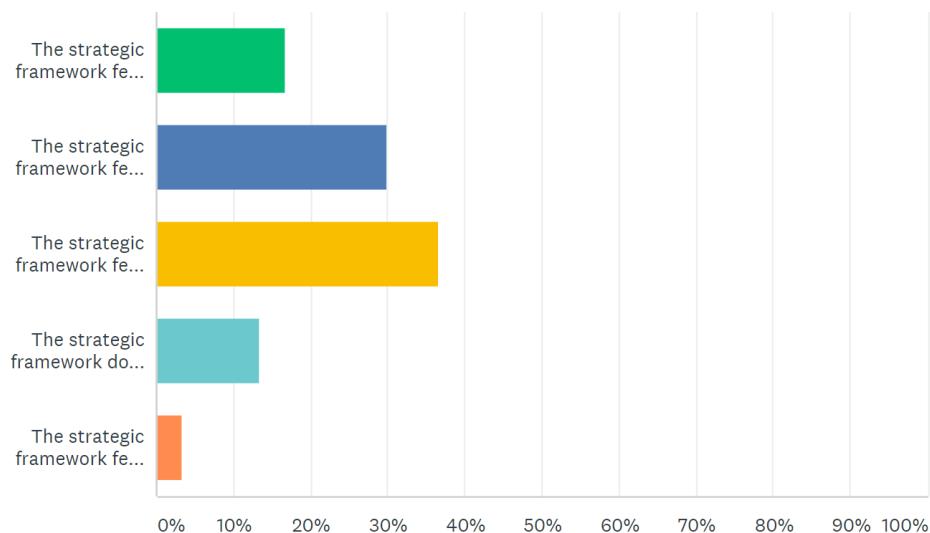
How excited and optimistic do you feel about the Strategic Framework?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 29



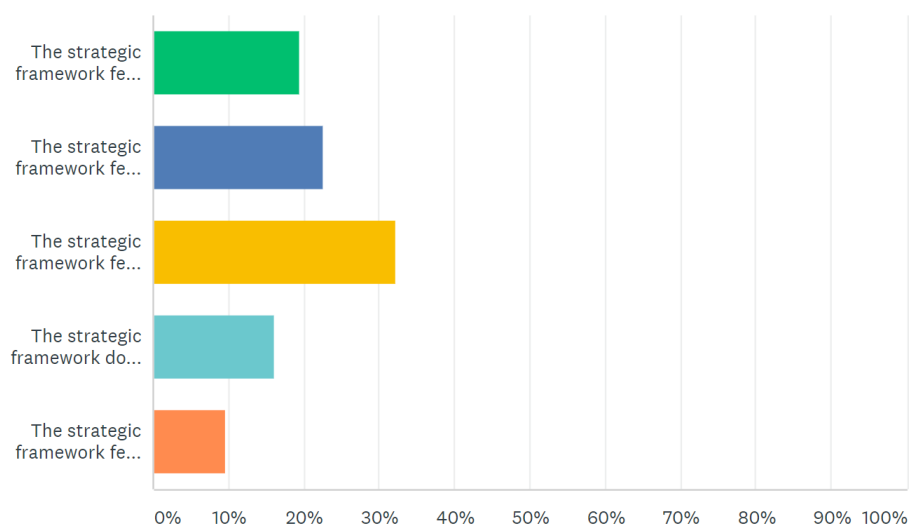
How sensible and clear does the strategic framework feel?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 31



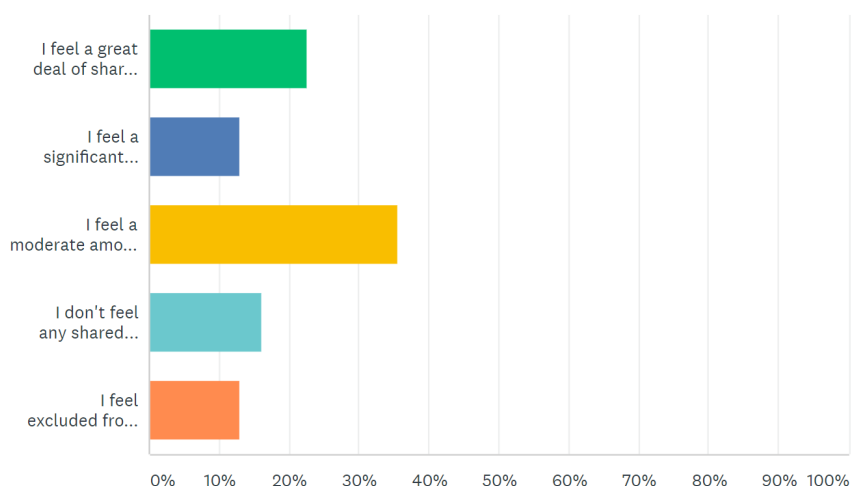
How joined up and aligned does the Strategic Framework feel?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 30



To what extent do you feel a shared ownership of the Strategic Framework

Answered: 31 Skipped: 30



C : Qualitative feedback

Summary

There is broad approval and encouragement for the general direction of the strategy. There is a recognition that the strategy development process and the language contained within the framework has sought to encourage greater collaboration and involvement of the wider community and that is welcomed. There is also a recognition that the strategy is making explicit a more human, person-centred approach to athlete development.

However, the feedback also suggests that there are areas requiring further attention and development. The language of the strategy is needed to be more inspiring and engaging, there still needs to be further clarity and detail to enable the community to make firm judgements, whilst there needs to be greater prioritisation to identify those strategies that will have the greatest impact.

Some elements are causing particular concern amongst some within the community; the specific performance focus within the vision and missions, the relationship between British Canoeing and the clubs and, in particular, where accountability and responsibility lies for delivering some elements of the strategy, and the use of data and the potential for overly restrictive What it takes to Win and What it takes to Progress frameworks.

Finally, there remain some areas which are felt to be important but are not yet satisfactorily covered in the strategic framework; the development of female athletes and coaches, the sport's approach to greater diversity, specific strategies for Crew boats and Canoe, and how the sport will grow the participation base.

A more detailed breakdown of the feedback follows;

General direction

- Whilst there is a cautious approval for the strategy, there is a recognition that this is only a framework and that more detail is still required before it will be possible to make a firm judgement on how the strategy will impact on each of the stakeholder groups
- The strategy is overly long with numerous solutions proposed within each area; it will be helpful to identify the key priorities that will have the biggest impact, and what the priorities will be if funding is restricted
- The strategy is quite cautious in its approach without any of the ground-breaking, inspiring solutions that some had been hoping for; likewise, the language contained within the strategy is cautious and needs to be more inspiring and engaging, offering greater conviction
- The key will be down to implementation, ensuring an effective change management plan and allowing sufficient time for the strategies to stick

Collaboration

- It is recognised that the strategy speaks openly about collaboration and inclusion of the wider community in developing and delivering the strategy and, providing this is followed through into action, with the whole race community working together, this could represent a step-change for the sport
- Some sense that the language of explicit collaboration is not borne out in many of the actions and are sceptical whether there will be any meaningful change
- There appears to be a shift in providing more responsibility to the clubs in developing elite athletes and this welcomed
- The nature of the British Canoeing – Club partnership, and how true partnership will be achieved in practice, needs to be made more explicit
- Many Clubs want greater autonomy and involvement in the key performance decisions
- The relationship between British Canoeing and the wider community of Clubs and athletes needs to be symbiotic, with all showing mutual respect and support
- The role of the athletes in building bridges between British Canoeing and the Clubs should not be under-estimated
- It may not be possible to satisfy every Club; British Canoeing should work with the ‘low hanging fruit’ that are willing and able to deliver British Canoeing requirements
- Consistently and continually building mutual relationships and connections is key, and that is everyone’s responsibility

Values

- The explicit statements around values is welcomed, in particular the commitment to an athlete-centred approach, as it is felt that this hasn’t always been the case
- More detail is required on how an athlete-centred approach will work in reality, if athletes are to achieve their potential, to have a great experience in the sport and to be retained for a lifelong involvement
- The values must be constant threads across all areas, and it is felt that not all areas in the strategy reflected the stated values
- The addition of ‘inclusive’ as a value would be helpful

Vision / Mission

- The vision and mission statements should focus on the growth and development of the holistic system and not Olympic medals
- The inclusion of the community in the vision and mission statements is welcomed but should be expanded
- Care should be taken that any medal ambitions are realistic as well as aspirational

World Class Programme

- It is not yet clear what improvements are being made to the support that the elite athletes will receive on the centralised programme and what will be different about the programme that encourages athletes to attend

Performance Academies

- There is a cautious welcoming of the Performance Academies model, as this allows more athletes to stay in the pathway for longer, to bridge the gap for the best 18-23 year old athletes, and for clubs to play a greater role in developing elite athletes
- There needs to be greater clarity on who will be responsible for the running of the Performance Academies, and how the relationship between British Canoeing and the Clubs will work; there are conflicting opinions on this
- If British Canoeing is responsible for the Academies, there should be clear standards and philosophies under which they will operate; however, there is some concern that they will effectively be run as mini-world class programmes by the Performance Department, under the guise of developing clubs
- If clubs are to be responsible, they should be included in the decision-making process from the start; however, there is some concern that clubs do not have the people or the infrastructure to be able to operate as elite centres
- The key to success will be the mutual relationship and partnership between British Canoeing and the host clubs
- There is concern over the role of those clubs not endorsed as Performance Academies, with the potential for a 2-tiered club system, and a suggestion that Academies should draw athletes towards them by the quality of their offering and not just recruit them from smaller clubs by right
- There should be a geographical spread of hubs to reduce barriers to access for athletes
- There is questionable incentive for Universities to support the Academies unless the sport becomes involved in the BUCS programme
- British Canoeing should continue to offer opportunities for the best 18-23 year olds to train occasionally at Nottingham on national camps

Clubs

- The strategy should be more explicit in valuing and defining the role that clubs have to play in the development of elite athletes
- There needs to be greater investment into and visible support for the clubs by British Canoeing
- Further details are needed to understand the links between Talent Clubs and Performance Academies
- The support for clubs to develop business models is vital, though this will take time and education to come to fruition
- There is no perceived benefit in separating sprint and marathon in clubs; clubs should all be treated as flatwater racing clubs

What it takes to Win and Progress

- Having an informed approach to identifying and developing talent is welcomed as this should increase the probability of being successful; however, there remain concerns and questions outstanding before a firm judgement can be made
- There is concern that individuality and the varied individual journeys that athletes go on may be lost in this framework, and that could work to the detriment of, for example, the late developer or the outlier who may otherwise have developed into elite paddlers
- There should be a greater involvement of experienced club coaches in the formulation of the What it takes to Progress framework
- Moving towards having a clear technical model for the sport (as seen, for example, in rowing) is generally welcomed
- There is concern over the use of non-performance data (ergo scores, fitness, strength etc) and how this may be used ahead of coaching insight in selection and development
- This project should be a catalyst to enhanced research, learning and sharing across the sport
- The What it takes to Win and Progress frameworks have to be coherent and cohesive

Coach Development

- The development of coaches across the sport is seen to be a vital component of the strategy; however, it is not clear what the priorities are
- The sharing of knowledge throughout the system through communities of practice is welcomed
- We should commit to being a sport of continuous learning, including from other countries and other sports
- Coaches need education and support around What it takes to Win and Progress, performance planning, training planning, the role of science in coaching and safeguarding
- The proposal to develop more full-time roles in coaching and for coaches to aspire to careers in the sport is welcomed, but there are concerns about the affordability of this proposal; an alternative might to have full-time coaches that work with clusters of clubs

Competition

- The approach of providing more opportunities for more paddlers to compete more often at more levels, and in a range of environments, is welcomed
- The focus on exciting competitions that engage athletes and teach them to love competing is welcomed
- The role of competition performances in selection across the pathway needs to be clarified, although it is suggested that the pathway should be as non-judgemental for as long as possible
- There should be more attempts made to publicise regattas and to seek sponsorship, and a novel approach may be needed to do so

Facilities

- The facilities strategy is broadly welcomed, although facility development is not felt to be an investment priority
- There is a mixed response to the need for a consistent overseas base
- British Canoeing needs a national centre that it can control in the long-term
- The culture and environment at Nottingham needs improving as much as the facilities

Females and Diversity

- There needs to be an explicit commitment to diversity and inclusion across the sport; this is missing currently
- There is insufficient attention paid in the strategy to gender imbalance, developing female athletes and involving females in the sport more widely - these plans need to be made explicit

Participation and Growth

- There is currently no mention of how the sport will expand its base into under-served markets or population centres
- Greater attention needs to be paid to how the sport will increase participation in order to broaden the base of talent in the long-term

Crew boats and Canoe

- Further detail is required as to how crew boats and canoe will be supported
- Crew boats present a great opportunity to get young people into the sport and develop a range of skills
- Clubs are not currently adequately resourced to cater for Crew boats

Funding

- Further clarification is required on the amount of funding available
- The lack of funding parameters means that there is no clarity on priorities

And finally

Respondents to the electronic survey were asked to identify 3 words that summed up their feelings having read the draft strategic framework. The consolidated responses are shown in the box below, with the words in the largest font representing those words that were identified most often.

