

## Case Study: Inverness Canoe Club

How does a Club encourage new paddlers to develop to skills and become self-reliant? And how do you go about increasing coaching capacity?

These were two of the key questions the Inverness Canoe Club's (ICC) new development plan asked. That was at the start of 2015.



The ICC is a big club of around 300 members and historically we have covered recreational sea and river paddling. Every year we run a large introductory course for new members, which allows those that wish to join in the events the club organises. Although the course is always well subscribed, several problems were emerging.

In all disciplines, we were struggling to bring on sufficient leaders and coaches. For open boating and white water this was a particular problem and we were no longer managing to run a calendar of events or have sufficient club coaches to cope with demand.



The Club encourages novices from the intro course to subsequently join Club events, including weeknight paddles and weekend trips, under the supervision of a qualified coach. Once they reach three-star standard they can move onto the peer paddling group. However, many new paddlers having gained the basic skills were not progressing on this pathway, comfortable in being led, and that was blocking the next group of new paddlers from being coached.

We set ourselves the goals of encouraging self-reliance in paddling and in supporting coach development.



The club agreed to make funds available to support those pursuing leadership and coaching awards. We also ran our own subsidised level 1 course in 2015 and 2016 assisted by Sport Scotland. We complemented this by a number of skills courses aimed at helping paddlers progress to three-star standard. In some cases we were able to run these courses with our own coaches but we simply didn't have the capacity or skills to provide all the instruction we needed, so we also contracted professional coaches and then offered the courses at very reasonable rates to our members. Taking on the admin and effectively underwriting the course meant we could offer the courses at very afford rates.

Our white water capability had become particularly weak, which was proving a real barrier to those who wanted to progress their river paddling. A very successful course was offered with monthly paddling sessions interspaced with peer paddles on less challenging water. A measure of success is that a number of the participants have gone onto four-star training, including one who was a novice at the beginning of the year!

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To encourage coaches and ensure they had current CDP, we organised a one day paddling course. Again we asked an external provider, Steve Mackinnon of H2O, to run this for us and he Mags Duncan and Gordon Brown, set up a brilliant day, packed with sessions on coaching skills, the coaching pathway and personal skills.

Our coaches appreciated being on the water element as well as that they were only charged a fiver for the day, thanks to a Club subsidy. We've also run our own subsidised first aid courses, prioritising coaches and leaders who need the qualification but anyone with first aid training contributes to safety on the water. We've also run a number of FSRT courses with SCA/sportscotland support.

Another way we have helped paddlers develop their skills was to organise a Paddlefest based North of Oban, and again we used the paid coach model, working closely with Tony Hammock of Sea Freedom and four other coaches. Nearly thirty participants had two days coaching on the water in sea kayak or Canadian canoe and again costs were kept well below those normal for a symposium (around £70). To make the event a proper symposium we had a communal meal, a fantastic talk on paddling in Alaska from Tony and gave participants branded baseball caps and boat stickers.

In the last two years, we have trained around 15 level 1 coaches, offered two-star and three-star assessments and four-star training in sea and WW kayak and open boat. We've also supported several members gain leadership awards and level 2 qualifications. We are grateful to our own coaches and leaders and our partner coaches working professionally to provide us with additional courses. The model seems to be working for us and we are about to refresh our plans for training in 2017.

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