

ANNEX C: APPOINTING THE “MASTER OF THE VESSEL ”

“ ... the cox or in the case of a coxless vessel the steersperson is deemed to be the master of the vessel ... who [may be] guilty of an offence and liable to a fine.
**Tideway Rowing Code
 Section 4.1, page 39**

C.1 “Master of the vessel”

C.1.1 Adoption of the Tideway Rowing Code has raised awareness among rowers that **the steerer is always master of the vessel** for all legal purposes, even if he or she is young, inexperienced, or a one-off stand-in, perhaps in an emergency. That understanding is not yet complete – young scullers in ‘play-boats’ on the Tideway sometimes seem to behave and to be treated as if they were on a municipal boating pool, not an arm of the sea! The Code makes very clear the high level of *personal* responsibility involved:

“In the context of the PLA regulations the cox or in the case of a coxless vessel the steersperson is deemed to be the master of the vessel ... who [may be liable to be found] guilty of an offence and liable to a fine. Bearing this in mind coaches and those in loco parentis of Junior coxswains and steerspersons should use this fact in risk assessments when determining the suitability of those underage to act as master of vessels with respect to their knowledge of and ability to adhere to the navigation regulations and this Code.”

C.1.2 There was **nothing new in that emphasis on the steerer’s role**. The ARA’s national WSC has made its importance and breadth clear to clubs for many years – Table C.1.

Table C.1: THE ARA WATER SAFETY CODE ON “STEERSMEN”
<p>“2.5.3 Steersmen, women and coxswains (collectively referred to as “steersmen”).</p> <p>“2.5.3.1 Any person steering a boat is responsible for the crew in their charge. Steering a boat is a highly responsible role. Steersmen must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and the risk of collision. * Learn and use simple and concise commands for boat control both on and off the water. Be able to use them correctly clearly and instructively. * Understand and observe local navigation rules, and audible and visual signals given by others with whom the waters in shared. * When visiting unfamiliar water, take particular care to learn of local hazards, weather peculiarities, and local rules of navigation. * Be conversant with safety and rescue arrangements available in the case of accident. * Recognise and respect the rights and needs of other water users, especially anglers. * Watch out for swimmers at all times and be alert to unexpected floating objects. * Know and have practised accident and man overboard drills.”
ARA WSC Page 11

C.1.3 **Crew selection** has to recognize *the steerer’s onerous legal responsibility as “master”*. *Whenever or wherever a member takes on that role, their appointment has to be undertaken thoughtfully and seriously by the club. Their decisions not only carry the personal exposure to criminal*

or civil liability, but also affect the safety of their fellow crew members (unless in a 1x), of their boat, and of other river users. Selectors must ensure that every steerer has the knowledge, training, and maturity to take on those responsibilities in the light of the conditions and the abilities/experience of the crew members, together with appropriate supervision for as long as it is needed.

C.1.4 The **form and content of an outing** must fit the steerer's competence – see, for example, our comments in B.2.5 above about the difficult decisions and complex considerations which faced the inexperienced NW8+ cox. The preparation for, and content of, each outing must be adapted to fit both the limitations of the steerer and those of the crew responding to his or her commands. Decisions on what to do during an outing or where to do it have to be based on *the steerer's view* of what he or she can or should do on the day. It is quite practicable to have a worthwhile outing for a crew like the NW8+ in the 2km between the ends of the RZs at Putney and Hammersmith bridges, avoiding the problems at both of those bridges. Clubs should educate both coaches and steerers on this component of 'choreographing' the detail of an outing so that a steerer is not exposed to having to make decisions or take courses of action too far beyond their abilities, competencies or experience.

C.1.5 There has to be **recognition by crew and coach of the authority a steerer needs** to match his or her responsibilities as "master". That process must begin at the pre-outing RA when the steerer's voice has to be given special weight. Once afloat, some decisions and commands concerning the navigation of the TRC NW8+ came from within the tin-fish. That is normal practice, especially when the steerer is still learning the skills involved. But, even with a highly experienced steerer, that carries some risk of uncertainty, confusion, delay or even conflict within the crew over whose decision or command is to be implemented. *It has to be good practice for every coach to lay down to crew, steerer and him- or her-self how the command and control of the manoeuvres during all or specific parts of the outing are to be managed. That should include contingent provision for what to do when voice communication between coach and boat is impaired or lost.*

C.2 Certifying basic steerer competence

(a) Development and licensing

C.2.1 The best training for a steerer is **informed experience**. Leaving aside the technical process of steering, the complexity and gravity of a steerer's decision-making task are such that 'learning on the job' is a large and proper part of training. Each individual builds a library of experiences from meeting and dealing with each of the varied and sometimes complex challenges which arise during an outing. It then becomes easier to handle each of them next time it happens. Supervision on the water is, of course, needed to minimize the risks attaching to that learning process. Post-outing de-briefing is also essential to develop an understanding of what went right or wrong in a particular situation.

C.2.2 From the outset of the new regime, TRRC committed itself to adding **a scheme of Tideway cox licensing**. Supervision has to come to an end somewhere. There has to be a key point in an individual's progress along the learning curve, where he or she can go on learning *safely unsupervised*. As when motorists step up from a provisional driving licence by way of a theoretical and practical competence test, the TRRC goal is to put in place systems for establishing that a steerer has achieved a minimum safe and competent standard for taking on unsupervised the legal and personal responsibilities of being "master of the vessel" on the water. In that sense, and given the recent growth in small-boat rowing, any system will need to apply to *all* steerers not just coxswains (as the involvement of an M1x in the Dove pier incident shows only too sharply).

C.2.3 At national level, the ARA is **moving in that direction on cox development**. The ARA would provide for a "Level 1 Coxing [qualification] ... designed to be run and assessed within an ARA-affiliated rowing club". That is to be followed by a more advanced ARA-assessed and –awarded Level 2 qualification. The draft Level 1 scheme envisages a club teaching and testing the competencies listed in Table C.2.

Table C.2: DRAFT ARA LEVEL 1 COXING COMPETENCIES (As at Nov 2007)	
1. In general	
	Maintains the safety of the crew, themselves and others
	Is enthusiastic, encouraging and motivating
	Is a respected crew member
	Is a positive influence on crew members during training outings
	Earns the respect and trust of the crew
2 Checking equipment and clothing	
	Correctly identifies and names the main parts of a boat
	Identifies different boat types and seat positions and groups within a crew
	Correctly calls strokeside/ bowside/ port/ starboard
	Checks the equipment to be used in the outing
	Wears the appropriate clothing for the conditions
Checks that the crew members are wearing appropriate [clothing for the conditions]
	Wears and fastens correctly the buoyancy aid or lifejacket
3. Safety	
	Contributes to risk assessment of the conditions with a coach
	Specifies the changes in conditions that could cause an outing to be terminated
	Identifies local hazards on and off the water
	Recognizes and respects the rights and needs of other water users
	Demonstrates a sound understanding of local regulations and circulation patterns
	Specifies the correct action to take in the event of accidents
	Maintains an awareness of other water users at all times
	Takes appropriate action to avoid annoyance or potential collisions
	Obeys local traffic regulations when coxing, and avoids hazards
	Sets up a cox box, stores it away and manages the re-charging
4 Commands and steering	
	Commands the safe movement of boat and blades from the boathouse to the water
	Specifies the reasons for boating and landing in the right direction
	Commands the crew to enter and exit the boat in a safe and orderly manner
	Follows the plan for the outing
	Steers the boat safely into the landing
	Maintains an awareness of other water users close to and in the distance
	Steers the boat mainly using the rudder when the blades are in the water
	Maintains a good course during an outing
	Can cox from a bow-loader and is aware of the different demands
	Commands spinning the boat using the current or wind
	Commands backing the boat down
	Manoeuvres the boat safely by commanding different members of the crew to row
	Gives commands in an appropriate manner
	Identifies common faults in rowing during the outing
	Provides feedback to the crew and coach at appropriate points in the outing
	Seeks feedback from the crew and coach on his/her performance

C.2.4 The assessor would classify a **candidate coxswain** on each of those competencies at one of five grades – Table C.3.

Table C.3: ARA COX PERFORMANCE GRADINGS	
Grade	Interpretation
(1)	Very basic – needs much improvement
(2)	Minimum competence achieved ('pass level')
(3)	Satisfactory level of competence
(4)	Good level achieved
(5)	Outstandingly good

C.2.5 The ARA proposals make a **basis for assessing all steerers and their supervisors**. Of course there would have to be changes to assess the suitability of someone for specific activities. The requirements for taking out a single-scul alone are not the same as for being a coach supervising crews with fully certified and experienced steerers. And, operationally, any standard would need to be interpreted in relation to the experience of the crew and its ability to respond effectively, efficiently and timeously to what the steerer wants.

C.2.6 At the time of writing this report, there is a **co-ordination issue**. TRRC has tried to keep in step with the national scheme. But both the new regime and the Dove pier incident among other matters have made progress on the Tideway more urgent. At its meeting in November 2007, however, the ARA National Council instructed its national water safety and coach education committees to press on urgently with preparing guidance for assessing coxswains and trialling it in regions; whereupon TRRC volunteered to participate in trials on the Tideway. *Our remaining points must be read as inputs to the operation of, and partly contingent upon the outcome of, the still-to-be implemented Tideway trials.*

C.2.7 What we envisage here would be a more narrowly specified **certification of suitability to gain unsupervised experience safely**. It should be designed as a first step along a unified pathway towards the eventual national Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications. To that end, it should encompass only a selection of the content of the latter. A club should set the same performance standards for the selected competencies. It should then be easy for an individual to continue along the pathway to Level 1 or beyond, if that is where he or she chooses to go, by building on the proposed certification without duplication or wasted efforts.

(b) Trust, audit or enforcement?

C.2.8 Like the national Level 1 proposals, a **Tideway certification scheme would be club-implemented**. But that raises problems of ensuring consistency between clubs of scope, standards and application. Many Tideway clubs already have schemes of some kind. Our discussions identified seven issues which TRRC will need to resolve with its clubs if even the best-motivated of them are to make it work – Table C.4. *Those matters could be a framework for assessing the forthcoming trials.*

Table C.4: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES IN STEERER CERTIFICATION	
Issue	Discussion
Curriculum	Minimum requirements would have to be set centrally, not by each club. Otherwise there would be a risk or a suspicion of some clubs adopting an inadequate approach.
Verification	Each club's approval <i>process</i> would need to be open to independent inspection to rule out superficial assessments or low pass standards. (That does <i>not</i> necessarily run to the secondary approval of each successful candidate.)
Breadth	Different combinations of skills are needed in steering coxed, coxless or single scull boats. Some clubs license individuals for only selected boat types (just as driving licences are qualified by type of vehicle or for automatic gearboxes).

Monitoring and review	Each individual's performance should be reviewed by a club to ensure that he or she continues to maintain standards and keeps up to date with changes. That, in turn, implies scope for withdrawal or limitation of accreditation.
Record	Individuals, clubs or the ARA (via OARA) ought to have a record of each individual's accreditation, especially if an award is limited in some way, notably in terms of which type(s) of boat he or she may cox or steer, or subsequently amended or withdrawn.
Transferability	Individuals move between clubs; should their steerer licence transfer, too? Clubs may want power to test a new member recruited from a club where he or she was already licensed. They may wish to check with the previous club whether or not accreditation had been granted, qualified or withdrawn.
Recognition	The demands of river, tidal, lake/trench, canal and coastal waters are different (leaving aside specific local rules and hazards). Tideway clubs and competitions in particular would need a policy on recognizing a licence earned on other waters or in other ARA regions (let alone in other jurisdictions).
Enforcement	Compliance of each club would emerge from TRRC's developing club safety auditing systems. Individuals could be held to account in the follow-up to a reported incidents by their club being asked for their licensed status. And competition organizers could require clubs to enter only appropriately licensed steerers.

C.2.9 The new regime has led TRRC to examine the general issue of **ensuring club compliance with safety standards**. That has hitherto been taken on trust, expecting each club to live up to the ARA code and tackling back-sliders on an exceptions basis when evidence points to a significant likelihood of failure. Now TRRC has not only introduced the Conduct Panel dealing with individual reported misdemeanours but also moved on (in 2008) to adding a broader system of safety auditing by way of peer review (in which each club would have its systems and practices independently reviewed by a colleague from another club). *Auditing a club's steerer-accreditation policy, practices and records would fit naturally into that process.*

C.2.10 Clubs could open their accreditation *processes* and standards to **external verification** by an independent and expert 'inspector' invited in from another club. Note the emphasis on "processes". What is envisaged here is inspecting the form, content, application and standards of a club's scheme. It is not a matter of the 'inspector' testing each individual; that must be for the club itself. (That would not preclude an inspector from sitting in on an approval test as one way of verifying the club's activities.)

C.2.11 The **normal scope of existing Tideway schemes** appears to include only individuals who wish to steer or scull *club* boats. That approach is too narrow; it omits the types of people listed in Table C.5. *Clubs need to develop their schemes to deal include all individuals in such categories.*

Table C.5: STEERERS NEEDING CERTIFICATES	
Class	Comments
Privateer scullers	Almost every senior club has an important minority who own their own 1x boats and go on the water outwith any organized squad or outings and do not use club boats.
Steering for a one-off outing	Coaches may require individuals who would never otherwise be steerers to take the role, notably when seat-racing.
'Anyone who will agree to do it'	Crews sometimes choose one of their number, whether licensed or not, just in order to get an outing ("now that we're all down here").
Coach supervising a trainee-steerer	A coach should be adequately qualified before being allowed to instruct someone learning this skill.

C.2.12 Ideally, clubs would make **their schemes self-policing**. There is a lot of self-interest for clubs to set high standards for their members here by way of reducing the risks of:

- * injury to crew members;
- * damage to boats and blades;
- * insurance claims; or

* adverse adjudications by the Conduct Panel.

But experience with implementing boat ID shows that some clubs (or individuals within them) would comply more readily than others. If amendment or loss of accreditation was part of a scheme, it would be difficult to add it to an individual’s OARA. TRRC should require the Region’s clubs to maintain a register of their licensed steerers (as they do for their boat IDs), open to inspection by the Divisional Representative or the RWSA or his authorised surrogate. Organizers of competitions in Thames Region could require each club to certify that every steerer among their entrants was properly licensed. Such a TRRC imposition might be unwelcome in other ARA Regions whose clubs race on the Thames; *but these matters must be considered in the course of the proposed trials.*

C.2.13 The **resource burdens of implementing general licensing** would, on the evidence of existing schemes, not be excessive. They should anyway fall within the burdens already carried by the responsibly and prudently run clubs which have implemented the spirit and the letter of the ARA WSC and understood the implications of the PLA/TRRC November 2006 letter. What we have in mind demands more by way of the will and the incentives for the weaker clubs to catch up with the best, rather than new impositions on the sport at large.

C.3 Tideway navigation

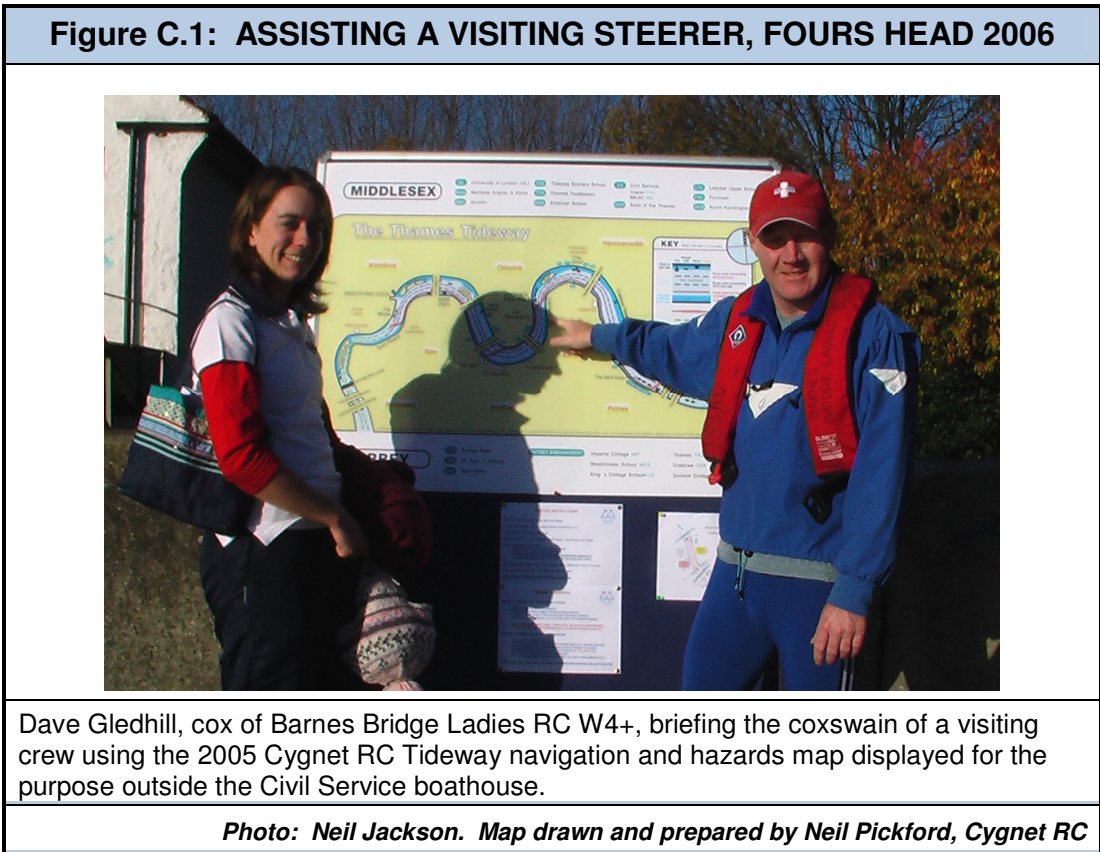
(a) Meeting the local challenges

C.3.1 The really difficult part begins when considering how any scheme of *general* licensing could economically and effectively encompass the **Tideway’s local navigation rules and hazards** (as it *MUST* do – see the ARA points in Tables C.1 and C.2). The Tideway offers more challenges to steerers than most other rowing venues – Table C.6. The examination above of the factors in the Dove pier incident shows how many of those came into play at Hammersmith on that day, as they do on every Tideway outing – see section B.2. *They will have to be addressed by any regional scheme or the proposed national trials.*

Table C.6: LOCAL CHALLENGES OF TIDEWAY STEERING	
Subject	Description
A complex navigation	On ordinary days, rowers may be seen on outings anywhere over more than 17km between Battersea and Richmond barrier (and, on either side of HW, the further 6km to Teddington weir normally exclusive to Twickenham-based clubs). That involves a winding, largely urban and once-industrial river which is also an arm of the sea.
Multiple hazards	Many locations with one or more of: bridges and their supports; islands; shoals; mooring buoys, moored boats and house-boats; and piers, pontoons, slipways, staites, piles and wharfs, some in derelict condition.
More rowing crews	The exceptional concentration of rowing clubs between Kew bridge and Putney bridge means that many more crews are likely to be about at any time, especially at weekends.
More non-local rowers	With the exception of Henley in June/July, the Tideway has more visiting crews at any time of the year. Those visitors are normally less familiar with the local challenges.
More users	As a navigation open to the sea and to all users, the latter normally include canoes, sailing boats, out-riggers, narrow boats and MVs from the smallest tin-fish or RIB to the Class Vs.
Higher speeds	The tide can run at up to 4kt (~7 km/hr). The speed limit is 8kt (~14 km/hr).

C.3.2 Those challenges, plus the vagaries of the wind and waves, are part of **the special attraction of racing over the 7km of “the Championship course”** between Putney and Chiswick bridges. They attract crews from all over ARA Regions and beyond to take part in the national-level processional races on the Championship course (Pairs head; Fullers Fours head; Veteran Fours head; Scullers’ head;

Women’s head; Schools’ head; Tideway head; Veterans’ head). In addition, such visitors come not only to prepare for those but also to train when their own waters are unavailable. Unsupervised steerers in all such crews must master the specific Tideway challenges for their own safety, for that of other users, and for the good reputation of the sport as whole. That that message needs to be repeated year-after-year has been shown year after year during the work of TRRC’s “Tideway experts afloat”. Tideway host clubs widely and generously *volunteer* advice and explanations for visiting steerers – Figure C.1. The onus *must* remain with the visitors’ clubs to take all reasonable steps to bring their unsupervised steerers up to a safe standard; as part of their duty of care towards their members and to other Tideway users. *The Tideway is no place for the inadequately prepared or the unsupervised to train, let alone to race. Again the terms of the proposed trials, both on and off the Tideway, will have to be scoped to include the issue of ‘Tideway-for-off-Tideway-steerers’.*



C.3.3 A Tideway club must include in its steerer accreditation process **knowledge of the Tideway waters and navigation rules**, comprising the elements in Table C.7:

Table C.7: ELEMENTS OF A TIDEWAY TEST	
Element	Comments
The provisions of the Tideway Rowing Code	Many clubs apply a written test of candidate-steerers’ knowledge like the Driving Theory Test
Knowing the home waters	Being shown over the waters regularly used by the club, including the Championship course and its immediate approaches, and tested about the danger points and constraints
Experience of steering the major hazards	Building supervised (preferably logged) experience of steering the major hazards and the places with special navigation requirements (IZs; RZs; crossings) under a representative range of circumstances.

Whilst all should know the Championship course, clubs from UL boathouse would give higher priority to their steerers navigating up to and beyond Isleworth Ait, while Putney clubs would be more interested in their steerers knowing the Wandsworth reach. *The external verification and safety audit processes discussed above should be flexible enough in that respect to ensure effective compliance (without attempting to impose on every newly qualified steerer a straightjacket of total Tideway knowledge comparable with, say, the London taxi drivers model!).*

(b) Going beyond trust or audit to enforcement

C.3.4 Taking the step to **a formal and enforceable requirement for a Tideway endorsement** for licensed steerers would have to be justified by the scale of the problem to be put right by it. The PLA and TRRC consider that, since October 2006, the general compliance of the rowing community with the provisions of the Tideway Rowing Code has improved. The achieved level is not yet acceptable. There is a need to bring the standards of all clubs up to those of the best. And the issue needs sustained attention, given the entry/turnover of coxes and scullers in the sport. But initiatives led by TRRC, the Tideway competition organizers and the Conduct Panel are moving things in the right direction.

C.3.5 **Enforcement through the ‘competition-entry method’** discussed above would work. But it would principally exclude from Tideway competitions any individual entrant unable to visit the Tideway to qualify before the entry form had to be submitted. We consider that that is neither justified by the level of visitors’ incidents or misdemeanours – Dove pier involved a Tideway club! - nor compatible with the spirit of our sport. On the other hand, Tideway clubs are entitled to expect visiting clubs from up-river and other Regions to use their best endeavours to bring their steerers up to a safe standard. Punitive enforcement against visiting clubs based in other Regions is not for TRRC. In recognition of that, TRRC has invited other ARA Regions to establish systems to applying to the clubs of visiting crews which breach the Tideway Rowing Code sanctions equivalent to those which apply locally under the TRRC Conduct Panel and enforcement procedure.

C.3.6 It is **our judgement** that, unless there is a marked deterioration in compliance, or external factors (such as rowing club insurance premiums or the report of the enquiry into rowing safety by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) shift the balance, *the human and organizational resources needed for a formalized Tideway endorsement are not YET justified by the enhanced compliance likely to flow from it. That said, there must be no let-up in informal work with visiting clubs and crews, and the forthcoming trials will need to consider:*

- (a) *whether to indemnify helpful clubs against vicarious liability for misdemeanours by steerers from other clubs whom they have helped to train; and*
- (b) *how reciprocal arrangements will work on other waters.*

C.4 The pivotal role of coaches

(a) Coach as supervisor

C.4.1 Anyone can take up **rowing coaching without prior steering experience**. That means they may not understand some or all of the constraints or priorities of a steerer under their care. That includes the apparently simple act of steering itself where the steerer does not ‘aim and point’ but has to integrate how quickly that particular boat responds to any rudder movement or blade pressure, the degree and duration of that response, and the effects of wind or stream pressures on the crew/hull combination. A coach giving an order or delaying a warning without understanding those factors may stand their crew into danger. That is on top of a coach having to understand the constraints for the steerer as master and the need for clear lines of command and control to the crew. *Without adequate awareness of the steerer’s context, a coach will not allow for, or assist in, a steerer making decisions and translating them into timely and legal manoeuvres and appropriate instructions to the crew. He or she will moreover be wholly unsuited to supervising a steerer who is still ‘learning the trade’.*

C.4.2 A **coach’s skills kit** needs to include a substantial component on steerer management, supervision and development before being allowed to take any crew onto the water. Those are outlined in Table C.8.

Table C.8: A COACH'S 'STEERER AWARENESS'	
Topic	Content
The "master"	The steerer's personal and legal responsibilities as "master of the craft"; and the relevant competencies
Supporting the steerer	Enabling the steerer's role in the pre-outing risk assessment (especially if it points to curtailing or abandoning the outing). Choreographing the outing to fit the steerer's competencies, priorities and concerns.
Communication, command and control	Best practice in ensuring that the crew know who is in charge, and getting the right messages from , through or past the steerer.
Practicalities of steering	Understanding steering realities. If that is insufficient, practical training under supervision in steering a 4x/4- through some demanding hazards, equivalent to a transit of, say, the Kew RZs.

C.4.3 Whilst formal coach training can tackle the development of such 'steerer-awareness', it will not, by definition, touch the very many **coaches without formal qualifications**. The sport cannot afford to lose their crucial voluntary input. But clubs must look out for situations where a combination of unskilled coach *plus* inexperienced steerer *plus* inexperienced crew raises the risk of a serious incident to an intolerable level. (That would be true even before boating on any part of the Tideway or similarly challenging waters.) The ARA is responsible for seeing that managing, supervising and training steerers *are* included in formal coach-training programmes. Clubs can ensure that their paid coaches are contracted to achieve such standards. But each club has to be aware of the capabilities in those areas of each of its qualified *or unqualified* coaches and training and deploying them appropriately.

C.4.4 In practice, **steerer-supervision is done by more than just the "coaches"**. Crews may rightly be selected so that one or more members have the experience and knowledge to be entrusted with 'mentoring' a learner-steerer on the water. In a pod of single scullers, the more experienced ones will often help the learners. That is a valuable part of the self-help ethos of our sport. But it still has to be done well, without undue risk. A prudent club will make looking after its steerers, and their coaches, mentors and helpers an active priority, backed up, of course, by monitoring how far each contributes to safe and efficient outings.

C.4.5 It is arguable that **coaches and launch drivers need the same knowledge of their home waters** outlined in Table C.7 for steerer accreditation. *Any club would be hard-pressed to justify authorizing a coach to exert navigating authority over a more qualified individual, let alone to supervise a steerer acquiring the necessary knowledge and experience.*

(b) The coach as leader of an outing

C.4.6 It is for a **coach to plan an outing**, and to expect to make reasonable adjustments to the plan once on the water in response to conditions, traffic, or the progress of the rowers. The outing's objectives of crew development or race preparation and its content, location and boat type must not compromise the steerer's responsibilities and achieved competencies. Within-outing decisions have got to fit around those constraints, too. Coaches must be ready to turn back or to limit exercises or pieces in the light of the pressures of circumstances on the steerer. (It is better to abandon a piece rather than ask a steerer to overtake through an RZ or to weave through traffic past a hazard.)

C.4.7 It should also fall to a coach to **respect the outcome of the crew's RAs**. A coach must ensure that the RAs are carried out and in a proper and informed manner. Only then can an outing plan be implemented with any adjustments needed to meet the crew's concerns. Coaches are powerful figures in our competition-focused sport. They are respected by their charges, not least out of unconditional gratitude for their investment of their normally unpaid time and attention to the crew. Their views can be the most powerful influence over RAs and choices. They carry immense if not decisive influence over the choice of personnel. A steerer who gives due priority to being master of the vessel over a coach's wishes, or a crew member who takes the same view, should be supported not de-selected. Clubs need

to monitor their coaches' relations with steerers and crews to prevent such distortions from building to an unsafe pattern of behaviour.

~~~~~

## ANNEX D: A RISK-CENTRED APPROACH TO SAFE ROWING

“You were the coach ... but you did not carry out a “structured” risk assessment in accordance with the ARA Water Safety Code 2.5.4.2.

**D Foster,  
Deputy Harbourmaster (Upper)**

### D.1 Safety, risks and going rowing

D.1.1 **Safety is a constraint.** It can feel like an obstacle to the immediate business of the rowing day. Club management must therefore get safety high up the *everyday* priorities of its coaches and members, and always included in the decision-making before during or after any outing through:

- \* The club designing an effective RA process for its crews, informing it day-to-day, and monitoring compliance.
- \* The crew pausing for its members to do their on-the-day RA before the outing starts.
- \* The coach or crew tailoring an outing to minimize the risks whether intrinsic to the crew and its steerer, or external to it, arising from conditions on the day.

All of those conflict with getting on the water, managing the time available, pursuing competitive ambitions, and fulfilling our outstanding volunteer, self-actuating ethic. *But we have to do it in our own personal and collective best interests.*

D.1.2 Safety considerations can get left behind in the **day-to-day pressures** of operating a club. There are never enough coaches or coxes. The smallest person often ends up in the steerer’s seat by default, not suitability. A coach trying to do seat-racing in small boats may invite inadequate steerers to take charge of some trial combinations without having had or made time to test or train them for the role. Members (rightly) expect to get on the water. Retaining coaches, coxes and members generates a temptation for club captains and management to go easy on those who lack the experience, training, aptitude or a sufficient knowledge of the requirements and hazards along the river (whether the Tideway or elsewhere) to do it safely. There is always the temptation to go on the water whatever the deficiencies of the steerer. And, even within an outing, delivering the content of a particular piece can over-ride prudence, especially in a club or squad or crew with a particularly strong competitive culture. *Only if each club’s culture positively embraces safety, will the choices made by its members, crews and coaches give risk-minimization a priority before and during every outing.*

D.1.3 *We endorse the view of the PLA that the **Dove pier incident arose from the crystallization of a series of risks.** There is no *guarantee* that a prior assessment of those risks for the TRC NW8+ then or for any other crew in the future, would prevent such an incident. But where the potential outcomes include death by drowning, active risk-management – identifying potential hazards; weighing up their probability and severity; and taking mitigating measures - is the only acceptable approach.*

### D.2 Minimizing risk factors

#### (a) Crew risks: Selection

D.2.1 The **intrinsic risk factors** for the NW8+ are common ones. As described in section 4 of our report, the outing brought together a *relatively* high combination of inexperienced or unqualified crew, steerer and coaching team. Clubs and coaches have to recognize where such a combination is at risk of a failure of some kind and take appropriate remedial action.

D.2.2 **Inexperienced combinations** are more likely if there is an exclusive squad structure or mind-set in a club. Understandably, a ‘top crew’ demands a ‘top steerer’ in order to do themselves justice in training (and *vice versa!*). In order to be able to concentrate on the crew, a ‘top squad coach’ needs a good steerer in the boat. It can also be unfair on a learner-steerer to bear the extra responsibility of

servicing a top crew or coach unless that is a considered part of his or her development. But those factors have the corollary that learner-level rowers and learner-level steerers can become isolated from the experienced ones and forced to learn their respective trades more riskily together. Preventive measures against that risk can include:

- (a) Placing experienced individuals in crews and nominating them to take responsibility for delivering effective emergency control.
- (b) Placing even their most senior steerers as masters of 'learner crews' from time to time for the greater good of the club as a whole.
- (c) Making time for coaches to review the structure, development and safety potential of their respective charges, including the development and training of their steerers (which would fit readily with what we say in Table C.4 about monitoring and review of the performance of licensed steerers).

(b) Reporting, education, and discipline

D.2.3 Coaches *must* take care that their own input to RAs and their decisions within outings **respect the concerns/limitations of rowers and steerer** (and that there is no unfair peer pressure from the crew on the latter). It is a clear responsibility of clubs to prevent coaches and the members entrusted to their care from failing on that count. In recruiting or authorizing a coach, it is in their own interests – even part of their duty of care - to assess his or her capacity to manage or supervise/train steerers. (Note that that distinction is deliberate - training steerers is a valuable coaching skill in its own right, and it should not be left by default to a coach without the capability to do it.)

D.2.4 No-blame **internal reporting systems** for near-misses or infractions would keep the safety team aware of issues with a coach, a crew or a steerer. A prudent captain and Club Water Safety Adviser (CWSA) will gain from feed-back from steerers on their experience of each coach. And a club might consider appointing a person – a steerers' mentor - to look after each steerer's interests independently from, and with a powerful voice in the ears of, the captaincy or chief coach.

(c) Personal risk management

D.2.5 The **NW8+ outing was very ordinary** in all respects bar one, the exceptional flood tide then running. The coach-and-driver team had already been on the water twice, and the flood tide was well established so there were no uncertainties over the location or timing of slack water and its effects on rowing navigation rules and there was no lack of breadth or depth of water. The NW8+ outing, therefore went ahead with normal confidence, based on an implied appraisal but without a formal on-the-day personal RA by each crew member. A thorough and formal RA would stand a better chance of limiting the scope of an outing after picking up the risks intrinsic to the crew or along the planned route, of making all parties aware of their limitations and the challenges ahead, and of identifying an extraordinary external risk factor such as the October 7<sup>th</sup> tide.

D.2.6 The RA process can work only if **all of the athletes understand it**. Induction and subsequent training for all athletes should include what their on-the-day RA is about in general and how it includes their steerer's responsibilities and competencies in particular. It should also spell out their duty to respect and support him or her. In an ideal world, they should all learn the rules, dangers and constraints just like a steerer (though not necessarily be tested on them) to the point where they can identify and discuss the risks and their mitigation, and, in the event of an incident, be a good informed witness.

(d) Informing Risk Assessments

D.2.7 **A good RA needs good information**. The extraordinary risk factor on the day for the NW8+ arose from the combination of a flood tide, an extreme tidal range and limited land water flow. Although "extraordinary" it was not at all "unforeseeable". The extreme range had been forecast many months earlier (and appeared as it always does in most quality newspapers on the day). The information about the extreme tidal condition at the time for which the NW8+ outing was scheduled was widely available

well before the 6<sup>th</sup> October. It should therefore have been considered well in advance by every club, crew or coach planning to boat on the Tideway that morning.

D.2.8 **The safety team in any club** must anticipate all such out-of- the-ordinary information their crews will need for their RAs, collect it in good time, and place it before them and their coaches with an instruction to include it in their RAs and to adapt or to abandon their outings accordingly. Learning from the Dove pier experience, for example, TRC now requires, in comparable conditions, relatively inexperienced crews or steerers to plan outings which stay below Harrods wharf, in safer waters (akin to skiing nursery slopes, and for that very reason known colloquially in some Tideway circles as “the Playpen”!).

**D.3 Setting the club safety agenda**

(a) Club’s top management

D.3.1 In our view, the first duty of a club’s committee (or its equivalent - practices, of course, vary, notably in school, academic or very small clubs) to its members and to the sport as a whole is to give **leadership on water safety issues** to the captain, coaches, CWSA and members. It is no good leaving it to the CWSA. Even in a relatively small club, he or she may become (or just as damagingly feel) isolated from the day-to-day activities of the members as the source of the constraints mentioned at the head of this Annex. The captain, however supportive and aware, rightly has other competing tasks and priorities to attend to. Ours is a volunteer sport and there are only so many hours in each officer’s day to devote to any task. In a big club, or one with batches of crews or solo privateers going afloat at ‘off-peak’ or mid-week times, a CWSA and captain cannot be expected on their own to communicate, monitor and enforce the committee’s safety policies on all members.

D.3.2 Members soon sense **where a club’s real priorities lie**. They will start to get the right or wrong message from what the committee actually does – Table D.1: The Committee has to get through to the members and coaches the place safety occupies in its definition of “success” so that they can make the process self-policing. But no club, at least on the banks of the Tideway crowded with boathouses, can do that alone. “Club-hopping” is a familiar phenomenon. Some clubs can get a reputation (deserved or not) for placing the irksome constraints of ‘safety’ a long way behind winning, corner-cutting or seizing an unfair advantage over the more prudent and careful majority. Individuals who want personal racing success at any cost will gravitate to such clubs. Some members, caricatured to us as long-standing ‘privateer’ scullers who ‘learned all that safety stuff years ago’, often seem to be impervious to newer safe practices. Clubs need to work not only in-house but also with each other to shift the culture of all participants if our sport is to thrive.

| <b>Table D.1: SETTING A CLUB’S SAFETY PRIORITIES</b> |                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Goals</b>                                         | <b>Methods</b>                                                                                                                                      |
| Visibility                                           | Ensure safety and navigation documentation and information are prominently displayed and kept up to date                                            |
| Selection                                            | Set the criteria for determining what crews, in what combinations can boat and where they can go under which circumstances; monitor implementation. |
| Responsibility                                       | List those empowered to take selection and boating decisions                                                                                        |
| Accountability                                       | Log decisions, review them, and openly enforce against manifest failure to comply                                                                   |
| Safe boats                                           | Incur the on-costs, if any, of specifying and checking buoyant boats and stable, easily steered coach launches                                      |
| Safe equipment                                       | Plenty of buoyancy aids, legal lights and light mountings allowing all-round visibility on rowing boats; good dry storage for all of those;         |
| Sustainability                                       | Plenty of spares - shoes, steering shoes, heel restraints, batteries, bulbs, hatch covers and bow balls; and monitoring and replacement regimes     |
| Progression                                          | Training incentives and subsidies (Level 2 coaching qualifications; RYA launch driving)                                                             |

D.3.3 That, in turn, depends on the availability of **information about individual members' and coaches' behaviour**, and its regular and frequent transmission to the Committee. All clubs should log their outings, their incidents, their boat damage, and – in order to provide a as good audit trail in the event of a dispute or worse - their decisions (such as forbidding or restricting outings on certain occasions). The results should be seen by the Committee and the general and specific patterns identified, and remedial or preventive measures authorised, minuted and followed-up. Some clubs try to develop an airline-style internal no-blame reporting culture, so that individuals can be helped to improve their conduct before they cause an incident.

D.3.4 Rowing is **a self-help, volunteer sport**. Most of us acquire most of our skills and knowledge through practical experience and from each other. Even a well-trained coach or steerer will develop 'on the job' a substantial part of what he or she brings to an outing. But training is still critical to the acquisition and understanding of the technical, theoretical or regulatory knowledge which are significant contributions to safe outings. Committees have many calls on resources. But they should make provision by way of time and money for, and encourage their coaches to undertake, formal training, especially the Level 2 coaching qualification.

#### D.4 Sharing the river, sharing the sport, sharing the standards

D.4.1 For many Tideway clubs, **the arrival of the Conduct Panel** followed by the on-line reporting system has focussed senior management minds wonderfully. Aware of their own exposure when reported on, some clubs are actively using the on-line system. We welcome the action of one club which openly started its 2006 Autumn season by setting "No points from the Panel" as a goal for its racing crews and coaches from top to bottom. Our impression is that the system is slowly gaining acceptance among clubs, particularly as they gain confidence in the peer group process and its priorities (where education and prevention take precedence over condemnation and penalisation). But TRRC can only play its part if it is effectively informed. *The system is only as good as clubs are prepared to make it by making reports through the on-line system, and acting on reports about their own members received from it.*

D.4.2 The Dove pier incident **did NOT occur as a one-off**. Every incident is, of course, unique in the detail of its own facts. And the Tideway is unusual among rowing venues. But it is not alone in being tidal (with its variable, often fast flows, the occurrence of waves and washes bigger than the freeboard of a racing boat, the acute contrast in width between HW and LW especially at pinch points, and the free access to it of any vessel or its master, whether or not suitable or trained for the purpose). One can meet very similar crews, coaches, and clubs at rowing venues everywhere. In common with all other ARA-affiliated clubs, TRC conducts its water safety operations under the national WSC.

*This "tragedy averted" is not simply a matter for TRRC and TRC to sort out under the stewardship of the PLA. The lessons from Dove pier in October 2006 are relevant to every rower, club or Region within the ambit of the ARA.*

END

~ ~ ~ ~ ~