



Consultation document on Review of Event Structure

Background

Event Operations Committee set up a Group to review Event Structure at the February 2007 meeting. Lyn West, Chairman of Event Operations agreed to chair the review group. Management Committee and Council were informed. A news item was included on the British Orienteering website. All regions were asked through their chairman/council rep to nominate a representative. Not all regions responded. In addition, two members who had expressed interest in the group were invited.

The final group consisted of Lyn West (Chairman & EAOA), Ernie Williams (EMOA & Rules Group), Richard Sharp (SCOA & Fixtures Group), Andy Robinson (SEOA), Graeme Ackland (SOA), Roger Hargreaves (SWOA & Councillor), Andrew Kelly (YHOA), Ed Nicholas (Councillor) & David May (Rules Group Advisor).

The Group was to

- Review the current event structure and determine if it meets the needs of British Orienteering and its members
- Consider the format of the Major Events and any changes needed
- Consider how any new format of event should be incorporated into the structure

The vision, values and strategic objectives as determined by Council need to be reflected in British Orienteering's fixtures structure.

The group was formed in early April. Discussion was held by Email. An interim report was made to Event Operations at their June meeting. A single meeting was held during the Scottish 6-day although not all members were able to attend. The final report will go to Event Committee's November meeting. Event Committee will then make recommendations to Management Committee and Council as appropriate taking into consideration feedback from members especially via the club delegate conference at the end of October.

Structure

The existing system has five tiers of event, each with their own combination of quality, courses and classes.

Level 1: Championship

Level 2: National

Level 3: Regional (Badge)

Level 4: District (Colour-coded)

Level 5: Local

This structure has served British Orienteering well for many years but it is increasingly out of touch with the burgeoning of new formats and the general rise of event quality arising from advances in mapping, printing, and electronic punching. Historically there were distinct differences in events at each level, but these are no longer as clear cut. E.g Level 4 & 5 events used master maps, Level 3 and above had overprinted maps. Now, a majority of events at all levels use overprinted maps. The

structure needs to ensure that events are recognised and identified by their quality (terrain, map, infrastructure, electronics) regardless of format.

There is a need for high quality events held on good terrain with demanding courses that provide serious competition for all ages and that effectively showcase our sport. At the other end of the scale, there is a need to strengthen local events that can be promoted to newcomers. There needs to be a structure of events in between that provides competition for existing orienteers but also enables progression of beginners particularly young adults to mainstream orienteering. A key aspect of this report is to put in place a competition structure which is easily understood and where adult novices are welcomed. Our sport has been remarkably successful in retaining members, but equally poor at attracting new ones, in particular young adults.

Throughout, we are mindful that events are delivered by enthusiastic individuals and clubs, not by the behest of British Orienteering committees. Thus while we have sought to simplify the structure, we have tried to ensure that no additional burdens are placed on organising clubs.

Recommendation 1: The structure should be reduced to 3 levels of event:

National

Standard

Local

National events

National events should represent the pinnacle of our sport in terms of quality – quality of terrain, map, planning, organisation and competition. These events should be continually striving to improve quality in all areas and the current system of allocation of the Major Events on a rota basis makes this difficult. There is a need for greater monitoring to ensure standards are maintained and improved on. The Event Structure Review Group (ESRG) fully endorses the recommendation that a Major Events Group should be formed to oversee these events. ESRG looked at the format of the events themselves but felt that the wider quality issues should be addressed by MEG.

British Championships

The current BOC should be the premier events in the calendar with all the top orienteers in each class present. Currently, this is not always the case. A British Champion should be the best in the class and recognised as such, and not just a competent orienteer that turned up.

The timing of BOC is problematical. The Group could not reach a consensus on the best time to stage the event. Attempts to fix the event in the calendar have proved difficult. Elite Orienteers do not want the championship staged outside the main racing season. May/June is becoming increasingly dominated by public exams for the juniors so are not good for them (and therefore their parents). Moving BOC to Easter was considered but it was felt that this would be generally unpopular. The JK and its format are strongly associated with the Easter weekend. An autumn BOC was also considered. There have also been suggestions that the relay championships should be moved to a different weekend and held in conjunction with other club events such as CompassSport Cup.

Recommendation 2: Further debate on the timing of BOC and the relationship to BRC is needed.

British Sprint and Middle Distance Championships were introduced to give elite orienteers greater exposure to these disciplines. Under the current structure, these are categorised as level 2 events. This is confusing and inconsistent. These disciplines have the same status in World Championship terms and so should have the same status domestically.

In recent years, courses have been included for other age classes in the Middle Distance but as non-championship classes. Similarly, an increasing number of non-elite orienteers have entered the Sprint Championships. The format of the Sprint Championships with qualification and final races needs to remain as it meets the needs of elite orienteering. Rules Group is in the process of drafting Guidelines for both these events which ESRG considered appropriate. It is important that these are put in place as it should not be left to the organisers of the event each year to decide the format.

The British Night Championship attracts a small but enthusiastic entry. There is little or no promotion of the event. The profile of this event needs to be raised.

Recommendation 3: BSC, BMC & BNC should exist as National level events in the fixtures calendar.

Jan Kjellstrom Festival of Orienteering

The JK works extremely well as an event in the current format. For the last two years, a Sprint Race has been held and is proving popular. Again Rules Group is producing draft guidelines. For some years, the elite classes have had a Middle Distance race on Day 1. A Middle Distance race for all has been suggested but the Group felt that this discipline still needed to gain wider popularity before wider inclusion in the JK.

Recommendation 4: The Sprint should become a formal part of JK although not included in overall scoring. The rest of the weekend should remain as it is.

Other National level events

Approximately 6 Level 2 National events are held each year. There is no overall strategy for the number or location of these events. While at one time, these events were held on good quality terrain and attracted the top orienteers to give good racing, this is increasingly not the case. The status of these events needs to be improved to produce good quality competition.

Recommendation 5: The number of National events should be reduced to 4 or 5 per annum and form Area Championships (Scottish, Northern, Midland, Southern and possibly Welsh). The increased weighting for ranking points should be reintroduced. See attached Guideline C.

The quality of the competition at these events needs to be improved as rebranding alone will not do this. National events used to be weighted in the ranking system which encouraged attendance at these events. Two serious competitions are based on scoring points in a series of events – UK Cup for elite and Future Champions Cup for juniors. Consultation with the organisers of FCC & UK Cup should take place with a view to including Area Championships in these series where appropriate.

Recommendation 6: The quality of competition at Area Championships should be improved by encouraging greater participation through use of these events for UK Cup and FCC and a higher weighting in the ranking system.

A Masters Cup for older age classes was started in 2001 but is poorly promoted and understood by few orienteers. It is based on a limited number of events, not all of them National Events, only a few runners score and the scoring system is not easily followed. The Cup would generate more interest if greater numbers of orienteers were involved. The top 50 runners are scored in FCC and UK cup and these series would appear to be an appropriate model.

Recommendation 7: The Masters Cup should be based on 3 x JK, 4 x British Championships and all Area Championships with scoring in line with UK Cup and FCC.

Standard events

Effectively these are all the events that do not fit into either of the other categories. These need to cater for the whole range of orienteers from beginners moving on from local events who might balk at age classes that look to the novice as 'more serious/more competitive' through the range to competitive orienteers who like the opportunity to race. These events need to provide a range of courses of different technical difficulty and varying length. It is the nomenclature of these courses that appears contentious. Currently there are two levels of events in this range:–

Level 3 with courses designated by number. Age classes are assigned to specific courses for seniors (but not juniors) but some competitors do choose to 'run up' thereby selecting their course on length and TD. A choice of short or long courses is offered in each senior age class allowing entrants to select on length. On average, 90 C3 events are staged annually. 40 different senior age classes need to be catered for. While numbers of events have remained constant, competitor numbers have decreased. When the structure was first devised, many C3 events attracted 800+ senior entries averaging 20/class so giving a reasonable level of competition. Clubs continue to stage events with 14

or so courses yet on some courses there are very few (or no) runners which does not seem to make good use of volunteer time. In the last 12 months, the average number of senior competitors in C3 events was 320 or 8 per age class. The review group took the view that this was too low a number to give meaningful competition. Of course, some classes would be decently populated and would give satisfactory competition, but this means that others would be much smaller and hardly worth holding. Adult novices are catered for poorly as either they run lower TD course non-competitively or run in a special class (M/W2IN) of 1 or 2 runners.

Level 4 with courses designated by colour that are part of an easily understood stepped system. Competitors have a free choice on entry. Competitions such as local leagues may be hung on to these courses with age classes being assigned to specific colour courses. Many of these leagues are highly competitive and successful. The number of entries for level 4 events may be similar to level 3 events but the number of courses is approximately half. The number of Level 4 events has been declining (from 325 in 1999 to 266 in 2006) yet these are the events that allow progression of adult novices through TD and then length.

Historically "colour-coding" was shorthand for a whole range of things - old maps, master maps, novice officials, poor areas, not-a-race and "badge" was pre-entry, overprinted up-to-date maps, better quality terrain, more competition, ranking points. Today the difference in quality is not as marked and is variable.

Recommendation 8: All events at Standard level should have courses designated by colour. The current colour structure should be expanded slightly from 8 to 10 courses to give a greater range and choice (see attached Guideline A).

It is recognised that there are number of established level 3 events that award age class prizes. This can be continued with age classes assigned to courses within the colour structure. As already mentioned, this is already done with a number of Regional Leagues at C4 events – EMOA, EAOA, WMOA. However, under no circumstance should any competitor on any course be declared non-competitive from the entire competition on the basis of age. The aim is to encourage progression of the adult novice but still provide opportunities to race for the serious competitor.

Recommendation 9: At any Standard level event, age class competitions and awards should be permitted within the colour coded course structure (see attached Guideline A).

The majority of C3 events are designated "ranking" events. The ranking lists are important to a significant number of competitors. Currently the points cannot be calculated in British Orienteering office from raw event data. The system needs to be simplified into a single ranking list but with age class lists visible by the click of a mouse. Currently Sprint or Middle distance races do not fall within the ranking system. The ranking system should include a wide range of event type.

Recommendation 10: A single ranking list should be produced based on all National level events and designated Standard level events. A simple system of producing ranking points from raw event data needs to be developed. See attached Appendix K.

Local events

Annually over 1000 Level 5 events are staged by clubs either as single events or as parts of local series. These are the entry point for new orienteers and hugely important for the growth of the sport. The review group felt that clubs should be left alone to put on a wide range of local activities throughout the year during the week, at night and at weekends. Strategic guidance and promotion of best practice should be the role of Development Committee.

Recommendations for implementation

The fixtures system works to a long lead time particularly in relation to Major Events. However, if changes are agreed they should be implemented as soon as practical. It should be practicable to introduce National Level Area Championships in 2008 by "rebranding" existing registered National Events. However, the related changes to encourage participation need to be introduced at the same time.

Introduction of Standard level events to replace Level 3 & 4 in 2008 may not be practical, given the number of events already registered, but should be implemented for 2009.

A changed rankings system could operate independently of the other changes proposed in this document and could be implemented separately. A realistic target time for such a change would be the beginning of 2009.

Conclusion

Discussions have covered a wide range of topics and there are areas that still need to be addressed although these largely come under the remit of existing committees. The main goal of the ESRG has been to simplify the fixtures structure while ensuring that quality and appeal of events is maintained without increasing the burden on hard pressed clubs and volunteers. We believe that these recommendations will achieve our aims.

Lyn West
September 2007