

# BSAC's next strategic phase

## Introduction and background

2020 has been an extremely challenging year. The pandemic has been one of the most impactful events ever faced by our sport and society as a whole. Like so many other organisations, BSAC has had to adapt to the changing world, coinciding with a natural time to review our strategic direction and priorities. Whilst change is challenging, our response has provided us with new and more efficient ways of working and a renewed perspective on the needs of our members and our ambitions for the future.

Since April 2020, a Strategy Working Group appointed by Council has been working to gather evidence and shape the context for a new three-year rolling strategic plan.

This document summarises that work and is intended to stimulate engagement with members to capture your thinking on our progress to date. It covers:

1. BSAC's present situation
2. Key external factors
3. What our members have told us they want
4. The rationale and intended benefits
5. The proposed strategic objectives

## 1. BSAC's present situation

The current strategy (2016-2020) focussed on BSAC's relevance to the diving community and our need to deliver sustained and steady membership retention and growth.

It delivered a significantly refreshed look for the organisation, a new website with integrated digital services to members, Discovery Diver, updated Ocean and Sports Diver courses, and new member recruitment support and digital services for branches.

There has been much progress in building our relevance and strength as National Governing Body (NGB). However, despite the membership decline easing up over the period (pre-Covid), it has continued to decline, a trend that has been consistent over the past 24 years. This is significant because:

- A declining membership impacts all core income streams and threatens our long-term sustainability.
- Our membership is ageing with many young members not staying beyond their first year.



- Our membership base fails to reflect our diverse wider society. This raises questions about a lack of inclusivity and understanding of broader audiences, which could be limiting growth.

Covid-19 has compounded and accelerated the downward trend in members.

While BSAC benefits from a clear constitution and strong member engagement, the present governance structures do not provide agility, capabilities, diversity, and flexibility required to effectively address these underlying challenges.

## 2. External factors at play

It's important to understand the operating environment in which BSAC exists.

The world we live in has changed dramatically. How people live, interact, and choose to spend their free time has changed. In brief:

### Environment

- Climate change, environmental concerns, and the need to mitigate human impact has become a global priority.
- Key underwater issues including plastic in our oceans, overfishing, endangered marine species are now very much in the public consciousness.

### Sport

- Changing social norms have resulted in a greater desire for 'experiences' and a blend of activities, in preference to long-term commitments to specific pastimes.
- Research shows that participation in diving is steadily declining, but "core" divers are even more so. These are the divers more likely doing numerous dive trips per year, buying a full set of scuba diving gear and taking continuing education courses – i.e. the typical BSAC club diver.

### Economy

- Global recession means job insecurity and falling incomes; the relative cost of diving may increasingly put off younger age groups; further impacted in UK by Brexit and Covid-19.
- The diving market is likely to become less lucrative and more competitive.

### Technology

- The ever-increasing reach of digital and technological advances has changed our world beyond recognition from even just a few years ago – it also offers real potential to transform almost everything we do.

- High consumer expectation of customised and personalised experiences.

## Education

- Competitors, such as other diving agencies, have been offering online learning for several years. They are seen by many as being more in tune with how potential divers wish to learn and engage with our sport.

## 3. What members have told us they want

The Strategy Group has kept a tight focus on what members say they want from us and value the most about BSAC – club life, diving, training, safety, protecting the environment and effective communications across our community. This is what we learned from the most recent membership survey (Nov 2019).

### Top five BSAC activities in terms of importance to members:

- Safeguarding the UK's precious waters and marine life for divers
- Protecting underwater heritage
- Developing safety recommendations
- Developing training
- Protecting the interests of divers in the UK and abroad

### Top five BSAC membership benefits in terms of importance to members:

- Access to BSAC club or clubs
- Access to BSAC diver training
- Third-party liability insurance cover
- Access to BSAC Skill Development Courses
- SCUBA magazine

### Top three reasons for remaining a member:

- To dive and socialise with a club
- To further training
- To keep in touch with sport and UK diving community

While the survey shows BSAC generally enjoys high levels of overall member satisfaction (and most would recommend us to family or friends) it also identified opportunities for improving the member experience along with an opportunity to consider our wider appeal.

## 4. Rationale and benefits

The new strategy will require BSAC to change into an organisation that is both agile and responsive to a broader community of member interest. The aim is to create a National Governing Body (NGB) fit for the future that will deliver a better training and diving experience for all, alongside the opportunity to make lasting and positive impacts on both the underwater environment and wider society.

We have thought carefully about why BSAC exists and what sort of organisation we need to become.

BSAC is facing real challenges to its sustainability. We need to arrest the decline in our membership. This means we must reach a wider audience and continue our efforts to better meeting the needs of our membership.

In an increasingly globalised, mobile, and diverse population, BSAC's reach across that diversity has been limited. BSAC will always be committed to divers, snorkellers and underwater explorers but supporting that community to diversify and grow has to be part of a strategy for survival.

The volatile and dynamic external environment precludes the more traditional forms of long-term planning; hence this strategy focusses on delivering key changes over the coming three years. We will work closely with members and stakeholders to provide an annual update and refresh.

### What changes will the new strategy deliver?

The new strategy is intended to deliver:

- **More flexible and configurable training that meets the needs of new and established members**

We will develop and diversify our training offering, giving broader options to get involved in underwater sport, as well as advancing the core diving and snorkelling programmes. We will ensure we offer more online learning options and modular content which will give members the flexibility to personalise how they progress. We will work with branches and centres to better understand and improve our flexibility to meet changing consumer demand.

- **A closer and more engaged BSAC-to-member relationship**

We will ensure members receive more personalised and useful communications and support. e.g. a BSAC membership app will support BSAC member essentials including membership details and qualification cards, personal details, communications preferences, and qualification record book.

- **Better communications and a stronger, more engaged and diverse community**

We will enable members to get more value and enjoyment from being part of the wider community e.g. by creating an online community platform where members can network, collaborate, influence lobbying and environmental work and engage on topics of shared interest. In addition, there will be a focus to support the network to become a more inclusive, accessible and welcoming place for all - to nurture a community where people really want to belong.

- **Strengthen our leadership role in the protection and conservation of the underwater environment**

The new strategy will purposefully place environmental considerations at the centre of our mission and values. We appreciate, as do our members, that all life on earth is under threat. We will use the resources we have – our community, our projects, our voice and our imaginations – to do something about it. Members will be actively engaged in a programme of underwater conservation and heritage work and together will help make change happen.

- **A more digitally advanced BSAC that delivers better value for money**

We will embrace technology across all areas, to significantly enhance the member and volunteer experience. e.g. by digitising lesson sign off/QRBs and advancing online learning.

- **Wider range of complimentary non-diving activities**

Being part of our community will not just be about taking part in scuba or snorkelling. We will create new opportunities for a wider audience to engage in related sports such as freediving and environmental initiatives. This work will include collaborating with other sports agencies to broaden experiences through BSAC for non-divers, families, and individuals.

## 5. The proposed strategic objectives

Delivering these benefits is dependent on the achievement of the four strategic objectives described below. Please review these before taking the survey.

### 1. Through quality and consistency and relevance of our training and safety recommendations; enhance our leadership role in underwater sport.

To reach broader audiences and grow, we need to diversify our offering (create more underwater sport options) and become more accessible (make it easier for all people to participate). Central to this will be a programme to improve the quality and consistency of our training offer to both our core and new audiences by:

- Facilitating a shift to increasingly modularised training, working closely with our branches and centres to improve our flexibility to meet changing consumer demand.
- Accelerating our digital training offer across all learning and development.

- Enhancing the effectiveness of our safety recommendations by responding to scientific insights swiftly and making the recommendations more accessible.
- Collaborating with other sports and agencies to create a more diverse offering that is attractive to a wider audience and adds value to existing members.

## **2. Understand, mobilise, and connect the BSAC community; ensuring that community is accessible to all.**

One of the most powerful competitive advantages of BSAC is a strong and engaged community. To stay ahead of our members' needs and aspirations we need to understand them better, improve accessibility and add value for all. To achieve this, we'll need to:

- Strengthen our understanding of our members and personalise the membership experience; adding value and increasing relevant engagement.
- Enable positive connections between BSAC members to deliver a greater sense of community, belonging and value.
- Cultivate a more supportive and inclusive culture throughout the network that allows wider audiences to feel welcome and connected to BSAC.
- Review our models of membership – in particular, enhancing our all-age and 'family' offer to open up a love of the outdoors to more people.

## **3. Strengthen our leadership role in the protection and conservation of the underwater environment.**

The new strategy must purposefully place the environment at the centre of our mission and values. BSAC needs to be socially aware and have a distinctive voice on the underwater environment that is aligned both with need and the national mood. To achieve this, we will need to:

- Strengthen our leadership role and visibility in the protection and conservation of the underwater environment.
- Actively engage members in underwater conservation and underwater heritage – in both diving and additional complementary activities.
- Review the environmental impact of our sport and business operations and actively mitigate.

## **4. Increase the capability and capacity of BSAC to achieve its strategic ambitions.**

For the implementation of strategy to succeed, BSAC must have the tools, capacity, and skills to deliver the desired outcomes. To achieve this, we will need to:

- Adopt a mixture of office-based and remote working to ensure we are flexible and agile; incorporating new technologies and automating services, where possible, to improve member experience and reduce overheads.

- Improve our ability to capture, analyse and use data to support and drive decision making.
- Increase skills and capacity of our governance and executive teams to manage change effectively, efficiently and swiftly.