

## **BUSA 2019/20 Development Survey: the results in context**

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### **Plain Language Summary**

There are a range of challenges facing sailing, universities and BUSA over the coming years, so it is vital to understand the current situation in order to inform future strategy.

A membership survey was created to discover the current state of BUSA sailing, with responses provided by individual sailing clubs. Most clubs were between 31-60 members sized (22 clubs) and the average membership size was 51 members. Compared to the rest of the UK, BUSA clubs had greater gender parity in their memberships (54% men and 45% women compared to 63%:37% for the UK as a whole) and members were more active (66% compared to 37%). The most popular activities were team racing and social sailing, while other activities such as match racing were less well attended. Club memberships were largely composed of first-year and second-year undergraduates, while the main group of postgraduates participating were Masters students.

In terms of future planning most clubs had a development plan, but not a plan to maintain or replace their boats when they reached the end of their useable life. A consistent challenge identified by clubs was a lack of funding (18 clubs) and the majority of clubs considered themselves to be struggling financially. It is difficult to say if lack of money is pushing clubs to try to improve their racing performance to acquire further funding from their union, or if this focus is causing the poor financial situation. The boats owned by clubs were generally of an unknown age or were built pre-2000. While this is not necessarily an issue for boat speed, it may be a cause of the consistently low opinion that clubs have about their boats.

Overall the situation facing BUSA clubs is complex, so this survey is a snapshot of the situation. To better understand the changes facing the clubs, and how these change over a longer time period, this survey will be repeated annually. From this survey, a number of areas of support can be suggested such as help to acquire funds and repairing and maintaining boats.

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## Introduction

The sport of sailing is facing a number of challenges over the coming years, with a shift in how, when and where we are participating in our sport and this will affect everything from retention of existing sailors, to recruitment of new sailors. Furthermore, BUSA is facing a number of challenges unique to its position as a student sailing organisation. These challenges can be boiled down to three major issues, all of which interact with each other: participation, racing and instructor/coach development. BUSA has recently undergone major restructuring and this is therefore the perfect opportunity to use this impetus for change to address challenges with wide reaching and innovative solutions.

Despite being in existence for around sixty years (Busa website.), a breakdown of the membership of university sailing clubs has not been attempted to date, and there is very little data regarding the number of sailors which are participating in sailing at university outside of BUSA-run events. While sailing clubs often keep a record of membership numbers, BUSA has not had access to this before. In addition, there is no “standard” method of recording membership numbers, making it hard to compare between sailing clubs. This lack of data means that any attempt to change the situation of a club has happened without any way of seeing if the action has been effective.

This study aimed to improve efforts to understand the situation regarding participation and membership within university sailing clubs, through the distribution of a survey to all BUSA clubs.

## What did we find?

In total, there are 2489 members of university sailing clubs. These clubs therefore make up approximately 1% of the estimated total membership of all sailing clubs in the UK (RYA, 2019). These club sizes vary (table 1), with the most common club size being medium (22 clubs) and an average club size of 51 members.

*Table 1: club size*

<b>Extra Small</b> (<15)	<b>Small</b> (15-30)	<b>Medium</b> (31-60)	<b>Large</b> (61-100)	<b>Extra Large</b> (101+)
4 (8.3%)	10 (20.8%)	22 (45.8%)	7 (14.6%)	5 (10.5%)

## Who is participating?

Of these members, the majority identified as male (54.12%) compared to female (45.52%), which is a significant improvement compared to the UK average of 63:37 male: female (RYA, 2019) and is much closer to the UK average for junior members (55:45 male: female). The change at a national level is likely to be due to older sailors being more likely to identify as male. This is another example of the “leaky pipeline” in which early recruitment pools of women are often comparable in size and qualification to men, but a greater proportion of men are retained within the system, leading to them being overrepresented at a senior level. This is known to occur in academia (Bennet, 2011), sport (Hancock and Hums, 2016) and sailing (Low et al., 2019). There are regional differences between the total membership and the male: female (figure 1), with the largest region and the closest male: female being the western region (355:357), while the largest disparity is present in the southern region (325:225).

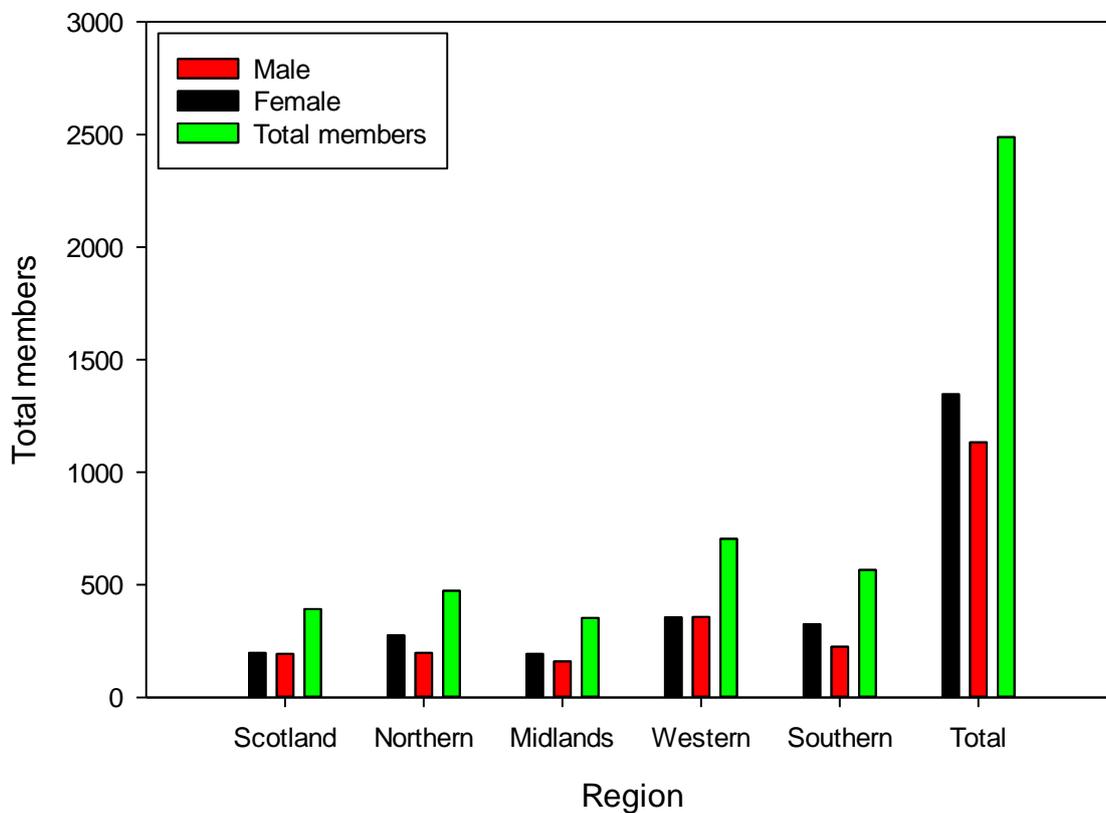


Figure 1: Club Membership numbers by region

## What are they participating in?

A large proportion of these members actively participated in the club's activities (66.29%) an increase compared to the UK average of 37% (RYA, 2019). This may reflect the shorter university sailing season compared to the UK sailing season, in addition to an increased amount of free time to attend sporting activities compared to many older sailors. The activities members were participating in was variable, with a reduced frequency of people participating in fleet racing, match racing and yacht racing compared to other activities, while most clubs reported high levels of participation in the social side of their club (figure 2). This is to be expected as university sailing is often perceived as focussing upon team racing and socials, while other activities such as fleet racing are side-lined (Robertson et al., 2019; West, 2019). This suggests important areas in which to increase engagement and support, as team racing and social sailing are not the only potential areas of participation for club members.

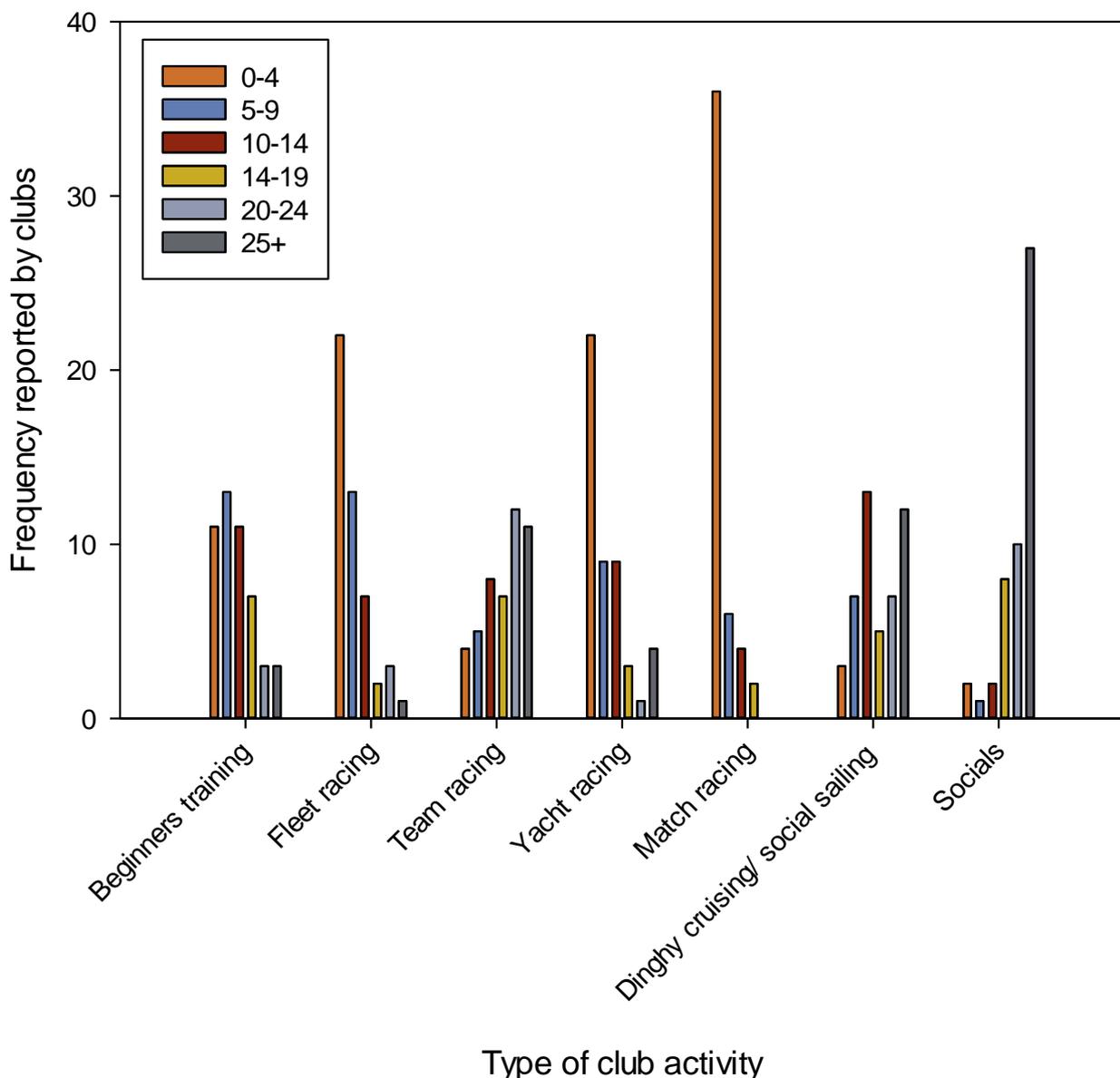


Figure 2: Breakdown of the number of people participating in each activity

## Which year are they in?

Greater numbers of undergraduates were reported to be attending club activities, compared to postgraduate, with the majority of these people between their first and third year of their undergraduate degree (figure 2). In terms of postgraduate participation, the main group participating were master's students, potentially reflecting the possibility for many to complete integrated master's courses as part of their undergraduate study. Other postgraduate courses are much less common across the UK at just 0.042% of all students 2017-2018 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019) and is reflected in these data. Further engagement with these groups may be an opportunity as there is a higher incidence of mental health problems in more senior academic positions (Levecque et al., 2017) and participation in sport has been shown to be beneficial in maintaining or improving the mental health of participants (Callaghan, 2004).

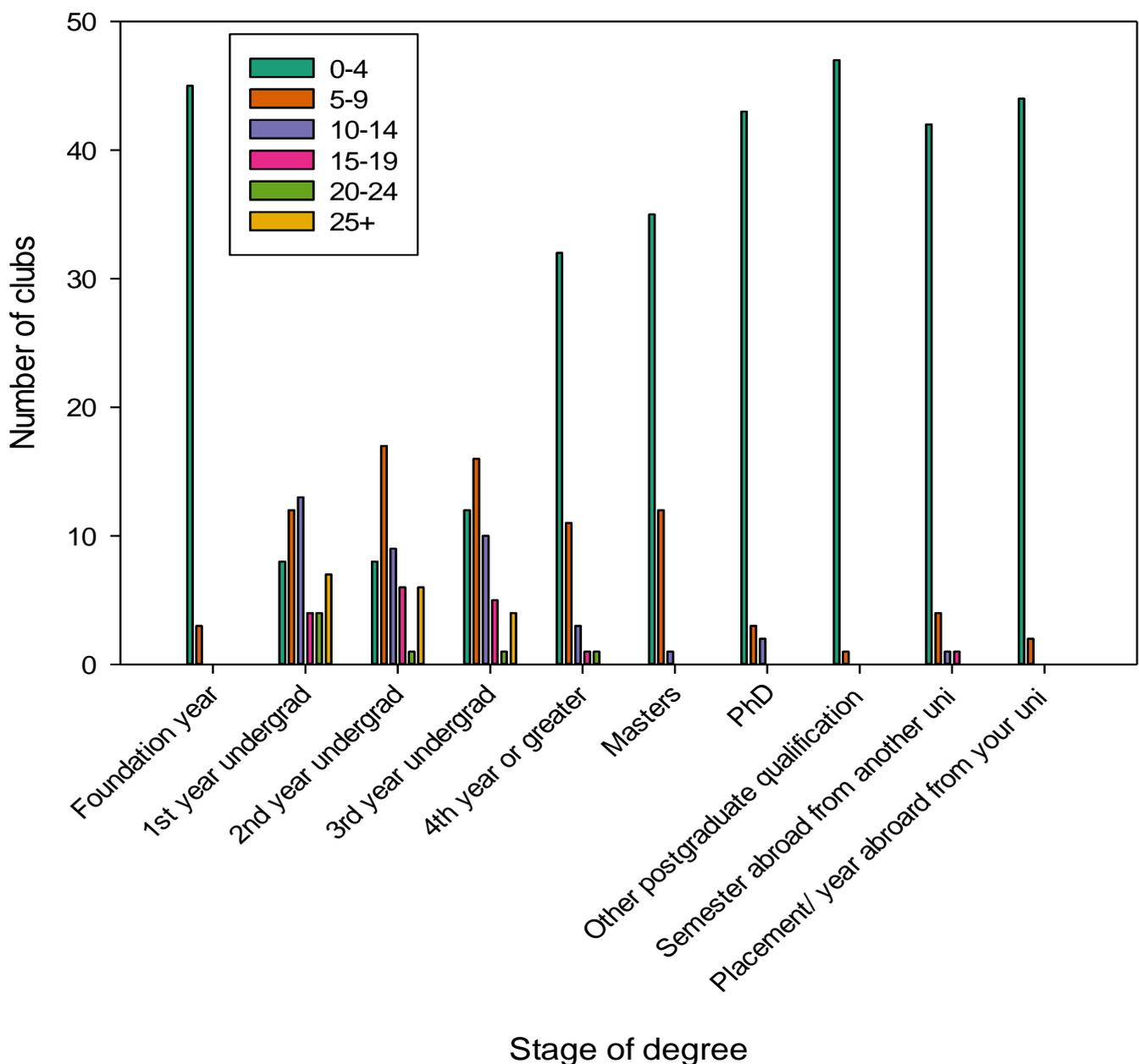


Figure 3: Breakdown of the degree stage of members of BUSA clubs

## What did clubs want to achieve?

The main focus for many clubs was to improve or purchase new boats and improve their BUCS and general racing performances (table 2). To achieve these goals, approximately 70% of clubs have a development plan (table 4). However, the desire to improve or replace boats is not reflected in planning, with only 50% of clubs, which owned boats having plans to replace these boats (table 4).

Funding was the major challenge identified to achieving a club's goals, while increasing the amount of the club members actively participating was the next most frequent response (table 2). Getting more members to participate in social sailing and yachting were particular areas of focus for some clubs, which has previously been identified as an area in which university sailing struggles to engage fully with (Robertson et al., 2019). As many Students' Unions tie funding to BUCS and general racing performance, it is possible that the drive to improve performance in these areas and increase membership is partly to try to become more financially stable (table 3). Given that most clubs also identify as struggling financially in some way, this suggests that there is a UK-wide need to review how sports clubs such as these operate and fund their activities.

Table 2: Development goals and challenges

Goals	Totals	Challenges	Totals
Improve/purchase boats	16	Funding	18
Increase membership	22	High turnover	5
Improve BUCS performance	15	Advertising	3
Improve general racing performance	12	Equipment	5
Increase active participation	2	Getting more to actively participate	8
Improved retention of members	2	Low membership	4
Increase participation in yachting	6	Coaching availability	1
Increase participation in social sailing	9	Time	1
Run a successful team racing event	2	Long term planning	2
Survive/become more stable	1		
Increase funding	6		
Increase participation in match racing	3		
Improve other equipment	1		
Increase participation in fleet racing	1		

Table 3: The financial situation of clubs

	Struggling - in debt	Struggling to function and save	Struggling to function	Struggling to save	Not struggling
<b>Total</b>	4	9	3	20	12

## How good are the club's boats?

The improvement or purchase of new boats is a consistent goal across many clubs potentially due to the quality of the boats available to the club, which were generally considered to be only slightly above average (5.9 on a Likert scale out of 10). Boat age may be a contributing factor to this perceived low quality, with the majority of boats being considered to be older than 20 years old, or their age unknown (figure 4).

*Table 4: Clubs with long term planning*

<b>Strategic development plan</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>Boat replacement plan</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Established plan	15	Established plan	12
New plan	19	New plan	8
No plan	14	no plan	20

## Is this a problem?

Older boats are not necessarily slower or of lower quality compared to newer hulls, with sail number 1954 coming second at the Firefly nationals in 2019, despite being built in 1957 (National Firefly Association, 2019). It may, however, reflect a decreased level of maintenance and care taken by students compare to boats owned by individuals. This may be driven by factors such as funding struggles, a lack of shared ownership, a lack of accountability for breakages, lower experience in maintaining these hulls and lower quality equipment available to university clubs compared to individuals. These factors will all contribute to the desire to replace or improve the quality of boats available to the club, however if flights are being replaced regularly then this implies that the skills needed to maintain equipment to an appropriate level are lacking. This is an area of concern as replacing flights is likely to be much more expensive than regular maintenance of an older flight, which will feed into clubs struggling financially, potentially perpetuating issues for clubs in a vicious cycle.

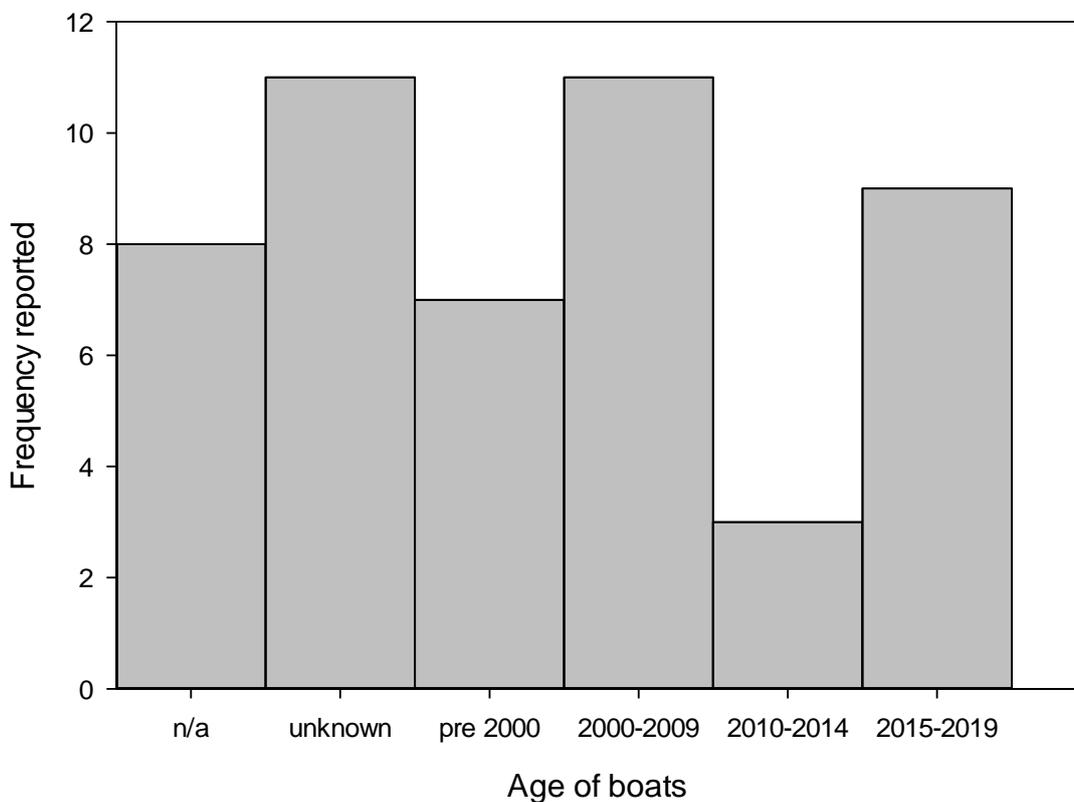


Figure 4: The age of boats owned by university sailing clubs.

## **Where do we go from here?**

This survey has indicated a number of areas of concern for BUSBA and UK sailing generally. The cause of the disparity between male and female sailors on a regional basis is currently unclear. While it is better than the UK wide average, we should be aiming to achieve equal numbers of male and female participants. The membership numbers also may hide a deeper story about whom is competing in BUCS events.

The numbers actively participating in team racing and socials are encouraging, however further support for clubs to engage with less represented sections of the sport, such as match racing and social sailing is important. In addition, support for clubs to address their financial struggles and achieve their goals requires a better understanding of how these issues feed into one another. If, for example, it is possible to improve the quality of flights of boats available to clubs, then this may remove the financial pressures on clubs to regularly replace their boats.

There are many challenges facing university sailing, therefore, this survey will be continued yearly to understand the changes that university sailing is undergoing and how the challenges faced are being addressed.

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## **Methods**

### **Survey creation and design**

A survey, distributed via the internet was developed ([https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdoUNCvMm\\_euX9LKPb\\_NUhwkYOpPswqQz5EvWwE0iGuNn9AhQ/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdoUNCvMm_euX9LKPb_NUhwkYOpPswqQz5EvWwE0iGuNn9AhQ/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w)) utilising a range of short and long text answers, absolute numbers, categoric reporting and a Likert scale for various questions.

The survey was developed and published through Google, with email utilised as the primary mechanism of dissemination. However, clubs were required to have submitted a response in order to apply to a separate development fund, so the survey was also available on the BUSA website. For the purposes of the survey, active participation was defined as attendance of at least three club-organised activities per term. Where questions were potentially unclear, additional definitions and examples were provided.

There are limitations to this survey; while all clubs surveyed did submit a response, this is only a snapshot of the current state of UK university sailing, and a longer term understanding of the challenges faced by these clubs is necessary to effectively support them. Furthermore, as this is a snapshot, conclusions regarding the successes of clubs and the factors, which drive these successes, cannot be made without longer-term data.

### **Data screening and analysis:**

All 43 BUSA-affiliated clubs and 5 non-affiliated university sailing clubs responded, and club size is distributed between very small and very large. When multiple responses were tended by sailing clubs, as occurred in 5 cases, the response with the greatest number of members was removed as this was considered to be an over-estimation. Club size was categorised by the number of members reported: Extra Small = <15 // Small = 15-30 // Medium = 31-60 // Large = 61-100 // Extra Large = 101+.

The responses for participation numbers and age breakdown were categorised by frequency of response.

The financial situation of a club was categorised based on the frequency of response. These categories were: in debt (has indicated that 'normal functions' of club are impacted because money is owed), still functioning, (but function is reduced due to poor finances), struggling with saving (functions normally but do not have extra money to save for future), struggling (both functioning and saving) and not struggling (no problems reported with financial situation).

Defining development goals was a long answer question and these were categorised based on the responses recorded. Comments that fell into more than one category were recorded in both. The categories identified were: improve condition of/purchase boats, increase membership, improve BUCS performance, improve general racing performance, increase active participation, improve retention, increase participation in yachting, increase participation in social sailing, run a successful team racing event, survive/become more stable, increase funding, increase participation in match racing, improve other equipment and increase attendance to fleet racing.

Defining challenges which may limit development was also a long answer question and these were similarly categorised dependent upon the responses given to the survey and broke down into: funding availability, high turnover of participants, advertising, equipment quality/quantity, having active participants available, low membership, low coaching availability, low time available and issues with long term planning. If comments fell into more than one category at any point they were recording in both sections.

The question regarding the age of a given flight of boats was subdivided into the following ages due to the limited knowledge available regarding the age of boats: unknown, pre 2000, 2000-2009, 2010-2014 and 2015-2019.

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