

QO AGM 2025 Chairman's Report

This has been my second year of my second tenure as club chair. But it's been the first year of Junior Orienteering Group under new management, and I think we can report that it has been a great success. I know JOG is highly valued, so we were all pleased and relieved when Ray, Sue and Sheila stepped up to make sure that JOG continued. We have had 12 JOG sessions over the year, all well attended. So a big thank-you to our three leaders, to all who have planned, controlled and helped, and even those who have simply turned up and added to the friendly informal atmosphere.

It's also been the first year of our new fixtures pattern. To explain - a number of us met up two years ago to take stock and decide our future. This resulted in five agreed priorities. In order these were: continue the Forest League, continue JOG, do more in spring and summer, do the occasional major event and do more virtual courses. I'm pleased to say last year's programme met all five of these priorities. I'll avoid giving a full account of every event, as we have held an amazing 27 of them! But some particular highlights:

Our classic forest league events remain very popular and well attended. We only put on three events but shared others with Devon. These are now Regional status which I think accurately reflects the tremendous effort that goes into each. We tried one on a Saturday, which was a success, so we will be doing that again. We still have the mystery of why JOG regulars don't come to QOFLs, this remains a problem we need to crack. But thanks to all who helped, and particular thanks to Robert and Robin who each took on the Organiser role for the first time, well done.

What should have been our two biggest events were both hit by foul weather. The Compass Sport Cup qualifier and our SW league were badly hit. Both were close to being cancelled but went ahead. Many thanks to Karen, Ollie and their respective teams, who stuck at it and made them happen. Learning from these experiences, the committee have discussed how we address weather risk and we've set some more specific cancellation criteria for the future.

I'll also pick out the Bridgwater Urban as a highlight. This went well with a good attendance and some great urban courses, so well done to Jim, Chris and the rest of the team.

Looking to the future we have a three forest league events and the first five JOGs lined up this Autumn, and we're finalising our plans for early next year. We have also committed to hosting the Southern Championships in just over a year's time. This could be our biggest event for many years, and our first as part of the UK Orienteering League, with perhaps 400 or more competitors.

As we all know our events can only take place if members are willing to volunteer to take the major roles or to be on-the-day helpers. Our club relies on a small set of dedicated volunteers who do the bulk of the work, and many of us are concerned that too much of the burden falls on too small a group. I'm well aware that not everyone has spare time to give, but if a few more members could help out it would really make a huge difference. I think before long we will have a simple choice - either we find more volunteers or we scale back the number of events.

So, yes, a number of us are feeling overloaded. I personally am in that group. I hold two major roles, the club chair and fixtures secretary, and at any time I usually have around a dozen active discussions going on simultaneously. One task that often seems to fall to me is finding volunteers, but I don't have enough time to do this properly. As I have said before: we rely on people coming forward, please do not wait to be asked.

Staying on the volunteering topic, there is a gap I need to tell you about. The club has had no Welfare Officer for a year now, despite repeated appeals. It is part of British Orienteering's Safeguarding policy that all clubs have a Welfare Officer. I have informed them we don't currently have one, as yet there has been no reaction, but given the seriousness of the subject I think there is a risk that one day we could be told we cannot continue until we have someone in post. So please consider if you could do this role.

Another thing that would be great for the club is some help with our communications - could you help with that? I feel there is a bit less of a buzz about the club than a few years ago, and maybe part of that is a shortage of news. Also better external messaging helps spread the word and bring new people in.

By the way you will be seeing more club messages coming via Mailerlite from now on. Although we have had it for a while, from now on we'll be using it more to comply with personal data laws. So please make sure you are on the distribution list.

Our membership is now exactly 100 which sounds good, but unfortunately this is about 5% down on last year, which itself was about 5% down on the previous year. So there is an unwelcome trend there. We do have new joiners, it's just that they are outweighed by leavers.

I know there is a concern about the ageing membership but I suspect our age profile is better than many other clubs. It is true that half our members are over fifty, but we have quite a number of juniors and in total almost a third of our membership is under thirty. And although we have some inactive members, a large proportion of our members are regularly competing and are engaged with the club.

And because of that, despite some problems, I believe the outlook remains good. We continue to offer a large number of diverse events for a club of our size. JOG is healthy and remains the envy of others in the region. Our forest events are popular, and we are getting better at doing the basics well. And I believe we remain a friendly and sociable orienteering club.

Richard Sansbury