

Controllers' Update Sessions

After teaching a few Grade 3 Controllers' courses, I began to wonder about how well controllers would keep their knowledge up to date; various articles were published and there's a wealth of information on various websites, but it would be so easy to miss some important bits. Also, did controllers have a forum for wide-ranging discussion that might provide useful input to important decisions being made by British Orienteering?

The changes to event structure provided a particular focus, and a date in January was selected. Very soon it became obvious that a single session wouldn't be enough, so we planned two sessions, to be run 2 weeks and 200 miles apart. A total of 37 people attended (2 of us had the joy of going to both sessions!), and the same agenda was followed at both sessions.

Mini discussions

Participants chose their topic from:

1. What constitutes "high quality competition"?
2. How should event standards be monitored and enforced?
3. How frequently do you need to do something if you are to be anywhere near competent at it? AND is it reasonable to expect controllers to have experience as event organisers?
4. Should we require ALL events to be planned and controlled using electronic means?

The small groups (3-6 people in each) discussed their topic for about 10 minutes then reported back to the whole group, where more discussion generally ensued.

Group 1

The new event types refer to Level 2 events as offering "high quality" competition. This group considered: **What constitutes "high quality" competition?**

TECHNICAL:

controls are located correctly

appropriate area quality, good map properly to standards – appropriate scale representing technical detail of the area*, well surveyed, symbol size right

pre-marked maps, electronic timing

ratios for course lengths correct

quality legs (vary distance/terrain etc.); good use of terrain

ORGANISATIONAL:

course length/climb available before entry

full consideration of assembly/car park/start/finish/walk – social area if possible

appropriate number of helpers & toilets – minimise queues

start times – sensible allocation inc. EOD

thickness & colour of overprint lines clear

advertising (to get good attendance) & pre-entry

timely results – at event and on web, with RouteGadget

GENERAL:

competitors have fun; good test against your peers – attracts best runners by being timed to avoid date clashes
event delivers what was advertised

* Hilary was asked to feed back to British Orienteering disappointment that standard map scales were imposed.

Group 2

How should event standards be monitored and enforced?

Controller needs to confirm that terrain quality is adequate for the event

Encourage informal review

“Secret shopper” could complete questionnaire or structured feedback on organisation, courses etc.

– feedback to club or Co-ordinator of Controllers

Feedback forms for competitors – to organiser or planner/controller, perhaps via Competitions

Convenor – difficulty of isolating post-bad-run irritation with self from genuine comments worthy of consideration. Form could be on website, accessed by link from results – delay should lead to more considered opinion.

Need to ensure CLUB take responsibility for event quality, it's not personal.

Controller should be in tune on the day, ask for opinions, observe.

Report from controller after the event – to the club; reports on L2 events could be reviewed at annual Controllers' (etc.) meeting. Feedback must be two-way. Form OK but also face to face discussion needed.

More controller training; clubs should make planners & controllers aware of standards (esp. junior courses) – event quality is their responsibility. All clubs should have a manual; experienced planners etc. should mentor beginners.

Controller likes to know who planner is before taking on event. Organiser responsibilities can be split, eg. arranging access often done by one person for all the club's events.

Essential to test-run some courses. Juniors' courses aren't always appropriate.

Whole group agreed:

1. HQ to draft template feedback form.
2. HQ to draft template manual (to include timetable)
3. SOA to organise annual L2 event officials' meeting.

Group 3

How frequently do you need to do something if you are to be anywhere near competent at it? AND is it reasonable to expect controllers to have experience as event organisers?

(This topic related to requirements on controllers in order to maintain their qualification.)

Some questioned whether there is a rule. It needs to be strictly enforced. BUT if it's too strict, it won't be adhered to.

Who monitors compliance? (Controller of Controllers)

Unanimous agreement: Controllers need to be regular participants (how to define "regular"? to any particular standard?)

Retention of skills varies across individuals. Much changes across the years, and some people have been left behind.

Refresher training required on computing

Under current Rules controller is responsible for confirming all organisation has been done to required standards; controllers therefore need to understand enough of the organisation side to ensure that all aspects are done properly, eg. to understand when systems will be sufficient to identify when people are still out in the forest. This means they must have experience at organising. South Group debated role of controller – as currently defined it includes non-forest aspects of event – should it? Would it be easier to recruit controllers if their responsibility was only in-forest?

Log book for controllers might help. Can't rely on British Orienteering records (they depend on completeness of event registration). HQ to draft template.

Debate over different expectations for different levels of event.

Consensus that there is scope for more assistant controllers – experienced person mentor them, exploit youth and fitness. Avoid rejecting people with valuable knowledge and experience.

Agreed the stated minimum requirements are OK as just that (minimum) but not enough to maintain competence.

Group 4.

Should we require ALL events to be planned and controlled using electronic means?

All agreed computerisation helps eliminate errors. Easier to identify & remove errors; built-in checking helps inexperienced planners.

If yes, need Condes, PC and internet for both Planner and Controller; P & C must be computer literate, which might rule out older (very experienced) controllers who lack computing skills.

Overcome this by working as pair with inexperienced controller with computing skills (and fit legs) – mentoring. Technology attracts younger people.

Planners' courses should include Condes – perhaps as a separate session to ensure all aspects are covered.

Need to allow 7-10 days to get maps printed professionally, though this can be reduced if local printers are used.

In North session, majority (18-2) agreed “All controllers should have Condes skill” (note “should”). All agreed Condes is essential for 6 Day planning/controlling.

Key point is for Controller to be clear up front how material should be supplied.

All agreed accuracy is key, Condes helps greatly.

Consensus against actually requiring IT skills.

Changes to Rules and Event Structure

Participants were then brought up to date on the **revised event structure**: 3 levels replace previous 5 – Level 1 = National, Level 2 = Regional, Level 3 = Local. Parallel with grade of controller required. 6 Day Event is Level 2, as multi-day holiday event. Scottish Champs will be Level 1, SOLs will be Level 2. Clubs have option of adding Level 2 events, via Fixtures Secretary – implications: embargo, controller grade.

All concluded that the effects of implementation were likely to be minimal (in Scotland at least) and we look forward to further review later in the year. The one area of concern was the question of whether a Grade 1 controller (for a Level 1 event) would be **required** to be from a different association; geographical considerations could cause this to be a difficulty for Scotland. Finding a Grade 2 (or 1) controller from a different club for a Level 2 event was not seen as problematical, given the likely number of such events in Scotland.

SOL class/course grid has changed only slightly; no separate “S” classes for 55+ (few participants). Debate over M/W18 & 20; agreed following would be more consistent:

	M	W
18	short brown	short blue
20	brown	blue

No change would be made at this stage as information had been distributed, but end-of-year review could consider it.

It was observed that British Orienteering's table of course ratios shows a change on the Brown, which might go unnoticed. The distance between brown and black seemed excessively large.

SOA course numbering uses reverse order to that used by British Orienteering – standardisation required.

“S” classes no longer separately specified. Middle distance races are intended to cater for those who want shorter distances.

Possibility of pot-hunters running inappropriate courses; monitor and discourage if necessary.

Scoring system for SOLs is under discussion.

Controller for Level 3 event preferably from different club, but can be same club – often impractical to do otherwise.

Post-lunch exercise

The short “So you think you know the rules?” quiz after lunch caused a few blushes and encouraged some experienced people to have a look at the rules and appendices again. It’s useful to be reminded that we’re all human and even the things we think we know, we might not know precisely. The Rules and Guidelines are available on the BOF website:

<http://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/downloads/eventinfo.php#rules>

with the revised draft Guidelines available from the next section on the same page.

Technology

We then moved to discuss **Condes and OCAD**, in particular the benefits and pitfalls for planners and controllers. Interestingly, the first group were unanimous in preferring Condes, while at the second session the pro-OCAD faction were persuasive (though only for smaller events). As ever, familiarity is the main issue. Lynne Walker’s presentation from the South session <http://www.scottish-orienteering.org/documents/general/LynneWOCAD.pdf> described the ease of planning and controlling small events using OCAD (free trial version available from www.ocad.com). OCAD full version is expensive and licensed to a single computer only. The version for planning only is also single-computer licence.

Condes: Need to agree software version at outset, and (preferably) folder where map files are held.

Some planners prefer to do initial plan on paper map, to get overview and shapes of courses.

One person should have control of the Condes file at any time. Planner should “own” Condes file, Controller shouldn’t change it.

Usually best to apply reference numbers to each control; don’t move a control, add a new one and change courses, so the change is obvious. Delete unwanted controls as final step. Some changes can be conveyed by e-mail/phone; need to check correctly understood. Most people preferred to apply final control numbers as a last step. Perhaps use different range for initial numbers.

Common faults:

accidentally moving circle

poor number position

lines not broken (esp. at cross-over) or bent

standard “taped route to finish” line even for seniors (see User Guide!)

circle breaks aren’t always same on printed maps as on screen - check

Controllers should be able to improve planners’ skills with Condes, as well as with planning.

Colour of overprint often indistinguishable from contour colour if printed straight from Condes. Steve Barrett imports file to OCAD and adjusts colours there.

Circle size is specified in Appendix B (3.1.5 and 3.1.12)

Size of control description box is specified in IOF control description document (5-7mm square).

Ian Searle can advise on using Condes for planning relays. (shortly to be added to User Guide)

For both Condes and OCAD, it was agreed that skill levels and version control are extremely important. There was no doubt that their use for planning and controlling has led to removal of many errors that frequently dogged events. Participants were reminded of the Condes User Guide on the SOA website:

http://www.scottish-orienteering.org/documents/natcen/Condes_User_Guide_v3.pdf Courses for both Condes and OCAD are organised by the National Centre from time to time. Clubs were encouraged to spread expertise among their members. (OCAD course aimed at general club users scheduled for 26-27 September.)

Purplepen was also mentioned. This is a simple tool for course planning, available for free download from <http://purplepen.golde.org/>

Emit and SI: SI units occasionally fail. Have spares available at the event. SI units need to be woken up before the event starts. The default setting is that they go back to sleep after 2 hours. There has been discussion at higher levels regarding recovery of data from forest units when people have been shown as missing a control.

Emit was of more interest to the northern group: issue of backup cards prompted some discussion, with agreement that best advice was to have roll of backup cards and a notice to the effect that if the event is important to you, you should use a backup card (and not just swipe in the general direction of the control unit).

Emit software can print card patterns; other s/w requires visual check.

Cold makes batteries slightly weaker.

Brikkes can die during an event, giving no time for that competitor. Electronics can go wrong. IOF requires 2 independent timing systems (clocks used).

Forest units are sealed– can't check battery strength. Check working OK before use. Also check how near brikke needs to be for forest unit to see it.

Jon Musgrave offered to send Maroc's tutorial package to other clubs.

Autodownload is simple to use, licensed to a club, £99/year or £300 for 5 years. People don't need to have been entered – download recognises dibber and course (but that way organiser doesn't know who's out in the forest!) It also doesn't require a PC at the event, as the download unit stores everything.

Sportsoftware (OE2003) – now on version 10.3. Powerful, same interface for SI and Emit. Major re-write is apparently in plan. Approx. £150/club for basic module; separate modules for Score and Relay events.

Major Events Group

Brian Bullen had attended BOF's Major Events Conference, along with Jon Musgrave, as BOC/BRC2008 organisers. He described some of the problems encountered at BRC2008. Major

Events Group has role of overseeing Level 1 events – including calendar management and quality control.

Dates of major events sometimes don't suit Scottish educational calendar. Donald Grassie to raise with BOF.

North group discussed controller's role in event organisation; concluded it includes prize-giving, which should be the climax of a major event, not an after-thought.

Linking with earlier discussion of how to monitor and improve event standards, the suggestion was made that we should organise an equivalent annual conference for officials at Scottish Level 2 events, to review the events and pass on wisdom to next year's officials. Practicalities are to be worked out; Hilary to draft event review form – completed forms would give basis for this discussion. Review should identify training requirements etc..

Brian spoke highly of a presentation by David May describing the various characteristics of different forms of O:

<http://www.scottish-orienteering.org/documents/general/DMaySprintO.pdf>. We also have Brian's summary notes <http://www.scottish-orienteering.org/documents/general/BBullenotes.pdf> .

Risk Assessments and Emergency Plans

At the first session, 3 people (Grade 3 Controllers of many years' standing) admitted to being unaware of the BOF standard Risk Assessment form. It's on their website:

<http://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/downloads/eventinfo.php> under the Event Related Forms and Documents heading. Although it need not be followed slavishly, it prompts all the right questions.

Emergency plans – ensure organiser takes 2 or 3 printed copies to event. Think everything through in the cold light of day, then if emergency arises simply follow your plan. Emergency plan should have set times for particular actions to be taken. Also remember safety aspects before and after an event – planner or controller out alone putting out or collecting in controls. Use good sense, report to others, leave maps etc.. If possible, establish contacts with local Mountain Rescue, promote understanding of orienteering. For night events, probably unwise to attempt own search; suggest involve police immediately if someone missing. Search dogs probably better than humans.

A checklist for controllers (and other event officials) is available at:

<http://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/downloads/documents/ChecklistsforBadgeandNationalEvents.pdf>

Hilary was asked to consolidate the various emergency plan documents she has, and produce a template Emergency Plan for clubs to adopt and adapt. It will be particularly aimed at Level 2/3 events (though not the 6 Day). Hilary was also asked to produce a template event organisation checklist – many clubs have their own, which will be mercilessly plundered for their best bits. It was felt that the BOF checklist (see above) is cumbersome and not well presented.

Donald Grassie (SOA President) suggested to the North Group that if an event went wrong and there was an enquiry, difficult questions might be asked within the club management structure up to Club Chairman. Therefore it is up to all of us to ensure that Risk Assessments are in place and suitable precautions are taken.

Other items

Event registration: new system being implemented whereby clubs register their own Level 3 events online. Agreed clubs need to communicate to avoid date clashes, though most events are far enough apart geographically. Level 2 events still go via SOA Fixtures Secretary (Paul Caban – pronounced **Kay**-bun for those who are still uncertain!)

Scotland will be able to arrange own Grade 1 Controllers. Marjory's role to be re-named; new Controller of Controllers (different job description) with controlling experience will be appointed.

Levies: SOA levy (adults only) is nil for entry fees up to £6; beyond that, 80p per adult. (Donald Grassie to seek clarification as to whether this £6 is after the £2 reduction for BOF members.)

(British Orienteering levies: nil for up to 75 participants. 76-250 participants, £1.50 each; 251 and more £2.50 each. Events for juniors only – no levy.)

6 Day Event and SOLs will use **pictorial descriptions** (only) for ALL courses. Spare copies of the de-coder card are available on request. The text of that and a simplified document aimed at children (showing fewer symbols) are available on the SOA website:

<http://www.scottish-orienteering.org/index/natcen/page/materials-for-junior-incentive-scheme/>

General Conclusions

One theme that kept recurring was the notion of the Controller as MENTOR. Grade 3 controller should expect to help novice planner with local event; experienced controller at higher grade could/should work with younger, less experienced (perhaps not qualified) controller (why does this only happen with 6 Day?) – exploit his/her fitness and energy, perhaps also make up for own lack of IT skills.

Refresher training was also considered desirable – specifically updating on changes to rules, and technology.

Further sessions

Without exception, all participants expressed the view that sessions like these should be repeated; all but one person wanted them either every year or alternate years. (One person wanted them only when rules have changed.)

Hilary Quick
5 February 2009.

amended 4 March 2009 to show corrections requested.