

for Coaches Code

British Canoeing's magazine for coaches

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Positive Active Blade Pressure

Why using positive active blade pressure is a more stable and beneficial than using low brace.

Coaching Matters Events 2015

NORTH

▀ Cumbria,
Bendrigg Lodge, Kendal
4th December 2015

Details available from Mike Sunderland
coaching.cumbria@britishcanoeing.org.uk

Download Event Programme from
www.britishcanoeing.org.uk

CENTRAL

▀ West Midlands, Leamington
15th November 2015

Details available from Jenna Sanders
coaching.warwickshire@britishcanoeing.org.uk

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First British Canoeing Level 4 Coaches Qualified.

We wish to offer congratulations to the first coaches to complete the new British Canoeing UKCC Level 4 Performance Paddlesport Coaching qualification. The qualification is an innovative programme run through a partnership between British Canoeing and the University of Stirling through a mix of modules,

residential camps and distance learning.

The six Coaches; Gordon Brown, Doug Cooper, Steve Macdonald, Tom Sibbald, Sid Sinfield, and Oisín Hallissey have spent the last two years studying for the qualification and graduated in August. They are now all continuing on with their studies taking the final steps to

completing an M.Sc. in Performance Coaching.

We are now recruiting candidates for the next intake, due to start May 2016. Applications are invited, with a deadline in December. Please contact fiona.fuller@britishcanoeing.org.uk for an application pack.



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Positive Active Blade Pressure

By Andrew Bonney

About the author

I started kayaking at nine years of age, with friends and by fourteen, was teaching at St. Austell Canoe Club, as a volunteer coach. At sixteen I went to Duchy, to study outdoor education and trained in surf kayaking, sea kayaking and white water kayaking. At seventeen years old I gained my BCU Level 2 Coach Award and by eighteen I had attained BCU Level 3 Inland Coach Award. This naturally led me into a career in outdoor pursuits, where I continued working in water sports gaining more knowledge and experience in more remote, steeper and dynamic environments. Aged twenty-one I adopted a new style of paddling technique which gave me the skills to go after the 5 Star WW Leaders award. This opened up my horizons and following advice I set off to kayak the world - France, Italy, Slovenia, New Zealand, Canada and Chile.

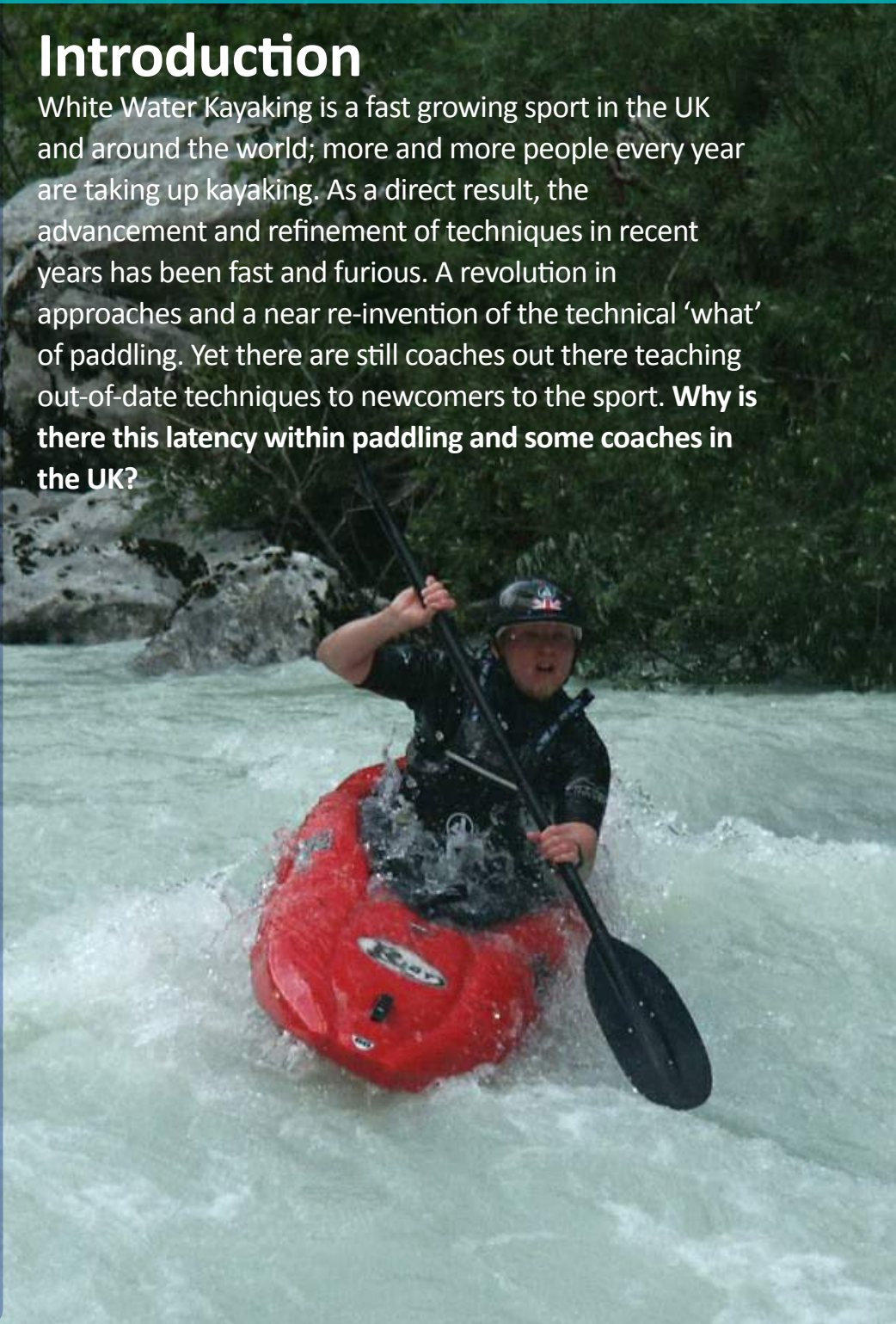
During the last five years I have continued travelling and working on rivers with a focus on teaching and guiding kayaking on steep creeks and high volume rivers, combined with raft guiding in between. I have worked with world class professional kayak coaches and paddlers, whom have set their businesses up by teaching kayaking on steep creeks and high volume rivers around the world.

Study method

This paper will outline teaching techniques as a major argument for why using positive active blade pressure is a more stable and beneficial than using a low brace. I will reinforce these techniques with interviews from pro kayakers, observing pro kayakers, coaches and personal experience.

Introduction

White Water Kayaking is a fast growing sport in the UK and around the world; more and more people every year are taking up kayaking. As a direct result, the advancement and refinement of techniques in recent years has been fast and furious. A revolution in approaches and a near re-invention of the technical 'what' of paddling. Yet there are still coaches out there teaching out-of-date techniques to newcomers to the sport. **Why is there this latency within paddling and some coaches in the UK?**



The low brace is not on the syllabi any more yet it still gets taught! There are modern day techniques out there, such as positive active blade pressure, combined together with torso rotation which offer the white water kayaker far more confidence and more positive, effective outcomes. Until all coaches and paddlers are updated, understand change and embrace the changes, strokes like the low brace will continue to be used as a first resort for support instead of the last. Presented in this paper are four different techniques utilising active blade pressure combined with torso rotation and rejecting the argument for using a low brace. These techniques are: Paddling down a rapid, breaking in and out, counteracting and absorbing hits and boofing-taking off and landing.

Teaching techniques

Over the last few years, I have been teaching modern and dynamic techniques that involve keeping the paddle blade in the water as long as possibly needed and using the positive active blade pressure to transfer energy through the body, back into the boat. Based on my observations I see that my students progress much faster with a lot more confidence compared to watching some other coaches teach their students using the low brace. When using the low brace I've observed students not having the same success and this is right at the beginner white water stage. The most frustrating thing for me when I am on the river is observing other coaches teaching out of date styles and techniques to their

students; it holds the student back from what they could achieve. Modern dynamic techniques will lead to a quicker grasp of concepts in the dynamic environment ultimately down time or leading to a positive outcome for both the student and instructor.

For example I once coached a friend for a few hours before his 5 star assessments in the French Alps. He was already a good paddler! However with a few laps down the course and a few technique adjustments he was performing better than ever. Using the positive pressure from the blade and transferring it through the body back into the boat. Basically, the ability to drive the boat where it needs to go in a more effective way progressed his paddling to be solid in high water French alps for his assessment.

Positive Active Blade Pressure

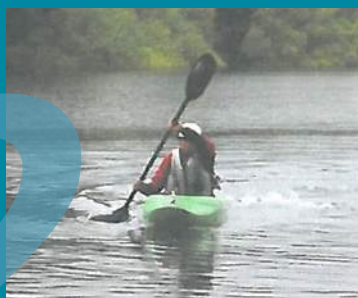
For those of you that are unsure of what positive active blade pressure is, well put simply - put your paddle in the water and pull on it! The resistance on the blade that you feel is pressure. We call this **Active Blade Pressure**. It is in the water, it (the blade) is being active and getting the pressure from your blade.

I would now like to introduce flat water techniques for learning how to use positive blade pressure.

1 First things first! Feeling positive active blade pressure by forwards paddling on flat water, is also feeling the support you get by forwards paddling.

▶ For example using slow strokes, extending strokes and following through with strokes to encourage trunk rotation and setting up for the next stroke will also enable to hold positive active blade pressure for longer as you build your momentum while maintaining support at the same time.

Forwards paddling is the most used stroke and least practiced stroke to date. There are many different styles of forwards paddling depending on the chosen discipline and craft you are in.



Having a good forward paddling technique will give more positive outcomes in any environment!

▶ Secondly to turn the kayak, keeping a positive active blade in the water at all times;

▶ Paddle forward to gain momentum and feeling the positive active blade pressure on each stroke.

▶ The last forwards stroke initiating the way I want to turn.

▶ Initiating a 'bow draw type' stroke by slicing the blade from stern to bow (active blade pressure), opening the angle of the blade to feedback and pulling the water as needed to draw the bow for the turn.

▶ Lastly power out of turn driving the positive active blade the whole time and feeling the pressure and support on the blade.

Using this approach coupled with looking where you are always heading will enable students to lean their body into turns and the direction of travel. This will edge the kayak naturally, thus removing one more thing the beginner kayaker needs to worry about as their confidence continues to grow.



Figure 1: First time kayaker using this method feeling the pressure of the blade and having great confidence.

Moving water

The eddy line is the dynamic frontier between moving and static water - crossing this environment is the most common reason a learner kayaker will capsize. For a beginner, white water kayaker eddy lines are the first dynamic environments to understand; even for advanced paddlers eddy lines can be difficult as the volume increases and the gradient gets steeper.

Breaking out

Breaking out can be just as difficult as breaking in. Exiting the moving water into the flat water of the eddy! However the technique does not change from breaking in.

Using the momentum gained in the flow to drive the boat over the eddy line far into the eddy, holding positive active blade pressure for support. Manoeuvring the boat in the eddy keep the positive active blade in the water for support, if turning on the eddy line this is a must because of micro eddy's then it is even more important to keep the positive active blade in the water for support.

By using the positive active blade technique and keeping the paddle in the water on the inside of any turn will give the paddler more support, control and therefore more confidence when executing the manoeuvre. Holding positive active blade pressure is by far a stronger way of giving the paddler more support and confidence as they cross the eddy line, turn and with the momentum to get where they need to. For the beginner white water paddler it can be the make or break to have the confidence to succeed.

Paddling down a rapid

If intimidated, a beginner paddler running a 100 meter class II rapid will try and put as many strokes in as they can to get down, or resort to a low brace! This may seem strange but if we were to slow the paddle rate down to five strokes as we paddle the 100 meter rapid, then they would feel the pressure on the blade. They would feel the support it gives them, also enabling them to turn if they wanted to, but the whole time having support and more momentum to get to where they need to. A small saying 'slow is smooth, smooth is fast' but very true and scalable: as we push the class of white water to higher grades requiring the boat to make a line and manoeuvre, the same still applies!

We don't always want to go straight down the river we may want to manipulate the white water, zig zag our way down the river to make lines or eddys. In essence we want to work the river, tactically, slow the descent down to scout what lies around

the corner and make safe decisions to lead others down the river. We can do this by using the natural lateral momentum of the river - As the river progresses the current deflects off the outside corner of the river and pushes back the opposite way. We want to drive the boat laterally using this current by getting our boat-tracking to the outside of the corner. Here's how:

- ▶ Drive the boat across the flow from left to right or right to left.
- ▶ Hold our line and position using the rails on our boat to make the required line to the eddy.
- ▶ Use positive active blade pressure to drive the boat using slow smooth strokes, feeling the pressure on the blade and using that pressure to drive the boat via the body and build momentum.



Figure 3: Ben Marr holding positive active blade pressure on a break in

As practiced on flat water, slice the blade forwards up to the bow then into a bow draw. Holding active blade pressure Ben will naturally start to build momentum without paddling to the speed of the river. Then, as Ben powers out of the turn, the pressure on the blade will allow him to be moving faster than the river then so enabling him to proceed to his next target or down river with more support and momentum to get where he needs to go. Paddling on higher graded white water requires this paddling technique to have the power, control and support on the water. If this technique was taught in the early stages of a paddlers development there would be more confident paddlers out there advancing their skills instead of having to re-learn a totally new and different style.

Counteracting and Absorbing Hits

Feeling the pressure on the blade and rotating the torso creates 'drive thru' drive through with the accelerating strokes. The pressure on the blade also gives maximum support and control as the rapid is paddled, having the ability to change direction at any time or to make the move. Even just holding the paddle in the water without paddling, whilst floating will offer more support as the blade is already in the water to pull on (active blade).

Breaking in

If we were to power across the eddy line, and turn once the whole boat is in the moving water the paddler would be more stable and confident. Holding the blade in the moving water on the down riverside inside of turn will give more support by holding the pressure on the blade throughout the manoeuvre (see Ben in the picture opposite).

As we are paddling down river there is always something that will trip us up and make us lose our balance.

Hitting a rock

Hitting a rock in the river is probably most common when paddling low volume rivers. This is where having a positive active blade in the water helps! By having positive active blade pressure I have support and when my boat hits a rock that I can't see, I can react instantly by applying positive pressure on my blade and driving forward through my torso to get more energy, more power and I will gain the support I need to keep myself upright and on course. If I did not have an active blade in the water I would be just sitting there! Hitting the rock would almost certainly make me use a support stroke that may fail, then my head would be hitting rocks as I try and get in the position to try and roll, if it's not too shallow to do so.

For example, as I hold pressure on my blade and I come up to the rock waiting until the last second before impact, I drive through, absorbing the impact and keeping pressure on my blade the whole time. Therefore keeping the momentum going and my boat on the same course, until over the rock then releasing the pressure as I finish my stroke and get ready for the next stroke. By doing this, I maintain my course whilst having support so keeping my balance and not getting wet.

This picture sequence opposite shows that using positive active blade pressure works as I ended up where I was meant to go, but hitting the rock was not my intention.



Figure 2: Here I am holding pressure on my blade as I paddle down a long but small rapid.



Figure 4: Holding positive active blade pressure to keep the boat tracking towards the target



Figure 5: Here using the positive pressure to torso rotate to absorb and drive through the impact



Figure 6: After impact holding balance in flight



Figure 7: As I land on a positive blade ready for my next stroke, ending up where I intended

Hitting a big braking wave

If we change our environment from a low volume rocky river to a high volume river, there are not really any rocks to hit, however the big waves, holes and breaking waves present similar challenges to navigate as rocks in low volume. It is in this environment when positive active blade pressure really comes into its own!

The fastest moving water is generally about a foot under the surface right where the blade will be. Having a positive active blade in the water even when not paddling will give pressure from the flowing water underneath the surface which will allow of speed as well as having the blade grip to apply pressure if the wave breaks.

Holding Positive Active Blade Pressure to pull on gives support and maintains momentum to get through the waves upright.

Going through a large wave train I can plant my last stroke (key stroke) and then holding the blade in the water; I can manoeuvre my boat and drive through.



Figure 10: Holding positive active blade pressure to absorb the hit



Figure 8: Reaching for the key stroke



Figure 11: Driving through on the positive blade pressure



Figure 9: Planting the key stroke



Figure 12: Holding positive pressure to finish and exit



Figure 13: Finding the lip, getting positive active blade pressure



Figure 14: Folding positive active blade pressure to drive through the stroke



Figure 15: Finishing the stroke with full torso rotation



Figure 16: Already set to land and finish on a stroke, weight forward, driving away

Boofing, taking off and landing

Boofing is a very common manoeuvre; keeping the bow up as you drop to land flat. Either you are trying to boof a hole, or a rock to make a move on an essential line. There are a few ways to do this, either the old school hip thrust action, or a well timed well placed forward paddle stroke, whichever way you like, it's always your last stroke that counts (key stroke). The key stroke is the last before I boof on the lip of a drop.

Your key stroke needs 3 things:

- ▶ Timing
- ▶ Placement
- ▶ Positive active blade pressure

Getting the pressure on the blade enables us to wait until the last moment to either punch through or to just give whatever drive is needed, may even be just a little flick but if you don't have the pressure on the blade to start, then you have less control at the lip. Sometimes the move requires holding the paddle in a paused positive reaching position, waiting to get the placement on the lip, then feeling the pressure and executing the manoeuvre. It's having the pressure on that blade which gives the control and support to propel ourselves forward.

Landing with a forward stroke and getting a positive active blade in the water allows you to get the pressure to pull-on. This is as important as the key stroke in itself. It's easy to remember:

- ▶ Take off on a stroke and land on a stroke

And for a few simple reasons, invaluable:

If I were to be boofing a drop there will normally be a hole waiting for me. If I land on a stroke and gain active blade pressure by looking for the stroke, placing it as soon as you land you can drive yourself out and away from the hole and carry on having momentum, support and control the hole time. The reach will also move your weight forward naturally, protecting the stern as it does not quite clear the hole.

Interviews with Pro Kaykers

Along the way I have met, and paddled with, some of the world's top white water kayakers, such as Dane Jackson, Jakub Nemec, Barny young, Adrian Kierman and the NZ legend Trent Garnham. When kayaking with them, I naturally assimilated aspects of their styles and techniques of paddling.

I asked these kayakers a series of three questions, their answers were congruent:

- ▶ **Where do you get the support from when you paddle down a rapid?**
All kayakers agreed forwards paddling, because this is where they get their power and support from.
- ▶ **How do you manoeuvre your kayak in the flow?**
Sweeping forward strokes.
- ▶ **Do you use a low brace for support when you manoeuvre in or out of the flow or when you're about to take a hit?**
They all agreed that no low brace would be used as they have no control with it

Counter Argument

Some paddlers and coaches like using the low brace in manoeuvres especially when teaching new paddlers to the sport saying that the low brace is important to keep the student upright when practicing manoeuvres. Also that the low brace will stop beginners falling over and capsizing. The low brace will offer a moment of support if it is used, breaking in and out a low brace is useful to give paddler a moment of support as they turn and cross eddy lines. Landing on a low brace off a boof will offer a moment of support and if you hit a rock the low brace will keep you upright.

The low brace can be used for all I have covered in this paper; however using the low brace to do these manoeuvres offers the paddler little progression and if they have to rely on a low brace for support all the time then their progression will be slow, less positive and take longer than using the modern day dynamic techniques and torso rotation. The low brace is a defensive approach and would be fine if the river was un-dynamic, but it is not. It keeps throwing punches and curve balls and whilst low brace keeps you upright for 'that' snapshot in time, it sets you up to be off balance, in the wrong place, too slow and un-reactive for what is coming next.

Conclusion

Kayaking is a dynamic and growing sport across the UK and all over the world with people coming and trying the sport that we really enjoy; this makes it more important for us to deliver the most up to date styles and techniques for each discipline of kayaking. Using the correct technique is essential in teaching others to transfer energy through the body back into the boat.

Whatever discipline of kayaking we are teaching we need to understand the basic fundamentals for each one we participate in, whether its white water kayaking, surf kayaking, sea kayaking or slalom everything we need to accomplish for each of these disciplines needs to be started correctly. Correct technique for forwards paddling is the least practised stroke but yet by far the most important, we cannot achieve student success if we do not understand how it works ourselves. The only way that we can achieve this is to get modern day coaching from the guys and girls who are at the top of their games and try different ways of doing things by trying different kayaks and participating in different disciplines.

This is where the new British Canoeing and UKCC coaching awards come in. It is important that new coaches participating in these awards get the correct instruction in approaching new techniques and then they can go and use these modern styles in different disciplines and dynamic kayaking environments so then they understand and can pass on the correct information to their students as it is experience that counts.

Paddlers and coaches that have not been coached in many years can sometimes fall behind current techniques in what they are trying to deliver to other; this is where it is important for us to participate in the sport and keep ourselves up to date with the ongoing changes so we can pass the message on to our students. Understanding what goes on inside the boat with our body and how correct techniques help us to go and have fun and do what we enjoy.

Low brace is an out of date stroke and should not be used or taught, as a first resort for support. In my experience they have little advantage, they are just a 'crutch', and are a bad and hard habit to get out of; it was not until I experienced positive active blade pressure technique that I was able to perform to the best of my ability.

Holding positive pressure on your blade to execute any manoeuvre whether it's just paddling down a rapid and adjusting course then driving, absorbing or counteracting a big hit insert is much more successful! Taking off and landing is by far the easiest and most effective way of paddling down a river so we have the control and we have the support to keep ourselves upright. Having a positive active blade in the water and having the support to start with will enable you to be more confident on the water.

News round-up

COACHING REPRESENTATIVE ELECTIONS and VACANCIES

Regional Coaching Representative

Elections & Vacancies

The following RCR positions are up for election and we invite nominations:

North East, Devon & Cornwall, Channel Islands.

Our congratulations go to Sam Saunders who has been newly elected as the **London RCR**. Welcome to the team!

Area Coaching Representative Elections & Vacancies

The following ACR roles are currently up for election and we invite nominations:

Team North: North Yorkshire, Durham, South West Cumbria.

Team Central: Suffolk, Lincolnshire, North Derbyshire, South Derbyshire.

Team South: East London, Central London, Oxfordshire, Hampshire Isle of Wight.

Our congratulations and thanks go to **Andy Oughton**, Leicestershire ACR, **David Reynolds**, Merseyside ACR and **Robin Oakley**, Hertfordshire ACR, who have been re-elected.

Our thanks go to **Stephen Moore** and **Lizzie Harrington**, for their hard work and support in their ACR roles.

Please get in touch! If you (or someone you know) are interested in taking on one of these roles please contact Natasha Devonshire (natasha.devonshire@britishcanoeing.org.uk) who can help answer your questions.

All applicants must submit a profile (not more than 200 words) and must be proposed by two current RCRs/ACRs or by five other coaches. These coaches must meet the British Canoeing Coach Update Scheme requirements and live, work or be a member of a canoe club in the respective area. These all need to be received by Natasha Devonshire in the British Canoeing Office by 4:00pm on 27th November 2015.

Note - before nominating anyone, please ensure you have discussed this with them and that they are willing to stand.

Recruitment Opportunity: Field-based Internal Quality Assurance Officers

British Canoeing is currently seeking to recruit two Officers to join the English Quality Assurance team. The purpose of these roles is to support the verification and continuous improvement of delivery standards for British Canoeing UKCC Level 1 and Level 2 awards.

For more information please see the **Job Description and Person Specification**.

To apply please send your CV together with a covering letter to rayan.sammutter@britishcanoeing.org.uk or for an informal discussion about these roles please call **08453 709539**.

CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS
• **23rd November 2015**





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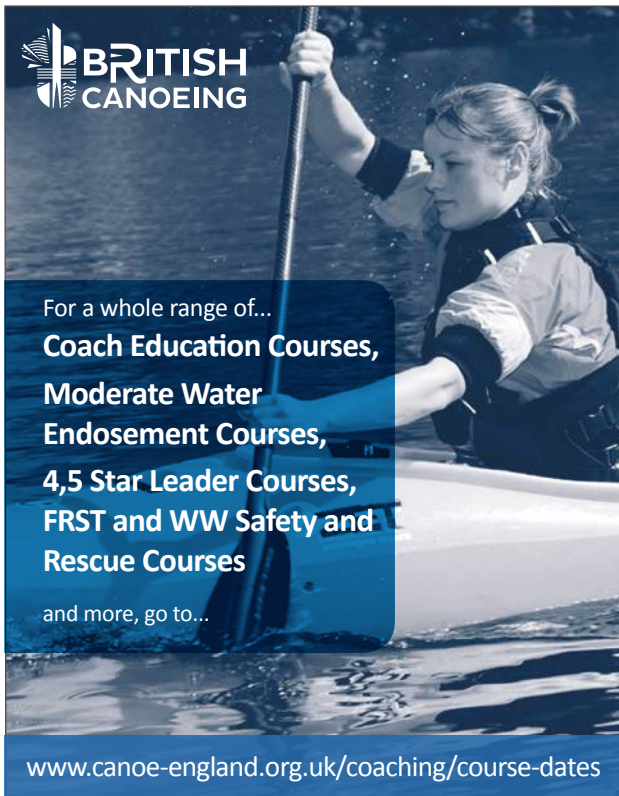




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