

UNITED HOSPITALS HEAD RACE 2026

Risk assessment

This assessment is designed to cover foreseeable risks in the conduct of the UH Head. This event is usually held in the middle of the Spring term. Boating for this event occurs mainly from University of London boathouse (ULBH), but one club (KCL/GKT) boats from Tideway Scullers School boathouse (TSSBH) and one club (ICSM) is now based at Putney, but will probably boat from ULBH. Invitational clubs may boat from ULBH or elsewhere. Racing will be on the ebb tide.

The event will be held in accordance with the principles set out in *The Tideway Code (TC)* published by the PLA. The event will follow the PLA guidance shown at <https://pla.co.uk/river-events>:

The races will be held between Syon Park Pavillion and Chiswick Bridge with the tide in the navigational channel. The river will remain open at all times during the event. Competitors will break from the rowing code in the following manner:

o As and when it is safe to do so competitors may overtake in the restricted zones [at Kew];

o As and when it is safe to do so competitors may follow the racing line.

Crews will proceed to the marshalling area following TC. The marshalling area is shown at appendix 6/website, and is alongside Isleworth Ait. The race will be held in two divisions, starting just below Syon House Pavilion and finishing at the MAA Boathouse. Distance approximately 4400m.

There will be officials placed along the course to maintain a constant line of sight of the course. There will be officials placed on the western end of both restricted zones at Kew to monitor the progress of powered vessels against the stream and assess the need for 'line astern' navigation through the Kew area.

Safety provision will be by a designated launch in the Brentford - Kew area.

History of the UH Head.

This event has been held in this location for many years. There have been no fatalities or significant injuries related to the conduct of this event known to the author in this period.

2006: event was rowed over a reduced course because of difficult conditions (wind against tide) above Brentford Lock.

2007: Thames Barrier closure immediately prior to the event which reduced the very strong stream to more acceptable conditions, but the novice section was scratched due to concerns about the likely stream conditions.

2008: No specific issues.

2009: Collision between a coxless 4 competing in the race and a small powered launch at Brentford Lock; with swamping of the racing shell but no injuries. The incident was reviewed by the PLA and the TRRC RSA, and it was felt that the collision resulted from a failure to keep an adequate lookout on the part of both boats and there was an onus on the event to ensure that the navigation of external boats was not compromised. Decision to not accept entries from coxless boats unless can demonstrate proficiency in steering (note need for any college club to meet high threshold).

2010: No specific issues.

2011: No specific issues.

2012: No specific issues

2013: No specific issues.

2014: Very significant fluvial flows during the winter months. Race format changed to exclude novice crews and race time altered to occur during the rise following low water. This provided reasonably settled conditions for the race.

2015: No specific issues.

2016: No specific issues.

2017: No specific issues.

2018: No specific issues on race day (note extreme cold conditions in previous week which led to precautionary cancellation of other events that weekend – due to local nature of this event the race was held in good conditions).

2019: No specific issues.

2020: Very fast stream conditions, difficulty in marshalling more novice crews in division 2. Event held just before coronavirus pandemic.

2021 (May and October, timetrial) No specific issues.

2022: No specific issues.

2023: No specific issues.

2024: Race cancelled due to very high fluvial flow.

2025: No specific issues.

Pandemic infection risk

It is assumed that there will be no restrictions in place for the 2026 race.

Key risks and mitigation process

Key risk (reference)	Measured variable	Risk level	Risk rating	Mitigation	Responsibility
Changes to fluvial flow	PLA fluvial flow flag	Black flag	Black	Consider impact of delay in establishing ebb stream	RCC(CU)
		Green flag	Green	Nil	N/A
		Yellow flag	Amber	Consider: 1. exclusion of novice 80 and small boats 2. change in time of racing to later in ebb or after low water (ebb direction) 3. change in time of marshalling and racing to flood direction	RCC/race committee (aim for decision > 24 hours prior to race time)
		Red flag	Red	Cancel or defer race to another date	RCC/race committee (aim for decision > 24 hours prior to race time)
High wind speeds (9)	Forecasted wind direction and speed	Forecast Mean < 15mph or Gusts < 25mph	Green	Course inspection by CU prior to race	RCC(CU)

		Forecast Mean 16-20mph or Gusts 25-35mph (especially easterly at Brentford Lock or southerly alongside Isleworth Ait)	Amber	Decision may need to be made on race day following high water and may need to be based on course inspection and review of actual wind speed and direction (note that forecast may > actual gust speeds) Consider: 1. Cancel or defer race to another date 2. Shortening of course to finish at ULBH (especially if strong SE gusts) 3. Shortening of course to start alongside Brentford Ait (especially if strong easterly gusts) 4. Combination of the above (see appendix 11)	RCC/race committee (decision may need to be made on race day)
		Forecast Mean > 20mph or Gusts > 35mph	Red	Decision may need to be made on race day following high water and may need to be based on course inspection and review of actual wind direction and speeds (note that forecast may > actual gust speeds) Consider: 1. Cancel or defer race to another date 2. Other options shown in 'amber' risk rating but only if conditions appear reasonable and stable	RCC/race committee (decision may need to be made on race day)
Poor water quality due to sewage discharge	Check status of Putney CSO in 72 hours prior to race; course inspection	No visible raw sewage on course; no alert regarding CSO operation	Green	Competitor instructions include link to British Rowing advice for poor water quality	
		Moderate level of visible raw sewage on course in 72 hours prior to race; CSO discharge status	Amber	Active reminder to all competitors regarding poor quality water advice in line with British Rowing guidelines. Consider Cancellation or deferment of event	RCC (CU)

		amber or red (discharge likely in next 24 hours or less)		
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Table of risks and control measures

Risk Assessment Matrix (Row Safe 2008 v1 section 1.2)

	Most likely severity of harm		
Likelihood of harm	Slight harm	Moderate harm	Extreme harm
Very unlikely	Very low risk 1	Low risk 2	Low risk 3
Unlikely	Low risk 4	Medium risk 5	Medium risk 6
Likely	Medium risk 7	Medium risk 8	High risk 9
Very likely	Medium risk 10	High risk 11	Very high risk 12

	Risk	Issues	Probability of accident	Likely severity	Risk estimation	Control measures
1	Risk of collision with other oared boat, powered vessel or fixed obstruction	<p>Novice and inexperienced coxes. Coxswains fail to attend coxswains' pre-race meeting Lack of adherence to competitors' instructions</p> <p>Risk of meeting powered vessels coming upriver during race (river not closed); especially in Kew restricted zones.</p> <p>Risk of other planned rowing events in the location (Boat Race Fixtures and Chiswick Sculling Ladder)</p>	Likely	Slight Harm	Medium 7	<p>i. UH sets basic minimum coxing experience criteria</p> <p>ii. Annual testing of steers/coxes for crews boating from ULBH by ULBH safety advisor (similar process at other boathouses)</p> <p>iii. Emphasis on responsibilities of individual club captains to ensure compliance with marshalling instructions and attendance at coxswains' meeting.</p> <p>iv. Coxswains' meeting – emphasise the need to adhere to the TC</p> <p>v. Emphasise need at briefing for officials' launches to be in designated position throughout marshalling and race.</p> <p>vi. Race officials monitor powered vessel activity and provide instruction to competitors during race. Event needs to ensure that there is appropriate tasking for these roles.</p> <p>vii. Ensure adequate gaps between crews.</p> <p>viii. Liaison between event and other planned rowing events – RCC (CU)</p>
2	Radio communication failure	<p>Immersion of handset/ severe rain Handset battery failure Handset failure. Length of course. Positioning of booster station. Aim to use digital radio system for better course-wide coverage</p>	Unlikely	Slightly harmful	Low 4	<p>i. Mobile phones as back-up;</p> <p>ii. Total system failure will require control to consider suspension of event.</p> <p>iii. Aim to use digital rather than analogue radio system</p> <p>iv. If using analogue radio system - there may be some difficulty in maintaining clear radio contact between start and finish despite optimum positioning of booster station (on roof level of ULBH); therefore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two analogue radio groups designated: Start group (L1,2,3,4, safety & BM 1 & 2); Finish group (L5,6,7,8, safety & M2,3,4&5) • Direct contact (mobile telephone back-up) essential between L1 and BM3 and BM5 BM2/L5 to act as relay for both radio groups IF NEEDED
3	Use of inexperienced race officials	Use of relatively junior personnel (student based)	Likely	Slight harm	Medium 7	<p>i. Invitation of other licenced umpires by CU</p> <p>ii. Role allocation by RCC/CU (high risk areas including Kew RZs)</p>

		Limited availability of licenced umpires				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Briefing by chief umpire iv. Overall control by chief umpire in start area v. Adherence to radio code
4	Launch engine failure	<p>Borrowed launches. Engine failure/ lack of petrol during event; 7 launches in action Launch failure prior to event, with no available spare Grounding of engine due to low water depth</p>	Likely	Slight Harm	Medium 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The event will not commence without sufficient fully functioning launches. ii. Launch drivers need to be aware of the risk of grounding up river towards Syon. iii. If a launch failure occurs during the event, then control will take immediate steps to identify a reserve launch. If one is not available, then the control/CU will review whether suspension of racing is appropriate. It may be possible to transfer one or two race monitors to the single.
5	Inadequate launch safety equipment	Borrowed equipment (responsibility rests with the individual club captains)	Very unlikely	Moderate Harm	Low 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. UHBC will not allow the event to start without sufficient fully equipped launches ii. If a reserve launch is brought into action then control to check launch. iii. UHBC identifies responsibility of individual club captains at UHBC committee meetings and elsewhere to provide equipment in line with British Rowing 'Row safe'.
6	Immersion in the Tideway	Risk of immersion, hypothermia and drowning.	Very unlikely	Extreme Harm	Low 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. All private matches based at ULBH will have appropriate rescue boat provision from recognised provider. ii. The event cannot commence without adequate safety boat cover. iii. Back up via RNLI if needed. iv. All coxes will wear buoyancy aids/lifejackets in line with BR Row safe v. Rowers will need to satisfy individual clubs regarding competence to swim; if not competent then they must wear an appropriate buoyancy aid or lifejacket. vi. If rowers are competent to swim then they will not wear specific buoyancy aids in line with national standards for rowing as set out in BR Row Safe
7	Medical evacuation	<p>LAS ambulance. Primary evacuation route via ULBH. Secondary evacuation routes shown in table appendix 4</p>	Very unlikely	Extreme Harm	Low 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. CU and others medically qualified. ii. Other officials will also have basic life support provision ability. iii. LAS outside of UH/ULBC control. iv. Designated primary evacuation route via ULBH.

8	Fast ebb stream conditions (high fluvial flow)	PLA 'flag' system Greater chance of high fluvial flows during winter months	Likely	Extreme harm	High risk 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. CU and organising committee to review ebb flow rates over previous few days, and aim for early notification (>24 hours) to competitors about changes to the planned events. ii. If 'red' flag then event may not proceed on the ebb and no oared boats should be allowed on the Tideway; rowing may be possible during the time between low and high water (nominal flood) but the duration of actual flood direction stream is likely to be short and unpredictable. iii. If 'yellow' flag the PLA guidance will apply and the event must consider exclusion of crews with limited experience. It may be possible for the event to sanction crews entered as 'novice' to race provided that there has been an individual assessment of each relevant crew to consider their experience and suitability. In general crews comprising members who have less than two term's rowing experience should not boat during the ebb stream in 'yellow' flag conditions. iv. The event may decide to revert to contingency plans (appendix 11); e.g. defer the race until the time of nominal low water or run the race upriver on the middle of the flood period. There will be a coxes' briefing immediately prior to the race in case of any significant change to the format.
9	Poor weather conditions	High wind speeds Heavy rain Limited visibility Fog	Likely	Extreme harm	High risk 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. CU and organising committee to review weather forecasts over previous few days and aim for early notification (>24 hours) to competitors about adverse weather conditions. ii. If gusts are forecast >35mph in a direction parallel to the river and against the stream then there is a high likelihood of unrowable conditions especially near high water (e.g. at Brentford on the ebb with an easterly wind). iii. However the Mortlake reach is relatively sheltered from the prevailing southwest wind direction and it may not be possible to accurately predict the impact of high wind speed on the water conditions until the time of the event. iv. If there is doubt then the organising committee will instruct a

						<p>delay in boating from ULBH and TSSC until there has been a course inspection by the CU.</p> <p>v. The CU and organising committee may determine that it is possible to achieve safe racing conditions by curtailing the course (including starting at Brentford Ait or finishing at ULBC) – see contingency plan. If there is a significant change to the race format there will be an additional coxes’ briefing immediately prior to the race.</p> <p>vi. Heavy rain or other climatic conditions may temporarily reduce visibility and the CU will monitor the situations during the event.</p> <p>vii. If the visibility is reduced such that the railway bridge cannot be seen clearly across the width of the river from the balcony of ULBH then the event should be suspended.</p>
10	Navigation of powered vessels in regatta area	Navigation of other vessels must not be impeded Adequate look-out by coxes, marshals, umpires	Likely	Slight harm	Medium 7	<p>i. Limited volume of powered vessel traffic on Tideway in winter</p> <p>ii. Event advertised on PLA event calendar.</p> <p>iii. Effective use of bank marshal (spotter) downriver of race finish to advise of oncoming vessels; to liaise with start.</p> <p>iv. Experience of race starter/officials Monitoring of VHF channel 14 by event and safety launch (VHF licenced).</p>
11	Watermanship of competitors proceeding to marshalling area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure of cox to keep adequate look-out. • Failure to adhere to PLA byelaws & TC 	Likely	Slight harm	Medium 7	<p>i. See 1 above;</p> <p>ii. Supervision by launches of TC rules in inshore zone</p> <p>iii. Officials 4 and 7 to be on station promptly and monitor crossing points. Official 4 to control Syon crossing point, official 7 opposite UL.</p> <p>iv. Pre-race information to coxes, only experienced coxes (30 hours experience minimum) permitted to race; emphasise care to be taken when proceeding to the marshalling zone to avoid other crews proceeding in the opposite direction on the flood (especially at the crossing points (upstream of ULBH and at Syon crossing).</p> <p>v. Port-hand buoys helps control risk by identifying correct navigation channel.</p>

12	Supervision of marshalling area	Crews rowing at firm pressure in congested area Failure to keep line astern Crews turning Impact of fast stream (excess land water)	Likely	Slight harm	Medium 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 3 launches in marshalling area; ii. Experienced Marshals in this area iii. Pre-race instruction to coxes, experienced coxes only iv. Race scheduled for as late as possible in the day to reduce conflict with non-event crews. v. Requirement for line astern marshalling; vi. No firm pressure / racing starts in marshalling area; vii. Official 4 to hold crews below Syon crossing if excess congestion. viii. Chief Umpire to exclude novice crews if conditions unsuitable
13	Turning of competitors on the stream Unsafe river conditions immediately prior to race	Unobserved obstruction on course Motor vessel against stream on course (especially at Kew RZ) Non-compliant external crew Novice boats have a larger turning circle; Failure of cox to keep adequate look-out; Failure of marshalling launches to supervise turning; Crews turning too far onto the starboard aspect of the fairway alongside Isleworth Ait	Likely	Slightly harm	Medium 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Adequate supervision by race officials; ii. Adequacy of experience of race officials; iii. Pre-race information to coxes, experienced coxes only; iv. Chief Umpire to check whole of marshalling area and check with control prior to starting race. v. CU will not start to turn crews until the river conditions (including other river traffic) appear suitable. vi. Chief Umpire to ensure adequate time gaps between each crew being set off to reduce likelihood of bunching/overtaking at Kew RZ vii. Attention by marshals to keep crews against stream in correct position on Middlesex side.
14	Watermanship of crews during race	Failure to keep adequate look-out Failure to adhere to TC Conflict with motor vessels Difficulty in communication between officials and coxes Cox failing to return to the starboard aspect after overtaking in accordance with event rules and TC	Likely	Slight Harm	Medium 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Pre-race information to coxes; ii. Ensure all coxes have key minimum competencies as assessed by club captains; specific requirement on all club captains to disclose problems with competency at previous UHBC committee meeting iii. Crews will be seeded (using previous finishing order) to attempt to reduce the amount of overtaking required. iv. Launch 4 will be on the Syon crossing point to monitor both UH crews racing on the stream and non-UH crews crossing from Surrey to Middlesex against the stream. v. CU will delay race start to avoid possible conflict in Kew RZs with oncoming powered vessels vi. Marshals will establish sufficient gaps between crews at the start to

						<p>reduce risk of overtaking/bunching of crews</p> <p>vii. Launches equipped with adequate megaphone and flags</p> <p>viii. Line of sight by officials along whole course</p> <p>ix. No coxless boats in event except with documented assurance of navigational competence.</p>
15	Navigation in Kew Restricted Zone	Variation of TC by event (agreed with PLA) Potential narrowing of channel in RZ's by oncoming powered vessels	Likely	Slight harm	Medium 7	<p>i. Lead Official in L5 to assess river conditions in Kew RZ as race approaches;</p> <p>ii. Officials 5 & 6 to enforce 'line astern' racing if conditions not safe (e.g. oncoming powered vessel)</p> <p>iii. Significance of instruction 'line astern' to be emphasised at coxes meeting</p> <p>iv. Abandonment protocol to be emphasised at coxes meeting</p>
16	Race finish and turning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ebb finish – possibility of drifting down 	Unlikely	Moderate harm	Medium 5	<p>i. Dedicated finish marshal to ensure crews do not stop in Chiswick Bridge restricted zone & they exit before turning</p> <p>ii. Novice crews coxed by experienced coxes;</p> <p>iii. Procedure for turning in pre-race information to coxes</p>
17	Watermanship of returning crews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adherence to PLA byelaws Failure to proceed in in-shore zone in accordance with TC Crews retuning to ULBH against ebb stream crossing across racing crews 	Unlikely	Moderate harm	Medium 5	<p>i. Officials to ensure crews turned and following correct course back to boathouse.</p> <p>ii. Emphasis on proper navigation in in-shore zone at coxes' and officials' meeting.</p> <p>iii. Official 7 to monitor returning crews especially whilst race still in progress.</p>
18	Impact of other private matches scheduled on same day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of events organised on the ebb tide at same time on some or all of the same course (e.g. Chiswick sculling Ladder) Impact of events organised on same day that potentially share some of the same marshalling area (e.g. UBR fixture races on flood at Chiswick Bridge) 	Unlikely	slight harm	Low 4	<p>1. Ensure effective communication prior to race day to mitigate conflict – e.g. minor adjustments in start times</p> <p>2. Ensure competitor awareness of possible conflict and need to keep a good look out</p> <p>3. Ensure good communication on day to maintain separation between the events e.g. avoid starting fixture race before all division 2 crews have started</p>

President, UHBC

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