

Southern Area Chair's Report May 2025 to April 2026

2025/26 proved to be a very productive year for many in the Southern Area, with athletes, coaches and officials achieving recognition and success at the highest levels of international judo. At all levels throughout the Area, the tireless ongoing effort and dedication of clubs, players, coaches, referees, technical officials and other volunteers continues to be at the heart of Southern Area judo.

This was the third year of my four-year term as Area Chair. We have continued to operate within the structure of the Area Action and Development plan, with activities aligned with the domains of the BJA Strategy, considering the short-term (year-on-year) and longer-term (throughout the current four-year cycle) activities and goals of the Area.

There are currently 89 registered Southern Area member clubs, with an additional 53 registered venues associated with those clubs. This is a decrease of 3 clubs from last year, but an increase of 4 registered venues/satellite clubs. Area membership has remained fairly consistent over the last 12 months, fluctuating between *ca.* 6300 and 6480 every month between Apr 2025 and Mar 2026 (the most recent data available). There is natural variation in recruitment of new members and leavers/lapsed memberships in accordance with the time of year.

The Area has awarded several thousand pounds of funding to a number of individual athletes and volunteers through its open grant application programme, and has continued to operate the rolling subsidy scheme throughout 2025/26 to support the progress of coaches, referees and technical officials to achieve their next levels of qualification. It is hoped that this scheme will be extended into 2026/27. The Committee has also agreed to launch a second round of the £10k Grass Roots Club Development Fund in the summer of 2026, with a goal to provide financial support to Southern Area member clubs for grass-roots development projects that seek to increase participation and growth, with long-term benefit to judo in the Area. It is hoped to simplify somewhat the application process to encourage applications from a greater number of clubs.

The Southern Area continues to be well represented on the England and GB squads, with many Area players enjoying national-level success at English and GB events in 2025/26. Area athletes won a total of 29 medals (5 gold, 8 silver, 16 bronze) at the 2025 British Championships across the four age categories (4 pre-cadet, 5 cadet, 7 junior and 13 senior medals). Area athletes across the range from pre-cadets to seniors also continue to represent GB at the highest levels of international judo, including European Cup, European and Continental Opens, and Grand Slams. Results included 19 medals (9 senior, 8 junior and 2 cadet) across a great variety of events across Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, in addition to selections, podium finishes and placements at European Cadet Championships, World University Games, European University Combat Sports Games, European Youth Olympic Finals, and both the Junior and Senior European and World Championships (for players representing Southern Area member clubs). Southern Area players have also been performing at the highest level of kata competitions, including the European and World Championships, and Continental adaptive events, including kata.

Events continue to run well in our now-established Southern Area events venue at Woking Leisure Centre. The Regional Schools Championships and Intercounty Team Championships are now regular fixtures, and we are still working on what is the preferred event to run in November, with an Open minor, pre-cadet and cadet event seeming most promising. Consideration is also being given to working with Kent to combine the Sunday of the Kent Open with a Southern Area Open Junior/Senior ranking event.

The Area's international referees also continue to be very active on the continental and world stage, with Lisa Rivers continuing to officiate at the highest IJF level, and most recently being selected for the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games. After many years of international refereeing, and as a

member of the National Refereeing Commission, Martin Rivers retired from these roles in January 2026, and the Southern Area gratefully acknowledges his significant – and ongoing – contribution to judo. Our international referees continue to support domestic events at all levels too, helping to inspire younger officials and contributing to the running of numerous training courses.

The Area was also well represented at the 2025 British Judo Awards, with Tim Byrne from The Judo Company named Coach of the Year, Sara Coni (representing both Camberley Judo Club and London's Nippon Judo Club) winning Cadet Female Athlete of the Year, and Isabelle Everest (Westerleigh Judokwai) winning the Inclusion Award.

Many congratulations also to Derek Paxton and Sarah Hopkins on their well-deserved promotion to 6th dan during this period.

2025/26 has also seen the progression of plans for the proposed review of the governance structure of Judo England as the largest Home Nation, to support the growth and development of judo in England in line with Sport England expectations. The proposed new structure would create an England Judo Board, and reorganise the nine existing Areas into five regions, one of which would be the Southern Region, largely the same as the current Southern Area. Appointed Regional Leads would each manage a Regional Board responsible for management of judo activity in the region with key Regional Co-ordinators (Events, Refereeing, Officials, Coaching & Talent, Dan Grading & Kata, Safeguarding & Welfare) and unified budget management. The proposal is currently under review by Judo England, with a working group being established to consider the transition to the new structure. The Southern Area's priorities are to continue to be able to provide for the Area's members and member clubs with provision of events, courses and funding.

John Malkinson