

## **What to expect when we ask you to swim in a competition**

*This document has been prepared for our swimmers and parents/ carers to give an overview of what types of competitions there are and what to expect when you come to a competition.*

*This is a link to the [swimming.org](https://www.swimming.org) page where there is some good information about meets*

<https://www.swimming.org/sport/licensed-meets/>

We suggest that all our swimmers try out competitions even if the main reason why you are swimming is to have fun, improve your strokes and get fit. In the coaches' experience there are very few junior swimmers who are not keen on racing their peers! Trying something for the first time is scary for everyone and even if you didn't enjoy your first few competitions you will probably find they get more fun with time once you get more used to the competition environment. Your coaches like to see you doing some racing so they can see how your swimming is improving. You may also find that watching better swimmers at competitions makes you keen to work hard in training so you can swim just like them.

A swimming competition is either called a gala or a meet. Usually we call team competitions 'galas' and open events where you swim as an individual 'meets'. Whatever gala/ meet that you do, make sure that you come prepared with your costume, hat and goggles. Bring a towel to have on poolside plus a top and possibly shorts/ tracksuit bottoms/ socks/ flip flops to keep warm and dry between events. Also bring your water bottle and some suitable snacks. You bring phones/ mobile devices onto poolside at your own risk and be aware that they might get wet – you are not allowed to take photos of other swimmers unless you have their permission (selfies with your mates are fine). Depending on the pool, if there are lockers that can lock in the changing rooms it can be better to leave your bag in the lockers as room on poolside is normally quite limited.

## **Cotswold League – Gala series starting in January**

This is a team event; the head coach selects the best swimmers for the team based on the times that you have obtained at other competitions. There are 4 rounds, one a month starting in January, where the clubs swim against each other scoring points. This is to qualify for one of the 3 finals (A, B and C) and the league places are decided at the finals in late April/ Early May. Each of the 24 clubs in the league has to host one of the rounds, most often they are in their home pools (some are nicer than others). All the galas in rounds 1-4 will have 4 teams swimming against each other, they will always be on a Saturday and generally the doors open at 6pm for a 6:10 warm up and 6:30 competition start. The same programme of events is followed at all of the galas (53 events in total) and generally one that starts at 6:30 would expect to end around 9pm. The age groups are 11 and under, 13 and under, 15 and under, and open (all on the date of the finals gala). The team is allocated a lane for the competition. Each age group has a race for each stroke (25 m for 11 and under; 50m for 13 and 15 and under and 100m for open), a 4 person medley relay and a 4 person freestyle relay. Additionally the 15 and under and open swimmers also have a 100m individual medley event. Event 53 is the cannon where 8 swimmers, a boy and girl from each age group swim 25m freestyle. When you are not swimming you will be on poolside with the rest of the team being looked after by the team manager; you will probably be squashed into a small space! Parents you will probably be squashed into a very hot viewing area with not that many seats! Due to the high

cost of coaches we would usually expect swimmers to be driven to the event and many people lift share – depending on the draw we could be swimming locally or up to 1.5 hours away.

## **Four Seasons Under 12s League – Gala series starting in November**

There are 4 galas in this league with the first of the season being in November. The age groups are 9 and under, 10 and under, 11 and under and 12 and under. In each age group there is a race for each stroke (two younger groups swim 25m, older two swim 50m) plus 4-person relays for medley and freestyle in each age group. The 12 and under age group also swim a 100m individual medley. To finish (event 51) there is a cannon where one boy and one girl from each age group swims in an 8-person relay.

These are low key events which are meant for the less experienced swimmers to get a chance to compete as a team. An email will go out to ask for availability and then the head coach will pick a team which will probably include everyone who said that they were able to compete on that date.

Travel, poolside and squashed viewing areas are the same as for the Cotswold League galas!

## **Club Championships - April**

We hold this around the end of April at our pool from 1-6pm on a Sunday for the events in butterfly, backstroke, breast stroke and freestyle. Ideally we would like all our swimmers to enter all the events. The age groups are 10 and under (swim 25m), 12 and under, 14 and under (both swim 50m); and open (swim 100m). We also have events in 200m freestyle and 100m individual medley which we hold in training sessions – any age group can enter these. We ask for entries by a closing date which we will advertise closer to the time, all entries are free. Events with more than 5 swimmers will run as heats and then the five fastest swimmers will go onto a final. Events where there are 5 or less swimmers will be decided in a single heat. Swimmers will be expected to stay on poolside from the warm up period until they have finished their final event – we sit each age group together and have a team manager for each age group to marshal swimmers to the correct event. Parents are squashed into the viewing area like sardines so a better bet as a parent is to volunteer to be a timekeeper/marshal/ drink carrier/ announcer etc! There is also a parents' race which we have run in a variety of formats over the years but would expect parents to be able to swim 25 to 50 m. The prize giving is at the summer party towards the end of June.

## **Open Meets – year round**

The meets that we support are advertised to swimmers with an email from 'Competitions Secretary' via Team Unify – the instructions of what to do to enter are contained in the email. All the meets that we advertise are ones that the Head Coach has assessed and indicated that he or a nominated representative can attend. Open meets are usually organised by swimming clubs to fundraise for their clubs – they are licensed by Swim England (ASA) which means that you get official times which will go on the Swim England website and be entered in the national rankings – these official times are what you use to qualify for county and regional competitions.

You pay an entry fee for each event that you enter (£5-10) - you pay this to the club and the club pays the meet organisers directly. At the meet spectators usually must pay an entrance fee (£2-5) and can buy a programme so remember to bring cash to the event! These take place in the bigger

competition pools in the area (generally Millfield, Hengrove, Horfield and Hutton Moor) as they have better facilities for swimmers and parents than most pools in the area. There are a variety of levels and novice swimmers will enter 'development/ level 4' and level 3 meets – it doesn't matter how fast/ slow you can swim provided you can complete the event you have entered. The higher-level meets will have qualifying times. The meets are often oversubscribed with entries and this can mean that even though you have indicated that you want to enter several events you may not necessarily get an entry into some or all of them.

Most often they will be on a Saturday and Sunday and will be run as a series of 'sessions' which are 2-3 hours in length; many meets will run 4 sessions in a day starting at 8am. Each session will have its own warm up immediately preceding the races in that session. Swimmers will need to arrive in time for the warm up for their session and will need to sit in the swimmers' area with the Cheddar team where there will be one or more team managers/ coaches from the club there to organise them. The events are organised with military precision and swimmers need to pay attention to the team managers and go to the marshalling areas when they are told to do so and then follow the instructions of the marshals up to the start of their race – if you miss your race that is tough! Don't worry if you are new – we will make sure that a team manager or older swimmer will make sure you are where you are supposed to be. Be warned there is a lot of hanging about!

When you enter we put in a guide time which allows the meet organisers to seed the heats so that the heats have swimmers who swim at roughly the same speed – the age groups are mixed up so sometimes a fast 12 year old could be swimming against a 16 year old. Boys and girls have separate heats. Quite often the format is called Heat Declared Winners (HDW) – for example, there may be 20 heats in the girls 50m freestyle – the winner of the event in each age group is the person who swam fastest in the heats. There is not usually a presentation ceremony and you just find out the results by looking at the results posted in the results area and pick up your medal from the medal table if you are in the top 3.

When you first do an open meet we would suggest that you pick one or two sessions and enter whatever event is suitable within those sessions so that you do not spend all day at the pool. Generally each session will have about 3-4 events for girls and 3-4 events for boys with a mix of distances/ strokes. Talk to the coaches if you want any help in picking events to enter at a meet – possibly the 200m fly is best left until you are more experienced!

Parents come prepared to sit in a hot viewing area in generally uncomfortable seats – often you can buy refreshments like tea/ coffee/ snacks but don't assume that you could buy lunch. There is also often a travelling swim shop there selling all kinds of swim stuff.

## **County Championships and Regional Championships – February, May and November**

Swimmers have to qualify for these events by getting a qualifying time at any licensed event (usually an open meet) in the qualifying period. They are such large events that they are held over several weekends in February (Counties), May (Summer Regionals) and November (Winter Regionals). The format is broadly like that of an open meet and a variety of the big competition pools are used across the county/ region. Entry for these is via our competition secretary. When we get to the

relevant time of year emails will go out about qualifying times and how to contact the competition secretary to enter.

## **Open Water Swimming – year round**

Some of our swimmers have fun doing open water swimming events – any that we are going to support as a club will be advertised to club members.

## **Masters Open Meets – year round**

Seniors are 18-24 and masters are over 25. Swimmers can find these events on the masters swimming hub at <http://www.swimming.org/calendar/disciplines/masters-swimming/> and they enter directly with the meet organiser. There is a wide range of abilities and speeds at these meets and the atmosphere is generally very low key!

**Updated November 2018 by Louisa Slingsby**

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