

Competition Guidance For Parents and Swimmers



Swimmer Classification

The governing body for swimming in England is the ASA and WDSC is affiliated to the ASA so all our swimmers, coaches, officials, and helpers are all registered members. The ASA provide will provide an ASA number for the athlete and insurance cover for the members and give access to various National Events and Talent Camps. Members are allocated into one of three categories:

- Category 1
 - Young swimmers in Learn to Swim programmes are registered in category 1. Category 1 membership provides insurance whilst the swimmer is at training but won't allow a swimmer to compete at an event.
- Category 2
 - Swimmers who train with our competitive squads need to be registered as category 2 swimmers. This category of membership provides access to the swimming rankings system and offers insurance to swimmers at training, club events and competitions.
- Category 3
 - Category 3 membership is for parents, helpers and volunteers. WDSC have a policy that every swimmer under the age of 18, must have a parent/ guardian registered as Cat 3 as well.

Membership

As Members of the ASA, fees are payable to the National governing body to provide the insurance for the swimmer. WDSC collect this fee on behalf of the ASA, which is included within the Annual Membership of WDSC. The national annual renewal occurs in February, so all swimmers, even those who have started mid-year will have to renew their annual membership then.

Swimmer Age

For a swimmer to compete at an event, they will usually have to be at least 9 years of age, either on the last day of the competition or by the end of the year (depending on the licence granted for that event). When swimmers are of the age, coaches will discuss with the swimmer when it will be appropriate to enter events.

Competition Calendar

The WDSC Head Coach will lay out a season competition plan that will be most appropriate for the swimmers and fits in with the training cycles. Swimmers and their families are expected to adhere to the Head Coach's season plan as part of their commitment to the training programme and WDSC. Unauthorised meets/ competitions could jeopardise the swimmer's place in a squad.

Types of Swimming Competition County/ Regional/ National events

Swimmers ultimately aspire to test themselves against the best in the sport, so will seek to target entries into County, Regional, National standards and beyond, in their careers from the age of 9. County competitions can be entered from age 10 and Regional Competition from age 11 (age taken from the end of year in which the competition takes place). National events can be entered from the age of 12 for girls and 13 years for boys. Open Water Regional and National events are also available from the age of 12.

League Galas are team events where the whole team competes against other clubs, gaining points for each race. League galas are usually made up of individual races and team/relay races for the different age groups. There are local leagues, as well as National ones too.

Open Meets are advertised by individual clubs and are licenced meets for anyone who is eligible to take part. Qualifying times vary per Level of event. These events are individual races with the fastest swimmers gaining medals/ trophies. WDSC run their own Open Meets, using Dorchester Sports Centre (1610), but we also enter away Meets run by other Clubs. WDSC also run small unlicensed Club Performance Galas. These are mainly enjoyed by the younger swimmers, who usually have little or no experience of swimming at Open Meets, or are too young to compete.

Long Course or Short Course?

Details of what 'course' a meet is will be on the meet information pack – usually described as LC or SC. Short Course meets are swum in a 25m pool (same as 1610) and Long Course meets are swum in a 50m pool (same as Millfield). The Meet season is usually split into two halves – the first from September to the end of December are usually run Short Course and from March then revert to Long Course.

What are licensed meets?

Licensed meets are swimming galas that comply with a standard set of ASA licensing requirements. All times achieved at licensed meets are official and get published on a rankings database. The level of the meet can be used to identify the purpose of the competition:

- Level 4 is for those beginning to enter individual competitions. These competitions are generally hosted by a local club, usually with upper limit/No Faster Than times.
- Level 3 is again, for entry level swimmers. Entries generally have Upper limit/ No Faster than times. Can be short course or long course. Times achieved here can be used for entry to Level 1 meets, regional and county championships
- Level 2 is aimed at Regional and National SC qualifiers and swimmers who are close to qualification. They require minimum qualifying times to enter.
- Level 1 is the highest level of competitive swimming aimed at National qualifiers and swimmers close to National qualification. They also provide opportunity to achieve international qualifying times. Always swum long course and will have quite tough minimum entry times.

Please note: For level 1, 2 and 3 meets the swimmer needs to be registered with ASA Category 2 membership.

Qualifying times / Upper Limit Times / Cut off Times:

A Qualifying Time is the time that the swimmer must have already achieved in order to enter an event at the competition. For Level 1 and 2 Competitions, times are normally based on faster than times.

Upper limit/cut off times are times set by a competition organiser that a swimmer must be slower than to be able to swim at the competition. This normally applies for Level 3 Competitions.

Qualifying times or cut off times will be included in the competition meet pack so please look out for these and check before submitting an entry for your swimmer(s)

Swimmers' Entry Times:

Swimmer's times are recorded on the [National Swimming database](#) (simply enter the swimmer surname or membership number to locate their times). These times are updated after each competition and form the basis of qualification entry for future events. The database is a great tool to take a look at. It records every swim and provides graphs and other useful performance data. Event rankings, whether by Club, County, Regional or National can also be accessed on this site.

Which times can be used?

The meet pack for a given competition usually states whether (1) times need to have been achieved at licensed meet and appear on rankings and (2) how recently the times need to have been swum. If this is ever unclear, please ask your coach or contact our competition secretary. As a general rule, Most L3, L4, and friendly competitions will accept No Times if they don't appear on the rankings database. L1, L2, County, Regional, and National events will always require times to have been achieved at licensed competitions and appear on the rankings database. Times for County and Regional event need to be swum in the relevant qualifying period even if they have been achieved beforehand. National qualification may be based on rankings or times depending on the competition.

Time Conversions

This is particularly relevant when you wish to enter a Long Course meet but only have Short Course times. At the majority of swim meets, time conversions are permitted from Short Course to Long Course or vice versa. The website, <http://www.pullbuoy.co.uk/times/> has a tool which can convert these times, although SwimManager will do this for you. Pullbuoy sometimes differs by more than a few 100ths of a sec and it is only a guide.

Entering Swimming Competitions

You will be emailed via Team Unify the details of the meet that is taking place. Packs/information can be found on this email or on the WDSC website under competitions. Please read through all documents (not just the entry form). Ensure you check age groups, what events your child can enter, and when they are taking place. Team Unify will determine whether a swimmer is eligible to enter the competition by checking the level and qualifying/ cut-off times associated with the competition and will just ask when editing the competition to "tick" what events the swimmer wants to do but please ask your coach if you are unsure. The coach will need to approve the swims you have requested on Team Unify if you don't get a chance to do this. Once entries are approved and then confirmed, fees will need to be paid by bacs.

What happens to my entries?

When all of the entries for the Club are collated, the Competition Secretary will submit the whole batch to the host Club, or if it is our own Meet, will submit them to the Meet software. All competitions will be limited to space and therefore, there is a possibility that not all entries/ events will be accepted into the competitions. The host Club will process all of the entries from visiting Clubs and populate the Meet.

Priority is not given to a host Club swimmers. All Meets are run under Licence and so must be fair in apportioning races based on Qualification criteria. Therefore, generally, if the event has Minimum QTs, then if it is oversubscribed, the slower qualifiers will be scratched and if the event has 'Upper Limits/ No Faster Than QTs, then the fastest swimmers would be scratched.

The host Club will send out a list of Accepted Entries to the visiting Clubs who will then distribute to its members. This will list which events your swimmer has been accepted for and which ones have been scratched due to being full. A briefing pack will then be distributed to the swimmers detailing protocol and detail for the day/ weekend. Programmes are normally on sale and most Open Meets have access to live results. The programme will begin with the slowest swimmers first through to the fastest. Results will be calculated in Age groups depending on the Competition conditions and usually, medals will be given out to the top 3 in each Age per event. Some events will have finals too, so the fastest 8/ 10 may get to compete in that too.

Team Competitions

Competitions that swimmers are selected to compete for the Club as a team, against other clubs, rather than individually. Swimmers will be selected to swim certain events for the best possible team

outcome. A list of selected swimmers will be communicated, via email by the Lead Coach for the event. These are usually fun, noisy and competitive events which we encourage parents to shout and support their team in! If you are selected to swim for the club please make your best efforts to be available.

Below are some examples of the Team competitions we may enter:

- National Swimming League (Arena) This competition is held over three rounds on the 2nd Saturday of each month from October, to December. Galas are held at locations across the South West of England and South Wales. The team normally travels by coach. The fastest swimmers will be selected even if this means younger swimmers swimming an age group higher. Swimmers are expected to attend even if they are only swimming in a relay as every swimmer makes a valuable contribution to the team effort.
- Southern Junior (Arena) League is the Junior version of the National Arena League competition and is a relatively new event. Swimmers may get selected for both competitions subject to age.
- Dorset Novice League is for the younger swimmers against other local swimming clubs. These are held over three rounds.

The Day of Competition

Competitions are very long weekends, normally and swimmers will be required to stay with their Team for most of the day. WDSC have some volunteer Team Managers, who have had DBS and safeguarding checks. They will look after the swimmers on poolside throughout the day so the coaches are freed up to advise and coach the swimmers and monitor the racing. Some Meets, we will have over 50 of our swimmers there at the same time, so it is quite a task to manage and look after them poolside and to ensure they don't miss their races. Parents are encouraged to stay and support their swimmers from the viewing area and should be available in case their swimmer becomes ill and needs to be removed from the poolside. Due to child safeguarding, parents are not allowed poolside during events. WDSC encourage swimmers to develop independence at meets communicating with Team Managers and Coaches regarding any queries.

The main reason for entering these competitions is to achieve qualifying times that will allow a swimmer entry into county, regional and national competitions. It also allows the coaches and teachers to see progress and to further improve a swimmer's technique. Entering a variety of these competitions will increase a swimmer's confidence in a live setting and hopefully help you see continued progression by swimming faster times at each competition and improved individualised feedback.

What to bring to a Competition

The following is a general guide of what to take to a competition:

- Two Towels
- Trunks/ Costumes (bring a spare)
- Goggles (Bring a spare set)
- Two WDSC swim hats
- WDSC uniform
- Poolside footwear such as flip flops, which can be worn off poolside- bare feet are not allowed off poolside as are shoes on poolside.
- Drinks and food- Bring at least two drinks as the poolside environment severely dehydrates swimmers. Food and snacks will need to be consumed to keep the energy levels up for multiple races.

Arrival at a Competition

- Please aim to arrive and be ready on poolside at least 30mins before the first warm up is scheduled to start. There is usually a Team brief by the Coaching staff, prior to the Competition starting.

- On arrival at a gala, a swimmer should first get changed and bring everything needed with them poolside.
- Look for your Team/ Coach and sign in with your Team Manager(s) advising them that you have arrived. Stay with the rest of the team and sit together.
- All competitions begin with a warm up session. This enables swimmers to get a feel for the water, the environment and to get their bodies loosened for racing. Warm up sessions will start at the advertised times, the Team Managers will let you know when you are required to warm up. A warm up session gives swimmers the opportunity to do approximately 10 to 20 mins of continuous swimming followed by 5mins of diving and sprinting. In busy meets the warm ups are usually separated into boys and girls and age groups – see meet information for warm up times.
- It is advisable to wear poolside clothes after warm up and between races. This will keep your muscles warm, ready for your race.
- The Team Manager will remind you which events you are swimming in. DO NOT leave the poolside area without letting the Team Manager know.
- Always be ready to start your race as no one will wait for you if you aren't there or have forgotten your goggles. Remember you are part of a team, so cheer on your team-mates when they swim and always create a good impression as you are representing WDSC Swimming Club.

Parents' Guide to Surviving Competitions 😊

You will need to make sure you have planned the day or weekend. Getting to the event can be tricky and sometimes involves a very early start. Pack plenty of food to get through the day as you will be at the event for a long time. Parking can also be somewhat difficult but if you arrive in plenty of time this isn't usually an issue. Some venues will charge for parking. Once you have ensured that your swimmer is poolside with everything they need. Take your seats and enjoy the competition! Or if you find it rather hot and would like to offer help, we always need volunteers! Most meets will have an area for parents to watch the gala. There is usually a spectator entrance fee and programmes will often be available to purchase. So make sure you have some money with you or pay no entrance fee by becoming a volunteer (team manager; official; teaching assistant; coach; general helper at our own events, such as collecting entrance fee or helping with the raffle). Your child will often be seated in another part of the pool with parents restricted from the swimmer area. The kids all try to cheer each other on and parents are encouraged to cheer for the children as loud as they like to spur them on during races!

Above all, despite all the trials of getting to an open meet they are good fun and if lots of children are there they all enjoy each other's company and entertain themselves through the day. Parents can have a good old chat too!

Volunteering

Volunteering to help with running competitions is a great way to let the weekend go quicker! Many volunteers are needed to run successful meets and full training is given for roles such as team manager; officials; teaching assistant; coach. You would get to see your swimmers race too and to feel part of the team. The Club is run by volunteers, from the moment you express an interest to the membership secretary right through to getting in the pool to train or to compete. Our Club could not run without volunteers. If you feel like you would like to help, please email our Volunteer coordinator at Volunteers@swimwestdorset@gmail.com

FAQ's

How much does it cost to take part in swimming competitions?

Team events and friendly galas are often club funded or free to take part in. There is a small fee for Club Performance Galas. Licensed meets typically cost between £5-10 per race. WDSC also charge a one off admin fee per competition, which goes towards paying for coaches packs that are required by other Clubs for the coach to attend and support your swimmer.

How do I find out about competitions the club is entering?

The Head Coach will publish the Club Season Competition Calendar at the beginning of the season (August/ September). This will detail which Competitions each squad will enter throughout the season. Competitions will also be communicated by the club via email. Parents and their swimmers should adhere to the Club Calendar as it has been designed to give the ideal balance for the swimmers as well as to support the Club in Team events. Swimmers should not enter unauthorised Meets/ Competitions as this could jeopardise the swimmer's place in a squad as well as the outcome of major competitions the Club choose to support. If you are concerned that you are not receiving information, please contact us.

Is my child ready for competitions and which events should he/she enter?

The best person to provide advice on this is your child's coach. The best time to have a chat is before or after training or to contact the coach directly via email.

Why did my child get scratched from a race?

Meets can be oversubscribed and host clubs may have to refuse some entries. Sometimes refusals are based on first come first serve basis, but usually is worked out by scratching the slowest (or fastest) swimmers for the events in order to reduce them to capacity. The Promoter will normally scratch evenly across age bands in order to be fair for all entrants. Parents will get a refund for any events that are scratched.

What is a disqualification (DQ) and why did it happen?

Most swimmers get disqualified numerous times during competitive swimming. This can occur for a variety of technical reasons and is very easily done! Although this can be frustrating it should be considered as one of the learning curves in swimming! Disqualification can occur for reasons such as moving on the blocks, incorrect stroke technique and when turning at the end of the pool to name just a few. A reason will always be provided by meet officials. Swimmers or parents should not be concerned about this as coaches will explain and seek to remedy any mistakes made in training. Details on what the numbers mean can be found on the website under useful links.

My child is worried about an upcoming competition, what should I do?

Competitions particularly the first few your child enters can be a daunting experience for both swimmers and parents. There are plenty of experienced WDSW parents and swimmers at the club attending competitions. You can always ask them for advice/help and they will be happy to answer any of your questions or point you in the direction of someone who can! The important thing to remember is that swimming is very much an individual sport. The focus should be on self-improvement over time and everyone has to start somewhere! First time competitors need only be concerned with recording their first set of times and seek to improve on these gradually through training and technical improvement.

What are County, Regional, and National Championships?

- County Championships: (Jan – Feb) Annual competition for all competitive swimmers in Devon. All swimmers who achieve qualifying times should enter.
- Regional Championships: (May-June) Annual competition for all competitive swimmers from clubs in the southwest region. All swimmers who achieve qualifying times should enter.
- National Championships: Winter Nationals are swum Short Course in December. British Championships is swum in April every year and will often double up as Olympic or World trials. Summer Nationals are swum at the end of July and beginning of August.
- There are 2 championships – British Nationals and Swim England (Home Nation) Nationals. Swimmers with the top 24 ranked times in their age group at the end of the qualifying window will be invited to the British Summer Championships. The next top 20 ranked English swimmers in their age group will then be invited to the Swim England Summer Championships.