



Technical Officials - Judge Level 1 pathway and tips:

Thank you for considering becoming an official!

This guide will outline the steps for you to become a licensed official, and provides some tips and advice for the practical side. In fact, it's probably WAY too much information so feel free to skim as you need. What I do know is that there were many occasions where I said "I wish I'd have known that!", so I thought I'd jot down some thoughts and learnings from my own experience and you can always refer back to this as you need.

Some background / context on roles:

There are several levels of official in competitive swimming, but we're only going to address Judge Level 1 (JL1) here, missing out Timekeeper. This is just because JL1 is the most comprehensive way into officiating and is the first formally licenced role. Timekeeper on its own is an option, but it's limited in scope, most useful for those club staff who are helping at their own level 4 meets, i.e. pretty much only the Club Championship and the Peanuts League.

A JL1 is more widely useful to meet organisers especially open meets and larger galas, and once licenced as JL1 you can actually officiate at all levels of competitions, even up to National level should you want to go that far. The full list of official levels in British Aquatics competitive swimming is:

- **Timekeeper** – A support role limited to timekeeping duties only.
- **Judge Level 1** - The first level of licensed Technical Official, it covers the roles of timekeeper, chief timekeeper, inspector of turns, and chief inspector of turns. JL1's will stand on each lane at each end of the pool, record the times, judge the turns, plus the first and last few metres of lengths, and the finish.
- **Judge level 2** - A JL2's main role will generally be as a stroke judge, i.e. walking alongside the pool during a race looking for technical stroke infractions along the whole course, as well as some other duties including assisting with observing start and finish infractions, and importantly, deciding on race placings in the event of an equipment failure.
- **JL2S (Starter)** – This official takes charge of the entire start process and start equipment, ruling on false starts etc.
- **Referee** - This official is overall in charge of the meet, and has the final say in all decisions on technical infractions and conduct. All judges report to the Referee, and only a Referee can disqualify a swimmer.

Getting started:

For all adult volunteers (just like swimmers) it's first and foremost a requirement to have insurance and be registered with Swim England (SE), so the first step is for us to email your interest to your club Memberships Coordinator (Sarah Larkham) who will get you registered with SE. There is a yearly fee of £6:00 for "Club Support" membership, but the club will cover this for you so long as you volunteer twice a year. Once you have your SE member number you can immediately start to train as a JL1.

Training comes in two parts:

Part 1: JL1 theory. This is an online course which you book yourself onto at the link below. You'll learn the timekeeping systems, the World Aquatics rules on racing including the key rules around starts, turns, and finishes, and you will see video footage which will help you to interpret how those FINA rules are applied in practice. The course takes 5-8 hours online depending on your grasp, but it can be done in quite small chunks and saved as you go, so there's no need to spend long hours in one or two sittings. You can also attempt the tests on each module multiple times so don't worry about getting something wrong first time around. It's very straightforward and I managed it in a total of about 5 hours over a week, although I did find just a couple of parts slightly tricky – Just talk to your other club officials or coordinator for help if needed.

The online course costs £20:00 which you pay up front, but again you may claim this back from the club.

JL1 Course link (once registered with Swim England):

<https://www.swimming.org/ios/course/9427>

Following completion of the online learning, you will then need to upload your certificate to your home nations platform (swimming.org). Once this is completed, let the Herts County Officials Coordinator know (address in "useful links"), and you will then be sent your Official's logbook and training record and a hard copy of the FINA rulebook. This pack usually takes about 4 weeks to arrive.

Next you'll look to do your practical assessment / mentoring. You don't have to wait for your logbook to attend a first meet as a JL1 trainee – If you want to go and do a meet before the logbook arrives, then feel free to register for any available meet (ask your officials coordinator for links to any upcoming meets), and then on the day, just tell the Referee that you are awaiting the log book - they will give you a loose leaf page which can be used to record that session. You can later staple it into the main logbook when it arrives.

The County Officials Coordinator will also guide you at some point to take one last online module in your own time, namely "Contemporary Issues" – This is a free course which explains some more recent developments around things like safeguarding, ethics, inclusion, disability etc, and it takes about an hour or two. This is a requirement to gain your licence at the end.

Part 2: Practical poolside. You'll now need to gain at least 15 hours poolside experience (typically more like 17-18 in my experience) to finally qualify as a licenced JL1. It may sound a fair bit, but bear in mind that you could easily get 5, 7, even 10 hours in a single weekend meet, (although Referees who assess you do like to see a varied experience, so many trainees will just choose to do something like 3-5 hours at one time, duplicated across maybe 4 to 6 different meets). Most trainees gain all, or nearly all the hours needed by only attending the events that their swimmer is also attending, so you can definitely stick together with your swimmer. My only exception was 2 hours at Herts Major league to get relay take overs signed off, and my swimmer had not been selected for that round. So largely, it holds absolutely true that you don't spend time away from your swimmer, just the very odd exception!

Just as you get HSC email invites for your swimmer to attend a meet, as a JL1 Trainee you will also start to receive separate emails from your club Officials Coordinator inviting you to sign up for the same events with a special officials link, although it generally comes nearer to the event dates, 2-4 weeks out. You can do as many or as few sessions as you like, it's entirely at your convenience.

Poolside practical – What should I expect at a meet as a JL1 trainee?

Aim to be at each meet at the same time as your swimmer (warm up time is normally the same as the officials briefing time). Identify where the officials are gathering – This is usually a side room in the complex somewhere, but ask any of the swim meet organizer team, or the venue staff, or follow anyone else in white kit.

The Referee will hold a briefing before every session and will pass around a paper sign-up sheet. Place your name on the list and also annotate “mentoring request” next to it. They will ask you what areas you need to learn more about, obviously at meet 1 that’ll be everything! Hopefully after a couple of meets that list will be down to just a couple of areas. The Referee will assign you a mentor, and that mentor will help you understand what their particular responsibility is during that session, and what they’re looking out for. You’ll find that in practice, after a quick discussion in the first couple of heats, they’ll very quickly hand over to you and take a step back and just monitor / assist if necessary. And in some cases there actually may not be enough officials for everyone to get a mentor on their lane, so you could be assigned a lane yourself (say lane 7) and your mentor will be judging over in lane 6. Just keep communicating and asking questions as you need to, there is plenty of time to discuss what you’re seeing! And don’t be nervous about missing something, there’s a lot going on and nobody is expecting you to be perfect, just report what you do see and which you’re 100% certain of.

You’ll get practice and guidance in all of the Judge 1 roles, and you’ll see all of the strokes and many of the different rules / infractions. You will inevitably be asked to go and do rule infraction reports (AKA DQ reports) on something you’ve seen. Your mentor will ensure you are replaced and will direct you to go and speak with the Referee. Let the Referee know what you saw, and they will decide on a course of action – If they decide the swimmer should be DQ’d let them know it’s your first report and they will take you through how to report an infraction on the written forms provided. Take your time on your first ones, there’s no huge rush as someone has taken over your lane, but learn to be concise and efficient if you can so that you can release the relief back to their main duty, and to assist others.

Recording your progress

You’ll need to record each session and your brief thoughts in your logbook (See pics below for an example) and your mentor will also write some feedback for you. Circle each area of competency that you gained some experience on, (your mentor will help you here).

The Referee will always allocate some time at the end of a session to meet with trainees and talk about what you have learned. You’ll feel competent in some areas very early on, and if you are ready the Referee will do a Q+A with you - if you can speak with clarity on that aspect (the main focus being on the likely infractions) they will sign off that competency. As the Referee has limited time however you can expect them to sign off an average of no more than about 1-2 (possibly 3) areas per session – See “Tips”. The only challenging aspect to get signed off is “Relay takeovers”, given that the majority of meets are individual rather than team events, and so don’t have relays. The main opportunities to gain competence in this will be at Herts Major League (one round per month in Feb, March, April) and the Arena National League (Rounds 1 and 2 fall in October and November). You’ll only need to do one session judging relay takeovers and the Referee will sign that off, given the rarity of team events.

Finally, when all competency areas have been signed off by a Referee, email your County Officials Coordinator to let them know, and provide a scan or photo of your completed competency sheet. The Coordinator will then sign off “JL1 Complete” and mail it back to you. Upload a copy of this on your profile at Swimming.org and also upload a passport style photo.

Your licence / badge will then be automatically sent out to you within about 4 weeks. **Congratulations!**

Tips:

- For every session you do, it's good practice to place a tally mark on your Competency Record sheet against each role that you experienced (see photo 1) – So for example, if you judged quite a few IM races and quite a few Backstroke races in that session, and you circled the competency number on the logbook page, then mark each of those lines with a tally. If you did a DQ report, also mark that line with a tally. This serves as a visual prompt to a Referee that when there are several tally marks you are probably ready to be assessed verbally on your understanding of that aspect.
- During any race of 200m and over, it's always a good idea to write the expected turn numbers at your end (1, 3, 5 and 7, or 2, 4, 6 etc) on the lane sheet prior to the start, and then cross off each turn as it happens. It's quite possible to lose track of how many laps the swimmer has done if your concentration drifts for a minute, especially in younger age groups where they get really spread out. As an Inspector of turns you may have to do a DQ report, and you will need the correct turn number. Also the Referee may rely on you to state how many lengths a swimmer completed in case of any confusion. The swimmers do sometimes lose count themselves and stop 2 lengths too early. Try to get in the habit of maintaining a simple written record as you go.
- Do get into the habit of crossing out every race entirely on your lane sheet when each race ends. It's potentially an easy slip to lose track of what race you're currently on.
- One of the duties of a JL1 at the start end is to make sure you have the right swimmer at the beginning of a race. Always ask a swimmer to state their name! (Don't ask "Is your name XYX?" because it's a noisy environment, they're wearing a hat over their ears, and they'll say "yes" to anything).

Equipment:

From the practical poolside stage onwards, you'll need to be equipped with the following:

- A white polo shirt or T shirt to get you started. (In due course you'll be issued a proper logo'd club official shirt, and later County shirts etc, so don't spend much).
- Black trousers / skirt / shorts as preferred.
- White or black poolside shoes: Some do wear proper trainers or shoes, but most would recommend Crocs or something similar. As a JL1 your feet can sometimes get very wet indeed (thanks, older butterfly swimmers) and it's no fun to be stood in wet socks and trainers for some hours, so it's good for your feet if the water can drain. Flip flops are normally acceptable for many lower level meets, but higher level meets later on (e.g. County / Regional etc) may set a more strict uniform standard which may include a "no flip flops" clause, just so you know.
- One stopwatch at least, preferably with a lanyard so you can keep hands free for writing – There's no set standard, most Judges use sports stopwatches bought cheaply from Amazon. Avoid anything too expensive, the generic far-Eastern made ones at around £10 are good and perfectly accurate. Some dearer watches may have more features like pace setting tools, or a 100 lap split record facility, which a Judge won't need. Some ability to do split times could maybe be useful in longer distance events, but you generally record lap numbers manually so it's by no means a must. Watches do get wet and even "waterproof" ones occasionally die, so having two cheap ones in your bag is best.
- Pens - carry at least 2-3 in your pocket, they can have a habit of dying in damp conditions and you might be marking 20-25 heats in a session before you can get back to your bag.

- A clipboard - Lane sheets will be issued to you at the race, but you need something to hold them and to write on. They may also act as a shelter for your paperwork when the swimmers dive in. The “box” clipboards available on Amazon are ideal for judges, as they include storage space for papers.
- Something to dry things with, like a handkerchief or small cloth. I use a towelling wrist / sweat band – You will get splashed a lot at the lane ends, it can be useful to have something handy to dry your face / glasses / paperwork during a race.
- A large water bottle for poolside hydration.

* A note on white vs black shoes: “All white” uniform was always the traditional colour until GB Aquatics introduced the option of a black bottom half around 2 years ago, (just as in other sports, in order to provide better comfort and confidence, especially for females). From 2024 onwards, one or two events have been specifying that ALL officials have to be in white top + black bottom half *plus black shoes* for uniformity. While this is not by any means a common stipulation yet, I think it’s probably a good idea to future proof your kit by getting black shoes and trousers / skirt from the outset. The days of white trousers, skirts and shoes are numbered.

Useful links:

British Swimming Officials resources page:

<https://www.britishswimming.org/browse-sport/swimming/officials/>

British Swimming records page (Where you will upload your certificates using your Swim England account)

<https://www.swimmingresults.org/officialsnews/>

World Aquatics rules (You will also receive a written extracts copy on completion of JL1 Theory):

<https://www.worldaquatics.com/rules/competition-regulations>

Handy tool for learning to calculate average times- (**Hint:** Very useful for the timekeepers exam!)

https://www.swimmingofficials.co.uk/time_string/test

Swim Meet – A tool that organisers will use to invite Swim Officials to their events.

(You’ll get specific swim-meet email invites and links from your Club Co-Ord, but it’s good to be aware of, and you may also browse for events to attend, should you ever wish or need to do more hours!)

<https://swim-meet.com/Availability/>

HSC Membership Secretary:

Sarah Larkham: sarahlarkham@virginmedia.com

(For Swim England registration)

HSC Officials Coordinator:

Andrew McGowan: Officials@hitchinsswimmingclub.co.uk

Tel 07894 947479

(For all queries on training and any ongoing support)

Hertfordshire County Officials Coordinator:

Jonathan Pope: officials@swimherts.org

(Final sign off of JL1 Competency and County support)

Pic 1: Competency record / sign off form – Note tally marks on the left indicating how many sessions you had responsibility for that role:

Record of Poolside Duties Competency Sign-Off Form		Candidate name ANDREW MCGOWAN Membership number 1737721			
	Competency	Date Achieved	BS Licensed Referee's Signature	BS Licensed Referee's Name	Referee's Reg. No.
1	Timekeeper 	19/11/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
2	Chief Timekeeper 				
Inspector of Turns:					
3	Backstroke 	3/12/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
4	Breaststroke 	3/12/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
5	Butterfly 	3/12/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
6	Freestyle 	19/11/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
7	Individual Medley 	23/12/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
8	Relay Take-offs 	23/12/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
9	Chief Inspector of Turns 	3/12/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
10	DO Reporting 	23/12/23	<i>[Signature]</i>	JO' BRIEN	723998
	Splits				
	Backup Button 				

Pic 2: Training Record sheets (AKA Log book) – Note circles on “Competency areas covered” – Match these to tally marks on your record.

TRAINING RECORD FOR JUDGE LEVEL 1					
Date	19 NOV 23		Event	HITCHIN OPEN	
Level	3		Number of hours	2.5	
Competency Areas Covered					
1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	
Candidate Comments					
EXCELLENT EXPERIENCE OF TIMEKEEPING. DISCUSSED BACK UP BUTTON, CHECKING OWN TIME AGAINST MAIN RESULT BOARD.					
Mentor Comments					
ANDREW WAS WELL ORGANISED + ASKED RELEVANT QUESTIONS. HE HAD A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE TASKS REQUIRED.					
Name	KIRSTY WALL				
Reg no.	1379016				
Date	02 DEC 23		Event	COSTA WINTER OPEN	
Level	3		Number of hours	2.5	
Competency Areas Covered					
1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	
Candidate Comments					
GOOD DISCUSSIONS WITH AMANDA ON DO PROCESS, COMMON BACKSTROKE INFRACTIONS, BREASTSTROKE ALSO.					
Mentor Comments					
ANDREW WAS REALLY KNOWLEDGEABLE WITH THE TURNS ESP. WITH BACKSTROKE, FLY & BREASTROKE. WE DISCUSSED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE IERS AT TURN END AND WE DID A COUPLE TOGETHER.					
Name	Amanda Yip				
Reg no.	1708617				