



COMPETITION ADVICE 2024

Read on to learn about how the Swimming Competitions are set up.

When it comes to competitions, they are classified at different levels to ensure that all swimmers can compete at a level that suits them. Any competition that has been licensed will appear on your swimmers' ranking file, which can be found here:

[Individual Best Times | Swim England \(swimmingresults.org\)](https://www.swimmingresults.org)

Each swimmer has their SWIM ENGLAND Membership number, which you can use to locate their times. Rankings have clear positives and negatives, as you can look up nearly all swimmers, compare times, etc. Some parents can become obsessed with rankings and where it's good to celebrate your swimmers' achievements; please try and keep things in perspective and remember that swimming is a long game. We have encountered numerous parents and swimmers over the years, and we have seen swimmers ranked at the top, aged nine, who cannot sustain this. The parents and the swimmers can become very frustrated. On the flip side, we have also seen the slow burners, who focus on training and have a good attitude, and in the long run, they overtake the early achievers. That's not to say that if your swimmer is doing well at a very young age, they will not continue this path; there are just a lot of variables to consider. All children grow at different rates and times, which can sometimes give swimmers a considerable advantage when they hit puberty, so please bear this in mind. We have found it's best to encourage your swimmer to focus on themselves, control their controllables, and enjoy the sport, which should always be the priority.

In the UK, all competitions are either swum Short Course (SC) in a 25m pool or Long Course (LC) in a 50m pool. Short Course season is from September to December, and Long Course season is from January to August. When entering an Open Meet, we advise everyone to read the Open Meet conditions; this will detail the qualifying criteria specific to each different meet. We understand it may not always be clear, so if you're unsure after reading the conditions, please ask for support.

The different levels of competition are as follows:

Internal non-licensed meets are usually for beginner swimmers to give them a feel for competing in a safe and familiar environment. At the club, we have the star galas for this purpose. The times from these competitions do not appear on the swimmers' Swim England rankings files.

Level 3 and 4 open meets can be internal, like our club champs or external meets, and they can swim SC or LC. Again, they are starter-type meets, usually for novice swimmers so that they can start their swimming journey. Therefore, there are upper cut-off times. This prevents the quickest swimmers from entering their quickest races; you will often see the fastest swimmers entering these meets in their non-preferred races so they can update their times. You can enter these meets even if your swimmer hasn't logged any times yet; in this instance, you see the words NT (No Time) on their entry. The times from these competitions will appear on your swimmers' rankings file.



Level 2 meets—These can only be SC, and they are qualifying meets, which means you must have already swum an event to swim it at this meet and be quick enough. During SC season, the quickest swimmers need to swim at level 2 meets to qualify for the SC Winter Nationals, which take place in December. Times from these competitions appear on your swimmers' rankings file.

Level 1 Meets—These are only swim LCs, and they are qualifying meets. Again, swimmers must have swum an event before and be quick enough to enter a race. Swimmers aiming to swim at the Summer British and English Nationals must swim during a specified window at only level 1 meets to qualify.

Here's a quick overview of some of the most important meets during the swimming season.

Dorset has three individual events during the season and 1 team event. The first event that most swimmers try to qualify for is the County Championships, which are held at the beginning of the year, usually at the end of January and into February. It's held over 4 weekends, with the shorter-distance events at the Littledown Centre and the Long-Distance (800m and 1500m) events at Dorchester. Last year, we also saw the return of the County Relays, which were held at Dorchester. The County Championships is a level 2 Meet. The qualifying period for the competition usually runs from one year's event to the next, so the swimmers have a year to gain their times, and they accept any licensed times, converting LC to SC if needed. It's a fun event with finals, which adds to the excitement.

The next event in the season is the Dorset Graded meet, which is intended for swimmers who might still need to qualify for the County Championships. It's a lower-level four meet, so there are upper cut-off times, except for the 9-year-olds. It's for the younger swimmers aged 9, 10, 11 and 12, and it's all HDW (Heat Declared Winners), so there are no finals. It's a good competition for those who missed qualifying for the county championships, usually held in May.

The final individual event of the season is the Dorset Development Meet, held at the start of July. It's a level 3 meet. However, swimmers must qualify to swim at the event without being too quick. So, there are upper and lower times. The upper times are usually linked to the Summer Regional qualifying times, so if a swimmer has qualified for an individual event at the Summer Regionals, then they can't swim that event at the Development meet. They also restrict any swimmers entering a race where they gained a medal at the County Championships, and any individual National Qualifiers cannot attend the entire meet.

Dorset ASA also selects a team to enter an annual Inter County National competition, which takes place in Sheffield during the first weekend in October. This is a very fun and prestigious event to be selected for, and it's made up of a team of no more than 30 swimmers who take part in individual and relay events. It's a level 2 event, and the swimmers are selected by looking at their individual 100m races. Some are selected for their 50m freestyle time for a relay swim.

All information relevant to the Dorset event will be posted on their website-

[Entry information | Dorset County ASA \(dorsetasa.org\)](https://dorsetasa.org)



The next level of competition is the Regional competition. We are part of the Southwest Region, which comprises six counties: Devon, Dorset, Cornwall, Somerset, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire. You can find their website by following this link-

<https://www.swimwest.org.uk/>

The Region has two main competitions during the season: the Winter and the Summer Championships. The Winter Championships are a high-level two-competition, usually taking place over three days on the first weekend in November. They are in SC. They usually have two sets of qualifying times: senior and junior, and there are finals. Many swimmers will use this competition to qualify for the SC Winter Nationals.

The Summer Championships are swum LC level 1 and are split into Groups (11-14) and Youth (15+). The qualifying window is usually from 01/09, the year before the competition, up until 2-3 weeks before the competition starts, usually at the start of April.

The Age-Group Champs are swum over two weekends: one at Millfield and the other at Bristol. The weekends are not usually consecutive. There are heats and finals, and many swimmers use this competition to qualify for the Summer Nationals.

The Youth Champs are held at Plymouth over three days during the first bank holiday in May. They also have heats and finals, plus the bonus of having the Qualifying Relays for the Summer British at this event. Again, swimmers use this competition as one of the main opportunities to qualify for the Summer Nationals.

The highest level of competitions (excluding international events) that many swimmers want to qualify for are Nationals! There are 3 National events over the Season. During SC season, there are the SC Winter Nationals, which typically take place over 4-5 days, starting on a Wednesday and finishing on the first Sunday in December. They are in Sheffield, and they are very hard to qualify for. They are split into 3 or 2 age categories, but over the last several years, these have changed without much notice to keep you on your toes.

Next, we have the British Championships, which typically occur during the Easter Holidays over 5-6 days and is a level 1 competition. It has been confirmed that the next 4 years will be held at the London Aquatics Centre. Again, they are incredibly hard to qualify for, and there's usually only 1 set of times for everyone to achieve. This is a very sought-after event in the swimming calendar as it's generally used as the qualifying meet for the top British swimmers for the most significant international event that season. So, this year, it was the Olympic trials, so every swimmer wanted to get to this meet to swim against the top GB swimmers. The British Junior selections for the top events that year are also usually made from the quickest Juniors at this meet.



Finally, we have the Summer Nationals, which are separated into the British Championships and then the English Championships (as well as the other home Nations- Scotland, Wales and Ireland). These generally take place in Sheffield and are two separate competitions. British take place over a week from about the 20th of July (usually the penultimate Sunday in July), and the English typically last a week and happen the Monday after the British Finish, so this year, it was from the 29th of July onwards.

Now, the qualifying criteria are different for these Championships because there's a specific qualifying window from the start of March until the beginning of May. During this period, all the swimmers from the level 1 competition are ranked on a live list, with the top 28ish (for all races and ages) qualifying to swim at the British and the next 40ish (for all races and ages) qualifying to swim at the English. Now we have said 'ish' as, again, the rules and ages are subject to change; there are single-age and double-band age groups, so the number of qualifiers can vary. It is a good idea to look at the previous year's conditions and hope no changes are made, but this cannot guarantee that no changes will be made. Some swimmers and parents find this type of qualification complex as they aim to swim their quickest within a specific window. Again, some people will watch the live rankings list obsessively as it's there for everyone to see or will get excited if their swimmer appears on the list during week 1. This is understandable as it's a significant achievement, but also bear in mind that it's a very changeable list; some swimmers stay on until the end, and others are bumped off quite quickly. Some swimmers only race at the end of the window, so please bear this in mind to save disappointment.

Below is the link for the Aquatics GB Website:

<https://www.aquaticsgb.com/>

Below is the link to the Swim England Website:

<https://www.swimming.org/sport/national-events/>

A few tips to make life easy are-

Always book plenty of accommodation in advance, as it can be much cheaper. Unfortunately, the cost of staying away always seems to be increasing. We prefer to stay in apartments, as you have a bit more space, and we find it cheaper and healthier to cook your own food. This is just our preference, though. If you can stay with other parents, it can be more affordable and social for yourself and the swimmers. Please book flexible accommodation and if you can, do not pay upfront, as sometimes competitions change.

Always speak to your coach for advice about which race to enter. They know your swimmers best and have a wealth of swimming experience and knowledge.



Support your fellow swimmers, parents, and Club. It is such a competitive environment that we all need to support each other. Do not get tangled up in petty rivalry. This is a children's sport; stay humble and realistic. Always celebrate with each other as much as possible, enjoy the swimming journey, share the load, and be a swim family for each other. My fellow swimming parents' support over the years has got me through some tough times.

Volunteer when and where you can. Our club could not have survived without our fantastic team of volunteers, but now more than ever, we need more parents to step forward and volunteer their services. If everyone does a little bit, then it lightens the load. We are all busy and have jobs and other commitments, but please give your time where you can.

If you are not happy about something, speak up, being mindful of your approach. Constructive feedback is always welcomed.

Do not make your swimmers' sport about you! This is their sport. Let them enjoy it and be supportive of them when things might not be going well. It's tough for them; remember that!

We hope all the information I've shared will be helpful even though it's a lot. Do not hesitate to seek advice or support from your fellow swimming parents; we are there to support and help one another.

We hope to see some of you soon at one of the many swimming events.

Bev on behalf

Volunteer PSC Meet Secretary