



## A Parent's guide to Competitive Swimming – Part One

Woking Swimming Club is a competitive swimming club. Once your swimmer is asked to join the club as a full member that becomes clear, but in the early days of Associate Membership I doubt the thought of your swimmer competing crossed your mind. For some parents the whole thing happens by “accident”, you either hear about the club and/or someone suggests that your child and their little friend go for a “trial”. Why? Because of course they can swim one length of front crawl in the training pool and because you want to ensure your child is confident and safe in the water and you want them taught to swim properly by excellent coaches but most probably because it seemed like a good idea at the time!

Depending on the age of your child and assuming they pass the trial they are offered Associate Membership of the club in one of the groups. For some time after this you regularly bring your swimmer (they are no longer just a “child”!) along to their Sunday afternoon 30 minute a week session in the small pool and watch them quickly improve under the watchful eyes and careful guidance of Sarah, Janet, Chris and Amanda. You might talk to other parents in the viewing area about Swimming Clubs in general, Galas, Open Meets but this is really just to pass the time and for now it is just great to see your swimmer loving the water and progress through the Associate levels of the club. At times you see you the coaches run little races, both individual and relay, they squeal with delight and cheer on their team mates and it all looks great fun.

### **The Diddys**

Then one day, when your swimmer is around 7 or 8 years old the coaches or your membership renewal email mentions the “Diddys”; this is nothing to do with Ken Dodd and Knotty Ash! Ahead of the Diddys actually happening you suddenly see your swimmer taken out of the small pool for specific sessions and given some experience and diving practice in the main pool. You put the date in the diary to come along to watch and support your little swimmer, really knowing very little about what you are turning up to see.

It is really at this point that you and your swimmer have started the journey into the world of Competitive Swimming. For some the journey will be longer than others, but whatever route it takes, together you will find it a safe, healthy, fun, enjoyable and rewarding , but at times frustrating, disappointing, time consuming and inconvenient activity!

The Diddys are the first occasion when younger members of the club have a chance to experience competitive swimming. The Diddys is actually two separate events, the events being

- The Summer Diddy Championships – held around June
- The Winter Diddy Ribbon – held around the end of the year



The events are generally for swimmers aged between 7 and 10 years old. It can be quite a daunting experience for the younger swimmers, so every encouragement is given to them. The helpers on poolside are mostly mums and dads of swimmers or ex-swimmers, or older swimmers helping out, and any attacks of nerves will be dealt with in a very kind way.

The 'event' includes a possible swim of 25m in each of the four strokes (Freestyle, Backstroke, Breaststroke and Butterfly). There are no qualification times to worry about for this internal club event as selection to compete is based entirely on the discretion of the coach concerned and swimmers will only be entered in strokes where they are thought capable of demonstrating a legal stroke. Girls swim against girls/boys swim against boys in their own year group. The grouping is done on a calendar year basis.

The Diddys are Heat Declared Winner (HDW); this is your first swimming definition that you'll need to understand. It means that the final placing for the whole event is based upon the times recorded in the heats, so a child can win their heat but not be placed in the top 6 if the later (or indeed earlier) heats are faster. Each event will be seeded with the intention of the later heats being the fastest. It is common practice to "spearhead" the final heat of an event, i.e. the fastest seeded swimmers are put in the middle lanes (lanes 4 and 3) with the slower seeded swimmers in the outside lanes, the idea being that it makes a nice spearhead formation as the race proceeds down the length of the pool. As with all sports, seeding can never be an entirely accurate prediction of the result as that is based on performance on the day and this is especially true of swimmers at this early stage which adds to the excitement of the event.

A presentation is made at the end of the evening only to those swimmers who were in placed 1 to 6 across all the heats. You will become very familiar with Heat Declared events and spearheading as you attend other events.

The other thing that the Diddys might introduce you to is the concept of Disqualification. It is a fact that during the evening some swimmers may well be disqualified (DQ'ed). Like all sports, competitive swimming has its own set of strict technical rules which are there to make sure that races are run completely fairly. Whilst it is obviously upsetting when DQs happen the club has to get the swimmers used to these rules from the start. When a disqualification occurs, this is normally announced along with the reason when the result of the race is announced.

The main reasons for DQs are:

- A false start – there are no 2<sup>nd</sup> chances on the start, strike one and you are out
- Incorrect stroke technique
- Incorrect touch at the finish
- Finishing on front when swimming backstroke



A false start can consist of no more than the swimmer moving on the starting blocks once the starter has called "Take your marks"! Getting the start right is an important early lesson for our younger swimmers.

The judges and referees have passed examinations (theory & practical) and would prefer not to disqualify, however they have to maintain standards without which some swimmers could gain an unfair advantage.

If your child is disqualified, please use this as a learning experience. It is not the end of the world. It happens to swimmers at all levels and is part of the preparation for later competitive events. It is essential that in addition to being able to swim fast that a swimmer understands the rules and can be disciplined enough to follow them.

So, you've survived the Diddys, you've had a long hot evening by the pool, you've cheered the swimmers on and maybe your little swimmer has come away grasping a ribbon or two and left the pool with a beaming smile. All those hours of training have been worth it. Even without a ribbon, at their first event, they will have achieved a PB (Personal Best) for the 25m events they have just swum. You need to record your swimmers PBs for each event/distance they swim in as this provides a visible and objective measure of their improvement. Get used to making a note of and updating your swimmers PBs – it is important both you and your swimmer know what they are. Whereas your swimmer will likely recall them from memory you'll need to write them down!

### **Club Championships**

For the younger swimmers the Diddys provides a twice yearly chance to compete against their peers within the club. As your swimmer gets older and progresses through the club the next thing you will find is that your swimmer is expected to take part in the Club Championships which generally take place towards the end of the year.

Once your swimmer is a full member of the club they are considered ready to swim in certain events at the Club Champs. The number and type of event increasing the higher the squad level, e.g. a swimmer in Seals might be entered for 50m Free, 50m Back (if their backstroke turn is considered legal) and 50 Breaststroke (again only if their stroke is considered legal).

The Champs cover all the competitive events you'll find as your swimmer progresses through the various levels of competition. The shortest distance swum is 50m events. Individual Medley (where the swimmer swims each stroke in a specified order – Fly, Back, Breast and Free) is introduced for Dolphins upwards.

Details (and dates) of which events your swimmer is entered for are sent well in advance. You need to mark these dates off in your diary as the club expects all swimmers to compete in each event they have been entered for.

The Club Champs are important for a number of reasons:



- Gain qualification times for the Surrey County Championships (see part 2)
- Compete for the club trophies, Championship and Club records
- A chance to update PBs
- Valuable aid to squad progression selection
- Chance to showcase their skills in front of an appreciative home crowd
- Allows inter-squad competition and comparison

Because of the number of events and swimmers involved the swims take place over a number of separate sessions. Swimmers are expected to stay to the end of each session they attend to watch and support their friends in the water.

The Club Champs are run as an official event and are licensed (which is covered when we talk about Open Meets). For the younger swimmers this gives them a really good introduction to how competitive events are run and experience of swimming in such events.

As with the Diddys each event is seeded, and this is done by the coaches using current form and some reference to up to date PBs. Careful consideration is given to this with the intention of getting exciting and competitive races and to get the best performance out of the swimmers.

Some events will not be suitable for the younger swimmers (e.g. some of the longer distances and the 100m events). Where some of the year group will be old enough to swim the 100m events at the Surreys (based on birth date) then others in that year group (who may not be eligible for the Surreys) may be entered for the event in order to provide a level of competition within the year group.

At the end of the Club Champs the coaches provide a printed certificate of the times achieved so you have no excuses for not knowing your swimmers PBs!

### **League and Gala Fixtures**

These fixtures are swum against other clubs both home and away and your swimmer will form a vital part of the club's team.

The club tries to ensure there is a full and varied fixture list and you should take the time to get familiar with this at: <http://www.wokingsc.co.uk/fixtures.htm>. A copy of the fixture list is also posted on the Notice board at the Pool in the Park.

As a member of a competitive swimming club, it is assumed that your swimmer will compete for the club when selected to do so. Of course, there are times when this just isn't possible e.g. illness, injury or another commitment. The club and our coaches are very sensitive to the need to produce well-rounded swimmers and understand there are many competing demands on a swimmers time,



but they also expect that swimmers when selected will do their best to compete, and if they are not available to have a valid reason for it. Commitment to swimming for the club is one of the main criteria for remaining and progressing through the club. Constant and repeated refusal to compete in galas or league fixtures will ultimately call into question a swimmer's commitment and in turn their place in a particular squad.

Different gala/league features have different formats, age groups and programmes and are designed to provide a competitive opportunity for all levels of competitive swimmer. Some events have restricted times where "speeding tickets" (and no points) are awarded if the time swum on the day is faster. It is up to the Team Managers and coaches to select the most appropriate team for the event and the swimmer is always encouraged to swim as fast as possible. Speeding tickets should be looked on as a badge of honour though and not something to be avoided!

For away galas the club may, depending on distance, organise coach transport to and from Pool in the Park. Swimmers are encouraged to use the coach as this helps to build team spirit and ensures the whole team can receive a briefing together and arrive at the gala on time.

As a parent of a competitive swimmer, in order to support your swimmer and the club you should familiarise yourself with the league/gala fixtures and try and ensure your swimmer is available for the events for which they might be selected. The Team Managers email the prospective team sheet out as far in advance as possible with the reply-by date on it. A great deal of time and effort goes into team selections so please try to respond to such emails in a timely manner as it is further time consuming and very frustrating to have to chase up responses and also limits the remaining time to select alternative team members ahead of the gala itself.

These days most competitive swimming events will use age at the last day of the event or round of the competition to determine which age group the swimmer goes into. Galas and league fixtures will have separate events (and sometimes different distances) for various age groupings. The programme and timing for each gala is deliberately varied to ensure that swimmers are not always likely to swim against the same opposition. At times, depending on the event and team composition a swimmer may be asked to "swim up" i.e. compete against older swimmers. This normally only occurs where the swimmer concerned is felt to be able to "hold their own" against older competition.

Non-availability or worse, withdrawing at the last minute, lets the club, the team and their friends down and deprives them of a valuable and fun competitive opportunity. Many hours are spent by the coaches and Team Managers on team selection to try and field the best possible team combination given the type and format of the gala; it isn't simply a case of selecting the faster swimmer for each age group/stroke. The clubs overall team selection policy is published on the notice board at the pool and can be found on the website, here:  
<http://www.wokingsc.co.uk/docs/TeamSelectionPolicy.pdf>



## Types of Gala

The Club generally competes in three levels of Galas:

- Friendlies
- League
- National

The Gibson Shield is a friendly gala and the Wey “B” League (two rounds, swum in February/March) are examples of galas which were generally established to provide swimmers who might not otherwise swim in galas a competitive opportunity. The Wey “B” League is time banded and therefore subject to swimmers getting “speeding tickets”.

The Club’s core gala programme is provided by the events under the umbrella Hants and South Coast Swimming Leagues, see: <http://www.swimleagues.org.uk/index.htm>

Each event has its own format, programme and age ranges; the programmes can be viewed at: <http://www.swimleagues.org.uk/programmes.htm>

In summary the club currently swims in the:

- Gemini Trophy – single round event, two teams per club, U11 to Open Ages, generally held in January
- Minor League – two rounds, no national swimmers, U11 to Open ages, held in April/May
- Premier League – two rounds, no restrictions on national swimmers, U10 to U14 ages, held in May/June
- Rother Junior Trophy – single round, same format as Premier League, held in June
- Rother League – three rounds, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> round being relay specific, U11 to Open dependent on round, held April/June/September.
- Junior Cup – two rounds, no national swimmers, U11 to U14 age groups, held October/November

Have you ever wondered how it is determined which teams we swim against and ultimately what we are swimming for? If so then read on.

As a general rule where multiple round galas take place, seeding is taken from final positions in the preceding year. Each round of the event aims to mix and balance the teams to provide varied competition, working towards final round galas with teams in successive strengths. As an example with 18 teams there would be three Galas for the first round, the teams in each gala being determined by:



	TEAMS					
Gala 1	1	6	7	12	13	18
Gala 2	2	5	8	11	14	17
Gala 3	3	4	9	10	15	16

So Gala 1 would comprise the teams that finished 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> in the previous year.

After the first round the top 6 teams ranked by the points achieved in each gala would swim for the Division 1 title, the next 6 for Division 2 and the final 6 for Division 3. Some competitions have a subtle variation on this where winners of Round 1 galas automatically go through to the top final round gala irrespective of the gala points obtained.

### **The National League**

The National League (formerly known as the Speedo league) is the most important league fixture in our calendar; details of the league and results can be found at:

<http://www.nationalswimmingleague.org.uk/>

The league fixtures take place over 3 rounds held in October, November and December.

The League is split into 7 Regions. Different Regions have different structures. Woking competes in the South Region, which consists of a Premier Division, Division One East and West, Division Two East and West, we are currently in Division One East. The top two teams in the Premier Division gain a place in the National League and League B finals which take place in Sheffield in April. The top two teams in the other Divisions are promoted and the bottom three teams demoted between the divisions within the region (subject to all teams remaining in the competition).

A similar formula to the Hants and South Coast leagues is used to seed teams for Round 1 and a slight variation used for Round 2. Again with the intention of ranking the teams such that the top final round gala comprises the 6 strongest teams fighting for promotion. The result of the final round gala determines the final position in the Division and ultimately promotion/relegation to/from a Division within the region.



## A Parent's guide to Competitive Swimming – Part Two!

So, you've diligently recorded your swimmers PBs from the Diddys. They have swum in some of the events at the Club Champs and have competed in a number of galas of various types and you've updated their PBs and added new distance/stroke combinations as they have been swum. It has been great to see your swimmer compete as part of a team with their friends and to improve their times and gain new ones. They have maybe moved up a squad in the club with an appropriate increase in training time and you marvel as their technique and stamina continue to improve and likely exceed whatever you were once able to do in the water!

### Open Meets

Then one day as your swimmer approaches 9 years old all hell breaks loose; your swimmer returns home with a piece of paper giving details of something called an Open Meet which is coming up. The pack contains a nice letter from Hilary, something about Consideration or Qualification times (QTs), a programme of events and details of the promoter's conditions and finally an entry form, not least of which details the cost of entry. It all looks very daunting, but actually it isn't.

So, what is an Open Meet?

Unlike a gala/league fixture, swimmers aren't selected as part of a club team, they qualify for the meet based on their PBs. Although they are representing the club, they are to a large part swimming for them self and a time in each event. Also, unlike galas, swimmers from any club can enter providing they meet the entry criteria so the competition is both wide and varied. Typically the coaches select which particular Open Meets the club will attend and support and give guidance on which swimmers should attend and which events should be entered. Where the club supports an Open Meet there will always be a coach present poolside to look after the swimmers and ensure they are in the right place at the right time to swim in their events (known as whipping, so don't panic when you hear of swimmers being called to the whipping area).

OK, so the coaches select specific Open Meets for the club to attend, how do you work out if your little swimmer should attend and if so which events they should enter?

In part, some of these decisions are made for you as every Open Meet is licensed with the ASA and part of that licensing process determines what level the event is aimed at. It also determines the number and level of qualification for the officials and potentially whether such things as electronic timing are in place.

There are four levels of Open Meet licensing, with each level being defined by certain criteria and the top being Level 1.



Below is a summary of the criteria that come into effect in September 2009:

- Level 1  
50m (Long Course) pool only. No upper limit times and minimum standard qualification times. Suitable for obtaining National or Regional QTs.
- Level 2  
25m (Short Course) pool only. May have upper limit times (although not faster than National Qualifying Times – see below) and minimum standard qualification times are required. Suitable for obtaining National or Regional Qualifying Times (QTs).
- Level 3  
Should have upper limit and lower limit qualification times to reflect the standard at which the meet is aimed. Suitable for obtaining QTs for Regional Champs and Level 1 or 2 meets.
- Level 4  
Suitable for obtaining QTs for County Champs and Level 3 meets. Upper qualification times should be in place (other than for club championships) and no lower qualification time is required.

Some points worthy of mention here, firstly the distinction between Long Course and Short Course events. Long course means the event is swum in a 50m pool, short course is a 25m pool. There are conversion factors which allow you to convert a time achieved in a Long Course event to an equivalent Short Course time, an online convertor can be found at:  
<http://www.swimcalc.com/convert/default>

Interestingly Long Course times are slower than Short Course times because the swimmers do not gain as much benefit from the turns off the wall. Obviously there are only a few venues offering 50m facilities although we are lucky to have Aldershot Garrison, K2 at Crawley and Crystal Palace nearby, with Guildford University of Surrey about to get a 50m pool too. National and Regional events are always Long Course events.

Level 1 and 2 events are likely to have quite challenging lower limit QTs, i.e. your swimmer must have achieved a faster time in that particular event to enable them to enter. Also, some events will stipulate that the time must have been obtained since a particular date and potentially at a certain level of licensed meet. For example, you cannot achieve a National QT at a Level 3 or 4 meet, Regional QTs cannot be obtained at a Level 4 meet.

Level 3 meets might have upper limit times (or may for example stipulate no swimmers with a National QT in any event can enter) to restrict the standard of swimmer entry. If your swimmer has a time faster than the upper limit time then they won't be eligible to enter that event. A Level 3 event



may allow times achieved to be at the discretion and validation of the club, i.e. they don't have to have been previously obtained at a licensed meet.

Level 4 meets relax the qualification times further; generally this Level is only used for Club Championships. Why does the club license the Club Champs? Generally to ensure times achieved here are potentially eligible for the County Championships, which require the entry time to be achieved at a licensed event.

Just to add a further variable, the Open Meet will generally take the age of the swimmer to be as at the last day of the meet itself. Specific events at the meet will be run for specific age groupings and gender and each event will have times specific to that age/gender. Some meets will use single banded ages (e.g. 10 years old) others may have double banded ages (e.g. 9-10 years old or 10 and Under – the latter may be shown as U11). Some specific races may not be open to certain ages, for example the youngest swimmers are not eligible to compete in 100m events (this is because the 100m is considered a sprint and swimmers of this age do not have the physiological development to compete effectively over this distance).

So, because you've looked at the fixture list (<http://www.wokingsc.co.uk/fixtures.htm>) and have kept an eye out for the entry forms (<http://www.wokingsc.co.uk/EntryForms.htm>) or more likely because your swimmer has brought open a piece of paper from their last training session!!!! You know your first potential Open Meet is coming up.

Assuming the date in the diary is free then the next thing is to find the QT criteria for the events suitable for the age/gender of your swimmer. Armed with the PBs you have diligently been recording and updating you are basically looking to see whether their time is faster than the lower limit qualification (or consideration time) and slower than any upper limit times that might be in place. You might find your swimmer is either too fast or too slow for every event they could potentially swim and hence your work for this Open Meet is done and you get a weekend off!

However, let's assume that you find that your swimmer is eligible for almost every event they could possibly swim. What you do now is tick every box on the entry form, fill in the time and write out your cheque for the best part of £50 and give it to Hilary. NO! You should stop and think a little.

You should consider two other things. Firstly the programme of events for the Open Meet and secondly how many swims in total and per session you are going to enter your swimmer for. The meet itself will be split into a number of sessions with each session comprising specific events. There's no standard magic formula here, e.g. 50m Free isn't always in the same session as 200m Breaststroke, so you need to study the programme of events carefully. Basically, you need to ask yourself some questions; if you enter your swimmer for every potential swim in every session do you both really want to be at the pool from 7am to 7pm and/or the whole weekend? Are there some sessions/events which for whatever reason they aren't ready for or don't need to swim? Is there a combination of events which might compromise their performance in a single session for a specific



event? Is swimming four separate events in a single session really a good idea and is your swimmer up to it in terms of fitness and stamina?

If you are in any doubt or need advice you should discuss it with the coaches before submitting the entry.

Once you have been through this process you need to ensure you complete the entry form for the events your swimmer is entering and return this with your cheque to Hilary (via the coaches if necessary). If you aren't sure or don't have a time for an event (e.g. they haven't swum it before), then simply mark a pencil cross in the time box and Hilary will obtain the time from the coaches prior to submitting the entry. Hilary is happy to receive emailed entry forms provided they are followed up with the completed paper copy and entry fee.

So, that's it, you put the date in the diary noting all the swims you've entered and await the big day! Well not quite, there's one last hurdle. All submitted eligible entries for Open Meets aren't necessarily accepted, some are based on fastest first, some first come first served, some only publish consideration times and will set the qualification time based on the number of entries they receive; all of these conditions should be made clear in the Promoters conditions for the meet. The point for you is that whilst your entry is all in order you will only be able to swim at the event if the entry for that particular event is accepted. Hilary will generally give you details of which events your swimmer has been accepted for. Having got this it is a good to check the accepted entries against the sessions and programme of events as you might find it changes your plans for the day, e.g. one swim in the first session of the day and then 4 in the last session might make logistics tricky. There are no refunds for accepted entries, so if you drop out of miss a swim your entry fee for that event is forfeited. If your swimmer is rejected for an event by the organisers then a refund will be available. This can be carried forward against the next Open Meet entry submitted, or it can be refunded.

### **On the day of the Open Meet**

Before the event itself you should remind yourself which events you've entered, you should also ensure that both you and your swimmer are prepared for a potentially long day at the pool. Make sure that both you and your swimmer have enough with you to drink, as swimming pools are invariably very hot places! You might regret wearing those jeans and that polar neck jumper! You will also need suitable snacks – the coaches have provided a useful guide to this:

<http://www.wokingsc.co.uk/nutrition.htm>

Also bring some pens to record times and maybe a highlighter pen so you can mark all the Woking swimmers in the programme and be ready to cheer for them all.

Also check:

- You know where the venue is and how long it will take you to get there. Information is available at <http://www.wokingsc.co.uk/otherlocations.htm>



- The closing time for registration for each session
- The start time of each session

Different meets have different sign-on/registration protocols. Some use cards which you submit on arrival, some use sign-on sheets and others just assume that having entered you'll be swimming. Where there is a sign-on/registration required you need to make sure you understand and follow the procedure, as if your swimmer isn't correctly registered by the cut-off time they will not be able to swim in the event.

Also, please ensure you inform the coach on arrival that your swimmer is there so they know who they are looking after poolside. If for any reason you find you can't make it on the day itself then please call 0785 1963287 to let the coaches know. Please note this number is ONLY used during Open Meets and is not a general number on which you can contact the coaches at any time day or night!

You should also seek to ensure that your swimmer is briefed on when to eat food during the day to ensure that they either don't get hungry before a race or, even worse, find that they have eaten just before they are called for a race. Also bear in mind that there is usually a "warm up" swim at the beginning of each of the day's sessions, and your swimmer will normally be expected to swim in each of these.

Having deposited your swimmer with the coach you'll then make your way to the viewing gallery; if this is the first session of the day prepare for a long queue to get in! When you get to the front of the queue be prepared to part with more cash as you will likely be charged for entry and also for a programme. Bear in mind the entries and programmes can be specific to each session or day of the event.

Once in the gallery find some other parents from the club, find a seat, sit back and enjoy the event.

Your programme will show the events in event order and list all the swimmers in ascending entry time order. Most Open Meet events will be swum Heat Declared Winner (remember that term from the Diddys!), so you might find your swimmer in a heat with others in different age groups based on the entry time of those swimmers. Where they finish in their heat may or may not be relevant for their overall position for that event. Generally the organisers will post the results for the previous event/session as soon as possible after the last swimmer (across all age groups) completes that event. You'll see where these sheets are posted as there will always be a group of parents intensely studying the sheets, furiously noting the achieved times in their programmes! Don't panic about writing everything down (although your swimmer will expect you to have done so!) as normally results from the Open Meet are posted some days later on the host club's website, and all licensed times achieved can be viewed online via the ASA National Ranking system within a week or so of the event.



The top placed swimmers in each event will generally be announced at a suitable point in proceedings and if your swimmer has won a medal or ribbon these are generally collected by the swimmer from a specific location at the venue; there's normally no time for "official" presentations of medals so don't expect the national anthem and raising of the club flag!

At some meets there is a top visiting club award, this is awarded to the club whose swimmers achieve the most points (different meets use different points systems) across the course of the meet, so although your swimmer is competing for them self and improved times they are also competing for the club.

Having read this far you are now an "expert" on inter-club competition and Open Meets in general, where next?

### **BAGCATS**

At some of the bigger meets there might also be awards made for the top BAGCAT points achieved in each age group. BAGCATs are nothing to do with a shop, a pink and white saggy cloth cat, Professor Yaffle or the mice and a mouse organ.

BAGCATs stand for the British Age Group Categories, which is a points system to measure and compare swimmers' performance. This is based on comparative performance tables (published by the ASA) with age correction factors applied.

The latest thinking is that swimmers at an early stage of their development should compete to win an overall category award rather than specialising in a particular event. The BAGCATs therefore define four different categories of sprint, form, distance and medley. The BAG Points are calculated from a set of age-related tables for each of the above categories as follows:

**Sprint** - best 50m-sprint performance (i.e. 50m/100m back, breast, butterfly and freestyle)

**Form** - best form stroke performance (i.e. form strokes are those with a defined form according to ASA Law) - thus best performance at 200m back, breast or butterfly)

**Distance** - best performance at 200m, 400m or 1500m Freestyle)

**Medley** - best performance at 100m, 200m or 400 Individual Medley)

To work out the BAGCAT points for an individual swimmer, you must complete at least one swim from each of the categories and the points for the best performance in each are totalled to give a single score.



## Surrey County Championships

The Surrey County Championships (aka The Surreys) are open to swimmers from all clubs in the county (with some blurred county boundaries!). They are run not by the Surrey ASA but by the Surrey County Water Polo and Swimming Association (<http://www.surreyswimming.org/>) and are held in February/March across various venues. Qualification times must have been achieved at a licensed meet between the end of the last championships and the end of the preceding year.

## South East Regional Championships

The South East region is one of the 8 ASA defined regions and covers Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the Channel Islands, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Sussex and the parts of Surrey and Kent that are outside London.

The Regionals (aka Districts) generally take place in May and June and are split between the Youth Championships for the older swimmers and the Age Group Championships for the younger swimmers, the youngest age category being 10 years old. QTs are understandably tougher than the county championships and have to have been achieved at a Level 1,2 or 3 licensed meet since 1<sup>st</sup> October in the preceding year. The Regionals normally operate a two-tier qualification system where they publish a base consideration time and an automatic QT. So if your swimmers gets a base time it may be enough to be considered for the event, but may not actually be enough to qualify. To get a guaranteed qualification then the swimmer needs to be faster than the automatic QT for that event. More details can be found at: <http://www.southeastswimming.org/>

## The National Championships

The Nationals are the pinnacle to which a young swimmer might aspire.

However, only a comparatively few swimmers (approx. 1% of the competitive swimming population) will ever achieve the elusive NQTs required to compete in the National Championships. These take place in Sheffield at Ponds Forge in July. QTs must have been achieved at a Level 1 or 2 licensed meet between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> May.

Details are published on the ASA website: <http://www.britishswimming.org/>

Look under Disciplines/Swimming and then Calendar and Competition.

To give you some idea of the pyramid of QTs as an example here are the 2009 qualification times for 200m Freestyle for an 11 year old girl:

**Surreys (Short Course)**                      2:48.00

### Regionals (Short Course)

Base Consideration	2:40.60
Automatic	2:34.20



### **Nationals**

Short Course	2:20.25
Long Course	2:24.96

### **Further Reading**

If you haven't seen the ASA's brochure *"Success is Long-term – Long-term Athlete Development related to the journey through Swimming"* it is well worth a read and covers some of topics discussed here in a little more detail.