

A beginner's guide to entering swimming competitions.

There are lots of types of swimming galas you/your child can attend, but they tend to follow a development pathway. There are licensed and unlicensed meets. Unlicensed meets do not have to follow the same Swim England meet rules and the results are not listed on the Swim England Rankings database. They can nonetheless be used to enter low level galas (Level 3 and 4).

When you receive an email about an upcoming gala and you are not sure if you/your child should enter it, please speak to the coaches or email the swimming secretary at drsaswimsec@gmail.com

We will publish a competition calendar at the beginning of the season. It will be regularly updated so please keep checking our website for the most up-to-date version. Please note that the galas and training program are carefully linked, and squad 1-4 swimmers should aim to only enter the galas recommended by the club. Please talk to your coach if you have any questions.

Please read the swimmers' nutrition and warm-up guides, (LINK?) and the code of conducts before every gala.

Galas are fun, sociable and the culmination of the training so swimmers should aim to enter as many as they can. They provide a useful 'marker' for both the swimmer and the coaches.

The minimum age to enter licensed galas is 9 (this can be age at the gala or age at the end of the year, so check each gala conditions). For our Club Championships and other unlicensed galas eg Kingfisher there is no minimum age.

Different types of galas:

Level	Pool length	Minimum times	Maximum times	Aimed at...
Unlicensed	25m	No	No	Everyone, but particularly Squads 1-3 & 5
Level 4	25m	No	No	Everyone, but particularly Squads 1-3 & 5
Level 3	25m/50m	No	Usually	Everyone
Level 2	25m	Yes	No	Squad 4 – coaches invitation only
Level 1	50m	Yes	No	Squad 4 – coaches invitation only

Club Champs and Bonfire Bonanza

These are the lowest level meets. They are unlicensed and just for the swimmers in our club to compete against each other. We do invite other clubs to attend the Bonfire Bonanza, but this remains an unlicensed and fun gala. These two meets are great fun and less daunting for young newly competitive swimmers as they will be familiar with the pool, the judges, officials and timekeepers. They will also know the other swimmers and have an opportunity to record legitimate times that can be used for entering other meets (Level 3) later on. We hold our Club Champs in June and the Bonfire Bonanza in early November.

Highly recommended for all swimmers

Club Meets

These are the next level (usually level 3, although they can also be other levels) where one club 'hosts' the meet and invites other clubs to come along and race. Some club meets will often ask the swimmer to have a minimum time that they will need to enter a certain race and some club meets will set an upper limit time which means the swimmer cannot enter the race if they swim faster than that time. This is great for younger swimmers as it gives those who are not necessarily the quickest a chance to develop.

This includes the following galas: City of Plymouth (October), PL Christmas (December). Two Counties (March) and our very own Sizzler (July)

Highly recommended for all swimmers

County Meets

Devon County hold a couple of meets throughout the year as a pathway to more advanced swimming competitions. The County Championships (Level 1 Long Course), Interclubs (Level 3 Short Course), and Relays (Unlicensed Long Course) are held in January/February and you will hear them referred to as 'The Counties'.

In June, we will also have Devon Developments (Level 3 Short Course) and Devon Sprints (Level 3 Short Course).

Each year the county releases qualifying times

There are usually lots of local swimming meets between September (the start of the season) and December (the deadline for the Counties) so that as many swimmers as possible have

the opportunity to achieve these times.

Swimmers for the Devon Relays and Interclub galas are selected by the coaches. Swimmers need to have reached qualifying times for the Devon County Championships. The Devon Development gala on the other hand is aimed at squads 1, 2 and 3 swimmers (as well as Masters)

[Level 1/2 Meets](#)

The next steps on the pathway after attending Level 3 meets are the regional and national qualifying galas. Swimmers (mainly in squads 4 and 5) are usually identified by the coaches as needing to attend these galas so they are not open to everyone. We attend the Exeter Level 2 gala in October and for swimmers trying to gain qualifying times for Regional and National championships, coaches might identify other galas to attend.

The South West Regionals are usually held in October (short course winter regionals) and in May/June (summer regionals). Swimmers need to have gained qualifying times for these meets.

English Nationals (winter and summer) and British Nationals are the next step up and only swimmers who are the fastest in the country based on rankings qualify for these events.

[Arena League](#)

Every year, we send a team of our fastest swimmers to compete in the National Arena League. It is a real privilege to be picked by the coaching team to represent our club. We race over 3 Saturdays (usually the second Saturday of October, November and December) against other teams, in individual and relay races. Points are awarded for the position we come in each race in each round and our total will determine the clubs we will race in the following rounds. The races are divided into Under 11s, Under 13s, Under 15s and 16 and Over categories (boys, girls and mixed).

Around September, the coaches will identify a group of swimmers who would potentially make the final team. If your/your child is selected, please ensure you let the club know asap if you/they are free for the 3 rounds. Historically we have raced either at the Life Centre, or somewhere in the South West, in which case we travel by coach to the venue and back.

Long and Short Course

This is just about how long the pool is. Long course is a 50m pool and short course is a 25m pool.

We have two swim meet seasons in the UK. The short course season runs from September to December and the long course season runs from January to August.

Time Trials

When a swimmer first starts swimming competitively you will not have any actual recorded times for any races. You will need to ask your coach to give you a time that you can use to enter galas. Sometimes the club will run time trials. This is where the swimmers race against each other during their normal training session and a time is written down, normally on a white board poolside, that can be used. These are not 'official' times but some meets will accept them in order to give young swimmers a chance to get off the ground. Swimmers can also gain times at the Bonfire Bonanza and the Club Championships.

Recorded Times

When a swimmer competes in a licensed meet their times will be recorded by official time keepers and these will be sent to Swim England to be recorded on a central database. These times are then official and can be used to enter meets in the future. Using this website <https://www.swimmingresults.org/individualbest/>, search for the swimmer using their family name and click on the membership number link. Once you have an official time it will be recorded here. Their personal best time will be on the main page but every time they do the race the time is recorded against it. You can click on the race to see the full history. Note though that disqualifications in races are not recorded (more on DQ's later).

Our competition Secretary enters many of these times on to the members Team Unify page so open teram Unify and then go to My Account and then Account info, click on the member for their times and you will see-

[DETAILS](#) [ATTENDANCE](#) [BEST TIMES](#) [MEET RESULTS](#)

Entering an Open Meet

Please ensure your details are up to date on Team Unify so you can receive emails about all the meets we are entering. Some will be relevant and some will not. You will need to work that out by looking through the details if the gala is suitable for you/your child. If you are unsure, please speak to your/your child's coach or email our Competition Secretary Mark at compsec.drsa@yahoo.com

To help you with deciding whether you/your child can enter a gala, please check the following:

1. Date & Location. The most important thing to look for first of all is the date and location of the meet. Can you make that weekend? Is it one day or a whole weekend? Is the gala accessible for you. If these are fine then look at the conditions of the meet. These are usually provided in the form of a 'pack' and will include details such as the entry age of the swimmer and the qualifying time conditions.
2. Age Groups. Some meets refer to age groups such 'age on [date]'. If, for example, this is 15 March and your swimmer is 10 years old on 15 March, it means your swimmer will swim against all other swimmers who are also 10 years old on 15 March. Some meets will be listed as 'age on 31 December...' this means that whatever age your child is on 31 December of that year is the age group they will swim in. This is really important as you need to know what age group they are swimming in, in order to see what qualifying times they need to have achieved to enter.
3. Race Selection. The coaches can suggest what races you should enter but please also check with your child. It is important swimmers do not race the same events all the time and they should try and enter different distances and strokes (again, please discuss this with the coaches).
4. Schedules. The schedule/programme supplied in the entry pack often plays a key role in deciding what races to do. For example, if the meet is for a whole weekend and there is one 50m race in each session, spread over both days, this will mean being around for the whole weekend for just a few quick races. This is a lot of waiting around. You might find it easier to enter just one day out of the two, or maybe just one session per day. Some children are very happy to sit around with their swim friends so it might be fine to enter the whole meet. This is completely your decision.
5. Qualifying Tables. Once you have a clear idea on what races your swimmer might like to do you need to check this against whether your swimmer actually qualifies to enter the races. The pack will have a qualifying table often showing either upper or lower qualifying times for each race and gender, but sometimes both. Lower limit times means the swimmer must swim faster than the time shown and upper limit times means they must swim slower than the time shown. You can obtain your child's personal best (PB) times from the Swim England website (<https://www.swimmingresults.org/individualbest/>) and if they do not have times they should contact their coach who will provide them. If the times for the races sit within the qualifying times then you are free to enter that race.

You may find you go backwards and forwards for a bit, deciding on what races to swim, working out whether they qualify and if the session times work for you. It's all a bit trial and error but once you have done one or two meets it gets easier and you will have a better idea of what works well.

Entry Process

The actual entry is quite straightforward. Log into your account on Team Unify, find the "Events" tabs, click on the chosen event and select the races you/your child wants to race.

Please note the deadline for entering as once this has gone, you cannot enter the gala anymore.

You will be billed after the competition via Team Unify. There will also be, on top of the race fees, another fees to cover coach poolside passes and will be clearly indicated on the entry pack and email.

Once our competition secretary has emailed through all of our club's entries, you should receive an email confirming the accepted and rejected entries (usually much nearer to the date of the meet). On occasion a meet may have to reject entries when too many entries have been received or if there is a mistake or error in the entry. Additionally, you will receive emails detailing the warm up times, spectator information etc.

Withdrawals

If your swimmer is ill or can no longer attend there are usually processes in place to withdraw from certain races or the whole meet entirely. Some meets operate a fining system for the club/swimmer if the withdrawal process is not followed so please read the pack guide for more information. It is essential you keep an eye on your mailbox so you don't miss anything.

On the Day of the Meet

On the day of the meet, it's important to turn up with plenty of time before the listed warm up time and with a huge amount of snacks, drinks, spare club hats, goggles, costumes, towels, a locker coin and if possible, things to do poolside. It can be a long, hot day but lots of fun too and a real time for team bonding. Parents/guardians/, family members and friends can watch from the gallery but when you are more familiar there are always volunteering opportunities you may wish to take up to get more involved in all the action. For more information on this speak to Caroline, our volunteers coordinator (drsavolunteersec@gmail.com)

Signing in

Some meets operate a signing in process where the swimmer needs tick their name on a list of swimmers attending each race in that session in order to be considered present. This can be a bit of a scramble, with the swimmers all bundled together looking for their names on sheets of paper by an entrance table. This is usually only for middle and long distance races where organisers want to ensure they run the minimum number of heats.

Heats

One thing that always comes up with young swimmers is how the heats operate at a meet. All swimmers are ranked according to their speed (entry time) and not their age. Heats are then split up depending on how many lanes the pool has. Usually, the slowest swimmers start first and the last heats are the fastest swimmers. This means that more often than not they will be swimming with children that are not the same age as them. This is really

important as it means that winning their heat **does not mean** they have come 1st. There may be children in faster heats the same age as your swimmer. Only when the results sheets are displayed can you know the actual official time and position.

Hot Heats?

Heat Declared Winners (HDW) and Finals

Some meets will state that certain races have HDW. This means that the swimmers' positions (1st, 2nd, 3rd etc.) are decided from the time they achieved in the heat and no additional 'Final' race is being run. Alternatively, certain meets, usually bigger Championships, have Finals for the top 8 or 10 swimmers (depending on how many lanes there are in the pool) by age group. This will be indicated clearly in the entry pack. **If the swimmer does not want to enter the 'Final' they must inform the organisers quickly or you could be fined! This is so they can invite the next qualifier in a timely fashion.**

Disqualifications or infractions

It's natural that at some point you/your child may be disqualified for a technical reason during their race. There are a huge list of disqualification reasons and the coaches work hard to ensure that the children know the rules. When there is a disqualification the referee's decision is final. If a reason is not given on the results sheet you should ask the coach poolside to explain so the swimmer is aware of what happened. It's never nice but actually can be pretty helpful in honing in on what needs to be worked on in the future. It's worth noting that whatever time you/your child got, if it's a DQ then it won't be recorded in rankings.