

A Parents Guide to Competitive Swimming at Stafford Apex

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“It is important that within the competitive programme individuals can compete in events which are appropriate to their stage of development and talents.”

The club website can be found at www.staffordapex.com

1. Training

Squads

The swimmers are assigned to squads based on the coaches assessments. Factors include training performance (not all swimmers train at the same speed and training pace is not always an indication of race pace), race performance, consistency, attitude and attendance. When the swimmer is ready the coaches will discuss a move to the next squad. In general as a swimmer progresses through the squads more training time is involved and a greater commitment to both training and competition.

Training Times

These are individual to each squad and a timetable will be given to the swimmer when they start in a given squad. It should be noted that if a training time says 4pm to 6pm, this means that a swimmer should be ready to swim at 4pm. He/she should have arrived at the leisure centre in time to change, perform a land-based warm up and be ready to start swimming at the specified time.

Contact

The committee who run the club are volunteers, information relating to them can be found on the club website (www.staffordapex.com). You should check the club website regularly for information. In addition the club secretary emails regular bulletins to parents. If you are not receiving these please contact her on secretary@staffordapex.com. In addition information will be posted on the noticeboard at the Leisure Centre.

Further sources of useful information: you can sign up to receive email notifications of blog posts on the club website and also it can be useful to join the club Facebook page.

Training issues should be referred to your child's coach. He/she should be available for queries before and after training. If your query will take time to sort out, it may be necessary to pre-arrange a time to have the discussion. If you feel you need to take the matter further please contact Head Coach, Julie Shenton, at the Leisure Centre.

Stafford Apex coaching sessions are a Stafford Leisure Centre centre-based activity. Therefore, Freedom Leisure provides the coaches, lane space and training times. For this reason training fees are payable to the Leisure Centre, at reception, not to the Club. The club itself employs members of the same team to coach the swimmers at Open Meets, Championships and League Events. Information about our coaches can be found on the club website.

Goals

Initial goals are County level qualifying times, and hopefully then to be chosen to represent your County (as the best in the County at a specific event in your age group), it is then to pursue a Regional Qualifying time and to swim at Regional Championships level. The highest level for club swimmers is to gain a National Qualifying time; this demands the utmost of training, dedication and hard work. For only a very few it could lead to International Team selection. The Olympic games and International Competition is the Ultimate aim of all swimmers. When you realise how many hours and years of training it takes to get a swimmer to that level, those swimmers and their parents and their coach deserve our ultimate respect.

But you can have a lot of fun in lower levels of competitive swimming and to gaining a medal or getting a personal best time is the best feeling in the world. You get out of swimming what you put in and the best swimmers parents are nearly always there to watch their offspring train and achieve their goals.

How hard will swimmers need to work?

Natural ability can only take you so far; training hard and teamwork with your coach and parents will get you to where you want to be. But you have to do the work in the pool and out of it ... Training becomes a way of life. Those who train hard will be successful, but many just enjoy their swimming and the social side of training with their teammates, but to succeed you have to put in the hours. Your fellow swimmers help you train harder.

The aim is to reach your potential, you should give yourself a realistic target and try to achieve it, by training hard, increasing your training sessions will enable you to increase performance and ultimately your results. Competitive swimming requires dedication from the swimmer, their coaches and their parents.

It requires hours in the pool, it also includes unsociable hours training including very early morning sessions and weekend swimming, dedicated parents are essential to help swimmers achieve their goals. Travelling to training and to open meets all over the country to gain qualifying times becomes a routine for our best swimmers. It may be over in seconds in an event, but it may take years of training and preparation to get there. The rewards are great, for those who have achieved a personal best time, a medal or a Regional or National qualifying time, the measure and the pride which is felt after a good swim, for swimmer, coach and parents makes it all worthwhile.

If you want to be a competitive swimmer, work hard, swim for your team with pride and swim to improve yourself at every training session!

2. Open Meets

Open Meets are licensed by Swim England. At these meets you can achieve qualifying times for Counties, Midlands and National Events.

These are for swimmers aged 9+

Clubs will post all information relating to their open meet on their own website. Here you will find Entry Conditions, Qualifying Times, Entry Forms and nearer to the event Warm-up Times, Accepted and Rejected Entries, and sometimes the Event Program. You should always check the website for the event prior to attending.

Levels of Open Meets

Level 3 is for Club swimmers who are looking for County qualifying times and level 3 meets will have qualifying and upper limit times set at an appropriate level. These meets would provide a programme throughout the year alongside key level 2 meets to support the requirements of swimmers up to County and Regional level. Note NQTs cannot be gained at level 3 meets. Regional QTs can be gained at level 3 meets.

Level 2 is aimed at Regional / National qualifiers and will have qualifying times. Access to the Swim England ranking information is used to enable meet organisers to verify that entry times submitted by swimmers fall within the stated range. Swimmers seeking Regional and National qualifying times should target level 2 and level 1 events for qualifying purposes.

Level 1 is aimed at National qualifiers, or Regional level swimmers close to National qualification, looking for opportunities to achieve National qualifying times. These meets will have qualifying times for entry, which will be just below the national times.

Qualifying Times and Upper Limit Times

These are times set by meet organisers for each event in the programme in order to control the number of entries in a meet. A qualifying time is the time that a swimmer must have already achieved in order to enter that level of competition. However, some meets will also have an upper limit time for each event, which means that swimmers who have previously achieved times faster than the upper limit time are not eligible for an event.

Most Level 1 & 2 Meets can only be entered by electronic entry, the Club Gala Secretary has to submit club entries electronically on behalf of the club, and entry times submitted are checked against the National Ranking system.

Level 3 meets will accept qualifying times achieved in training or at a junior event. The requirement of having achieved a qualifying time in order to enter for an event relies significantly on the integrity of coaches, swimmers and parents to submit correct, truthful information. This is a clear expectation within the SWIM England Code of Conduct.

Long Course / Short Course

Simply, Long Course mean the event is held in a 50m pool, short course means the event is held in a 25m pool. Level 1 events are always long course. Level 2 events are always short course. Level 3 events can be held in either pool.

If your time has been recorded in a short course pool you will need to convert it to enter a long course event (and vice versa). A link to the recommended time conversion utility can be found on the club website.

Age on date / 31st December

Some open meets will decide the age of the swimmers based on the age they are on the last day of that meet. In the case of level 1 & 2 meets many use the swimmers age on 31st December of the current year. This latter method is how Counties, Midlands and Nationals work out a swimmers age. It can also be used at a level 3 meet, so keep an eye open when reading the meet conditions.

How an Open Meet works

When you arrive at an Open Meet, all Apex Swimmers will sit together on poolside with the Coach. Heats are organised by the speed of the swimmers. This means that there will be swimmers of varying ages in the same heat. Medals are awarded to the fastest swimmer in an age category, so winning your heat doesn't necessarily mean that you have won your age category.

Once the heats have all been completed, one of 2 things will happen: Either the winner of each age group will be declared as the fastest swimmer in the heats (HDW) or a final will be swum for the fastest swimmers in each age group. Most Open Meets are HDW, but Counties and Regional Competitions have finals for all but the longest events.

Rejected Entries

Sometimes a Meet is oversubscribed and it is necessary to reject some entries. The means by which this is done will vary, but will be contained within the Entry Conditions for that meet. At Level 1 & 2 all entries will be rejected on a 'Fastest Swim' basis by age group, meaning that the slowest swimmers in

each age group will be rejected. This system may also be used for a Level 3 Meet, but organisers can choose to accept entries on a 'First come first served' basis. For these Meets it is important to get Club entries to the organisers early.

Which Meet to Enter?

You will be guided by your coach as to which level of meet you should be aiming for.

Each club will have a list of target meets, if you are given an entry form it is advised that you should be entering that meet, if you are unsure of what events to enter please see your coach who will be able to advise you. It is entirely possible that members of the same squad may be advised to enter different meets.

If you are unable to enter a given meet, you may be missing the chance of an important qualifying time. Please bear this in mind. Meets are chosen to maximise swimmers chances of qualifying for Counties, Regionals or Nationals. It is all about improving and gaining qualifying times, not necessarily winning medals. You should not enter an event without your coach's permission.

What kit do I need?

Swimsuit – for the boys a pair of Lycra jammers, for the girls a Lycra racesuit. Do not worry about buying a top of the range racesuit; you just need something tight-fitting (so it doesn't move when the swimmer dives into the water or during the race). The swimsuit should comply with FINA rules on swimsuits. You will find that older swimmers and their parents are happy to provide guidance here! If you do invest in expensive race swimwear please note that these suits are best kept for galas only as they have a limited life. Do not use race suits at training.

Club T-shirt – to wear between races. Poolside shirts and polo shirts are available from Brand Warehouse (see club website for more information)

Goggles –some goggles that are not going to slip off when racing.

Club Swim Hat

A swimmer should also take plenty of drink and something to eat. Swimmers are not allowed to leave poolside without footwear, so they often find some flip-flops useful.

Warm-up

Please always arrive 15 minutes prior to the warm-up time. This means the first warm-up time, not the time for your sex/age. The club will lead the swimmers through a land-based warm-up prior to entering the pool.

3. Junior Gala

The club Junior Gala is not licensed by Swim England. It allows our junior swimmers an opportunity to swim in a competitive environment without the pressures of an Open Meet. We usually invite Walsall swimming club to bring their swimmers along too.

The junior gala is open to all swimmers who have not achieved a Midland Qualifying Time in the event. However, on this occasion if over-subscribed, the fastest swimmers will be rejected.

The junior gala also contains 25m races for the development squad to enter. There is no age limit for these races, so even our youngest swimmers can have a go!

4. Counties / Midlands / Nationals

Initial goals are County level qualifying times, it is then to pursue a Regional Qualifying time and to swim at Regional Championships level. The highest level for club swimmers is to gain a National Qualifying time, this demands the utmost of training, dedication and hard work.

Staffordshire County Championships are held over 3 weekends in February. These are open to swimmers aged 10+. To enter you must have achieved the qualifying time set by the County ASA. This must be achieved within a specific set of dates – Usually from some time in May to a close date in December in the immediately preceding year. Qualifying times are published on the Staffs ASA website. There is a link to this from the club website.

West Midlands Championships are held over 2 weekends in May. These are open to swimmers aged 11+. To enter you must have achieved the qualifying time set by Swim West Midlands. This must be achieved within a specific set of dates – Usually from some time in October in the preceding year to a close date in April in the same year as the championships. Qualifying times are published on the Swim West Midlands website. Again there is a link to this from the club website.

The very fastest swimmers may get invited to swim in the English Championships or the British Championships. More information on these events is available on the Swim England website www.swimming.org.

5. PB Times

It is most important to keep a list of your personal best times. You should notify your coach of any pbs , so that the club and coordinators can make sure that you are entered for the appropriate meets for you. A list of PBs achieved at Swim England licensed meets is available on the Internet. Follow links from the Stafford Apex web site.

6. Swimming for the Team

The club enters teams for the Staffordshire League and for the Nuneaton and District Junior League. We also enter teams for the County Relay Championships in March.

Team lists are posted on the noticeboard in the Leisure Centre. Parents are asked to confirm that their child can swim by placing a tick next to their name. For this reason it is important to regularly check the noticeboard.

If asked to swim for your club, do so with pride and commitment. Swimming as part of a team is as rewarding if not more rewarding than swimming in an open meet for yourself.

To be offered a team place is an honour, we are a club and every swim counts. It may not seem important or necessary to parents to have to travel miles to a team gala for maybe only one swim in one event, but just to swim 50m in a relay team for example is very important to your club, it is a team effort and if one person isn't available to swim, it can affect the whole team.

7. Officials

We need qualified officials to make sure that the rules of swimming are applied fairly and impartially. They also ensure that the event is conducted safely. Officials will take courses as prescribed by Swim England.

There are 5 type of official you may encounter:

Timekeeper

Judge Level 1 – These officials are qualified as Timekeeper, Chief Timekeeper and Inspector of Turns.

Judge Level 2 – has knowledge of all aspects of judging and also of the role and duties of the Starter.

Starter

Referee – the highest level of official who is responsible for running the event fairly and safely.

The club is only able to function as a result of people volunteering to train as officials and to officiate at events. We are required to provide judges and timekeepers at League events. In addition we provide officials to clubs when we are attending their open meets as we rely on these clubs bringing their officials with them in order to run our own Open Meets.

Each level of technical official consists of some training, a short examination and a practical evaluation. Further details can be found at www.swimming.org.

If training as an official interests you please contact our club secretary: secretary@staffordapex.com.

There are also other opportunities to volunteer within the club: we need lots of helpers at every event, from serving drinks to officials, handing out medals, helping organise the children poolside, manning the door, announcing, to volunteering to be on the committee! If you are interested please email the Secretary.