



GUIDE TO COMPETITIVE SWIMMING **FOR THE PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF SWIMMERS,** **ESPECIALLY NEW SWIMMERS**

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Introduction

Getting involved in competitive swimming for the first time can be an unfamiliar process for younger swimmers and often just as much for their parents or guardians. There are things to know and understand about what is expected of you; what sort of competitions you should be entering and at what stage; how to enter; what you should bring to galas and Open Meets; the leagues the Club enters, and what you should make sure you have with you on the day of competition. Don't worry if you don't know all of this straight away. You'll pick it up quickly and some of it will become more relevant to you as your child progresses.

Much of this information is on the Club website or is explained by coaches on poolside but it is currently not in one place and is sometimes difficult to find. This guide is an attempt to pull all of that information together in one place.

The most important thing for newcomers to grasp is that it is vital to compete and get times in a variety of events. Hopefully the following will explain why.

Starting Out

It is important for you to be clear and understand that Chelmsford City Swimming Club is first and foremost a competitive Club. We have a proud record of significant competitive success in swimming, at county, regional and national level. The Club and its coaches will guide you and your swimmers about what you should be aiming to compete in and achieve as they develop – **but you are expected to compete. Once you are in the Junior or City Squads you are training to achieve competitive success, not to simply train for fitness.**

We encourage children to compete as we believe it is one of the key ways to make a swimmer faster and better. It's really important that swimmers make an effort to enter competitions for several reasons:

- It gives swimmers an idea of what it's like to compete
- It gives swimmers their times, and therefore is a clear marker of how they are progressing
- It gives swimmers a goal towards which they can work
- It gives swimmers a sense of achievement
- It shows the coaches how the swimmers cope with a competitive environment
- Gaining new improved times are one of the major factors in helping the coaches to decide whether a swimmer is ready to move up to the next squad

Each season the Club enters teams in several league competitions. **If your child is selected for the Club in one or more of those leagues they are expected to turn out and compete and represent the Club.** The leagues should not be seen as optional "add-ons" to individual competition. The league fixtures are regarded as more important to compete in than Open Meets. If your child is regularly unable to compete in league fixtures the Head Coach will reserve the right to remove your child's place in the competitive squads.

The Club's Squads

Each of the squads or sections has different aims and mainly targets swimmers at different stages of their development.

Intro/Academy Squad

Primarily targeted at swimmers who are progressing from Learn to Swim provision and who wish to develop and progress to the Junior Squad, though some move on to Water Polo rather than competitive swimming. To join children must be at least 7 years old and be able to swim at least 250 metres. Generally, swimmers will have progressed to Level 7 of the Swim England Learn to Swim Programme.

Junior Squad

For swimmers aged up to 13 who are aiming to develop as competitive swimmers and progress to one of the City Squads. If by the age of 13 swimmers are not felt to be capable of progression to one of the City Squads they will be encouraged to move to the Club's Swimfit provision. The emphasis in the Junior Squad is on development of stamina and stroke technique. Swimmers progress within the squad to different stages designated by different colour hats.

City Squads

The City Squads are for older swimmers although some talented younger swimmers may be selected who are training for competitive success. Swimmers are required to train regularly and will have a target number of sessions given to them by their

coaches dependent on their age / school year or squad that they are in, up to a target of at least 6, ideally 7 sessions a week for swimmers aged 14 and older.

The Club's Coaching Team

Parents will always be aware of who the specific coach of their child is but may not know about the Club's coaching team as a whole.

Head Coach: The Head Coach oversees all of the swimming coaching and decides on the coaching teams. They also decide the structure of the squads and training schedules; progression of swimmers from the Junior Squad to one of the City Squads and the leagues and other Swimming Meets that the Club enters. The Head Coach can be emailed at headcoach@chelmsfordcityswimmingclub.org.uk

The Basic Structure of the Swimming Season

For very young swimmers, aged 9 and under, the wider structure of the swimming season may not be very relevant but for other swimmers it is. For older swimmers the competitive season is divided for championship purposes into a Short Course (25 metre pools) phase from September to late December and a Long Course (50 metre pool) phase from January to August.

Short course competitions continue from January onwards but in the second half of the season will tend to be for younger swimmers or those not aiming to qualify for regional and national championships.

In competitive terms the season is structured approximately as in the table below:

September to December	Qualifying for County Championships (LC) County and Regional Winter Championships
January to February	County LC Championships
January to April	Qualifying for Regional LC Championships
April to June	Regional LC Championships Qualifying for National Championships
July / August	National Championships

Registering Official Times

Once you are an Swim England registered swimmer and have competed in a licensed event you will have times for each swimming event recorded on the national Swim England database. As your child competes in more Meets and events and improves their times the record of their Personal Best times will be automatically updated on the Swim England database. You can access this database either via the National Swim England website or via the link on the Club website. See the 'Personal Bests' on the Competitive Swimming page.

The Different Competitions – what you should be aiming to compete in at different stages of your development as a swimmer

Leagues

Currently the Club enters the following leagues:

Arena National League: for swimmers 11 and under up to Open (over 16). This is the premier league competition for swimmers over the age of 11 so the Club aims to put out its strongest / fastest swimmers in this league. There are 3 rounds held between October and December each year. Ages are as at 31st December in the year of the competition.

National Junior Swimming League (M11): for swimmers aged from 9 to 12, age as at the last date of a league gala in any year (usually the last Sunday in June). This league is for the strongest swimmers in the Club in those younger age groups and fixtures are normally in spring and early summer.

Essex Mini League: is for swimmers aged 9 to Open (over 16). The main feature of this league is that swimmers are penalised if they swim events faster than a designated time, so the aim is always to select swimmers who are able to swim very close to but not over the times specified. This means that this league also creates opportunities for those swimmers not selected for National League teams.

Club Championships

Our Club Championships are held each year. Only members of the Club can compete. They are an ideal opportunity for younger, less experienced swimmers to get experience of competing and registering official times. Medals are awarded in each age group and Club Championship trophies are presented at the presentation and family disco evening each year.

Licensed Open Meets

Throughout the season the Club will decide to enter a number of Open Meets organised by other Clubs. Most of the Meets the Club enters are local but occasionally are further away.

There are three different levels of open meet. The hardest level with the fastest qualifying times is level one. Only the top swimmers in the Club will qualify. Levels two and three are easier and all of the City Squads and many in the Junior Squad should qualify. Some swimmers in the City Squads may be too fast for some level three meets.

Each Open Meet the Club enters will be posted on the Competitive Swimming Fixtures page of the Club website and there will be details of the programme; the Qualifying times (QTs) and Upper Qualifying or Cut Off times by event, age group and gender; and an eligibility report that tells you what events at that Meet your child has the times to compete in.

Qualifying times and cut-off times

- A qualifying time is a time that is required in order to enter an event
- A cut-off time is a time that is the fastest a swimmer can be in order to enter an event

As well as giving general competitive experience, Open Meets are an opportunity to bring down Personal Bests or achieve QTs for County, Regional or National Championships.

You will gradually get used to seeing that some Open Meets have tougher or higher entry times than others. Usually Level 1 licensed Meets are tougher than Level 3 Meets. Use the information on QTs and the eligibility report as a guide to the Meets you should think about entering your child for. **If in doubt consult with your child's coach.**

Essex County Championships

Once your swimmer is at least 10 years old they will be able to aim to achieve qualifying times to compete at the Essex County Long Course Championships, usually held over 3 weekend blocks in January and February each year. Times usually need to be achieved by mid-December preceding the Championships.

Each year the Club gets around 80 of its swimmers achieving at least one QT for the Essex Championships and this is the first main competitive goal your child should have once they have got used to competing at Club Championships and a few Open Meets.

East Region Championships

Usually held in late April and May the Regional Championships are for swimmers at the next level up from County Championships and for swimmers aged 11 upwards. Normally your child will be in one of the City Squads before they will have a realistic chance of achieving regional QTs. Times need to be achieved SC (short course) and normally between September and the closing date. Each year around 25 swimmers from the Club achieve regional times and compete in the championships.

National Championships

Held in late July and early August the National Championships are at an even higher standard than regionals and a swimmer will need to be ranked in the top 44 or so in the country in any event to qualify for Nationals. Each year Chelmsford has around 6 swimmers who qualify for Nationals.

Disqualifications

Inevitably, sooner or later, swimmers will be introduced to the concept of disqualification (DQ). Like all sports, competitive swimming is governed by strict technical rules which are there to make sure that races are run completely fairly. These rules are included within the

Swim England Handbook. In fact, our Club Championships are governed by the same set of rules used in the Olympic Games! All gala officials such as referees and judges have passed examinations (both theoretical and practical) and would prefer not to disqualify, however they have to maintain standards without which some swimmers could gain an unfair advantage. We do understand it is very upsetting to new swimmers when DQs happen, but 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 disqualifications are:

- A false start – there are no 2nd chances on the start. Please note a false start can consist of no more than the swimmer moving on the starting blocks once the starter has called “Take your marks”!
- Incorrect stroke technique, particularly for breaststroke and butterfly
- Incorrect touch at the turn or finish, again particularly breaststroke and butterfly when you have to touch with both hand simultaneously. Turning off your back to touch on your front when swimming backstroke
- Incorrect turn
- Taking a ‘flyer’ in a relay race i.e. diving in before the incoming swimmer has reached the end.

Sooner or later, your child will almost inevitably be disqualified. Being disqualified should be looked on as a learning experience; it is not the end of the world. It happens to everyone and even experienced swimmers are disqualified occasionally. It is much better to be disqualified early at a club event and learn from that disqualification, than to be disqualified at a County Championship or National League event, later in a swimmer’s career when it really matters.

Entering Competitions

All competitions that have been approved by our coaches are on the Fixtures page of the Competitive Swimming section of the Club website along with information on qualifying times and eligibility of individual swimmers. Entries for galas are done as group entries by the Club’s Competition Secretary as this is the method preferred by competition organisers. Please do not enter galas directly as individuals unless you have discussed this with the Head Coach in advance. However, it is up to you and your child to make sure you complete the entries for Open Meets and Championships where you are eligible to compete. The Head Coach and Competition Secretary may send out general reminders but **ultimately the responsibility to enter is yours.**

If you are serious about competing it is a good idea to spot the dates of competitions as early as possible and put those dates in your family calendar so that you make sure you do not get double booked. Of course, there will occasionally be weekends when family commitments mean your child cannot compete but **if you are serious about your child progressing in competitive swimming then you need to prioritise swimming competitions as much as possible.**

If your child is unable to attend due to illness **please email the competition secretary immediately**. This helps the coach on poolside know who is turning up. Competition organisers also have the right to fine a club if a swimmer is not withdrawn prior to the race – please remember that this fine will then be passed back to the parent for paying if they have not informed us of a ‘no show’.

Below is an attempt to answer likely Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about entering:

Who deals with entries for the Club / who do I liaise with?

There is a Competition Secretary for the Competitive Swimming section of the club who liaises with the Head Coach to decide which competitions the Club enters and puts the fixtures on the website. The Competition Secretary **then sends the Club’s entries in to the Meet Organiser** and will also deal with entries for our Club Championships. The Competition Secretary can be contacted at competition@chelmsfordcityswimmingclub.org.uk

The Head Coach, in liaison with the coaching team, decides selection for league fixtures.

How will I know if my child is selected for a league team?

You will receive an email. In addition, the teams are placed on the notice boards at New Hall along with details of the venue, times, places to meet etc. You will be asked to confirm that your child can attend.

It is vital that if your child cannot compete you let the relevant person know as soon as possible. Of course, if your child is genuinely ill on the day it can’t be helped but if that is the case you need to contact someone urgently so that another swimmer can be brought in. Other than illness no other reasons for withdrawing on the day are acceptable as it can mean the team and the Club are let down.

How do I know what competitions are coming up for me to enter my child for?

On the Club website under the Competitive Swimming Section is a Fixtures page. As the Head Coach decides to enter Open Meets details of these are posted on the Fixtures page, along with the details of League Fixtures and County, Regional and National Championships. **Check the Fixtures page regularly for updates. Put dates in your diary / on your calendar, including league fixtures. Remember you should make every effort to swim for the Club in leagues if selected.**

How do I know if an Open Meet is a good one to enter my child for?

Look at the QTs and Eligibility Report for the Meet on the Fixtures page. Think about whether your child has a chance of achieving QTs for County and Regional Championships and if the meet offers them a chance of getting those times. If in doubt ask your coach.

What specific events should I enter my child for at a Meet?

This is one of the most difficult questions to answer. Parents almost have to become their child’s Swimming Manager, thinking about how and what to race. It will be affected by what your child is aiming to achieve. They might want to enter their strongest events if they are aiming for QTs for Counties. Equally they might use some Open Meets to swim some of the events they are weaker at to get more experience or bring down their Personal Bests.

Discuss with your child what they are aiming for and again consult coaches if unsure. You will quickly pick this all up and can learn from more experienced parents as well as coaches.

Do I have to pay to enter?

For the league matches no – the Club pays. For all other events yes you do. All Open Meets and Championships have an entry fee per event and Admin fee. This will be detailed on the Fixtures page on the Club website.

How do I pay?

Payment is by debit/credit card.

Payment

To do this, you will need to have your log in details for your swimmer on Club Organiser, the Club's database. If you do not know your Club Organiser account you should email membership@chelmsfordcityswimmingclub.org.uk

To pay an entry fee for the relevant fixture on the Fixtures page of the website, click on the 'Payment' link. You will then be directed to Club Organiser where you will need to log in to your account. Once logged in go to the Fixtures and on the drop-down menu select the relevant fixture. You will then have a pre-prepared list of all the events at that meet that your child is eligible to enter. Select those you wish to enter and then click pay now. You will then be able to make the payment using your debit/credit card to complete the transaction.

Once you have paid you will receive an email from Club Organiser confirming your entry.

Going to a Gala / Competition

For those swimmers and parents new to competing it can be quite a daunting experience. Here are some tips and "dos" and "don'ts" to help you prepare in advance and have what you need on the day.

Travelling and arrival

Ensure your swimmer gets an early night the night before and arrives at the gala on time. Make sure you know when the warm up is due to start for each session. Please plan your journey to ensure you arrive at the pool leaving plenty of time to change before the warm up. You will be expected to do some stretching exercises on poolside before the warm up so it is advisable to be changed and on poolside 20 minutes before the scheduled start of warm up.

On arrival some galas have a signing in or out process or a registration process for all swimmers. Swimmers need to sign in or highlight their names to ensure that they are entered in the events on the day. The organisers for a sign in event or sign out will assume that those who do not register are not competing and will not allocate them a heat to swim in.

Clothing for poolside

Racing costumes/trunks should fit you like a second skin, which means for the girls, you should not be able to pull up the straps two or three inches above the shoulders!! Boys' trunks should be small at the sides and tight fitting. No baggy bottoms, as these will cause drag which will slow you down. Both boys and girls need to take separate warm up costumes/trunks to the ones they will be racing in. All costumes should be Swim England/FINA compliant – please check before purchasing

Club Hoodies and polo shirts only to be worn, together with plain black/blue shorts or tracksuit bottoms or Club branded versions available from our kit supplier these can be purchased direct when the ordering window is open. Please bring a couple of Club tops as they will get wet. Fashion shorts or jeans will not be allowed on poolside. It is important to stay warm when at a gala all day and we expect all swimmers to dress in the team colours on poolside.

Chelmsford City Swimming Club hats should be worn at all galas, by both boys and girls. Remember these hats show that you are representing Chelmsford City Swimming Club and it tells everyone you are proud to be part of the same team. These can be ordered online by sending an email to clubkit@chelmsfordcityswimmingclub.org.uk. or personalised ones can be ordered from the club kit supplier direct.

Poolside shoes should be worn. Most poolside floors can be very cold and you lose valuable heat through your feet, therefore it is sensible to wear poolside shoes...and make sure they are clean!

Goggles. A minimum of two pairs of goggles must be with you on poolside. Ensure your goggles fit properly during warm up and do not be tempted to fiddle with them between races. It may be a good idea to take a spare pair up to the beginning of the race in case your normal pair breaks.

Poolside

We would advise against portable games machines, MP3 players, iPad's etc., being brought onto poolside. You run the risk of these being damaged or unfortunately stolen.

Chelmsford swimmers will sit together and with coaches and / or whips on poolside. Please remain on poolside at all times. Do not wander off to see your parents. Some galas do not permit swimmers to go up on the balcony. If you need to leave poolside ensure that you report to the person in charge from Chelmsford City Swimming Club.

Please behave appropriately respecting your coaches and volunteers, all Swim England officials, gala rules i.e. remaining silent at the start of the races and other clubs and your team members.

What to eat

Fruit, cereal bars, Jaffa cakes, bread and pasta should be packed in a lunch box to be snacked on through the day. Any food containing high levels of fat should not be eaten. It is

important that appropriate food is brought for day long galas and eaten! Do not eat a large meal too close to the start of the gala.

Take plenty of water and fruit squashes.

NOT PERMITTED: fizzy drinks such as Red Bull, any sweets and chocolate.

Medication:

Please ensure that you have with you all relevant medication that you may require through the day.

Check List:

- Enough warm up AND racing costumes/trunks
- Plain Black/Blue Shorts or Tracksuit bottoms
- Club Polo shirt or Hoody
- Towels
- Poolside shoes
- Chelmsford City Swimming Club Hat (take 2 in case one rips)
- Goggles...At least two pairs
- Entry cards/sign in (where necessary)
- Food and drink to last the whole day
- Leave home early to get to the pool on time (you should be on poolside 20minutes before the warm-up starts)
- Medication
- Positive attitude

Rules for Team Galas:

- All swimmers must wear their Chelmsford City Swimming Club tops and hats.
- All selected swimmers must travel by coach (if available) to the venue.
- Please register with the team manager either at the coach before departure or on poolside before the warm-up starts.
- No swimmer leaves the poolside until the end of the gala and the final result is given.
- At the end of the gala all swimmers must sign out with the allotted team manager.
- There may be limited spaces on the coach for parents but after swimmers (32), & support team (6), there will only be a few seats spare. If there are any, they are booked on a first come, first served basis and £5 per seat per parent is payable.

COMMON TERMS

- Consideration or Qualification time - the slowest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.
- DQ'd and disq. - disqualified
- Entry time - The time submitted by the Club for a swimmer being entered in a gala. If entries are made well in advance, the entry time may not be the swimmers current PB
- Heat Declared Winner (HDW) - When no final is swum and the winner is declared on the times swum in the heats
- Individual Medley (IM) - The competitor swims all four strokes in the following order: - butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle.
- Licensed Meets - These are the only meets at which you can qualify for County, Regional and National competitions (see section on Licensed Open Meets)
- Long Course (LC) - Events held in a 50m pool.
- Lower Qualification Time (LQT) - The slowest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.
- Medley Relay - Four swimmers each swim a different stroke. The order is always backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle.
- Personal Best (PB) - A swimmer's personal best time for a given event.
- Short Course (SC) - Events held in a 25m pool.
- Squadron Relay – Usually the last race of a gala. A freestyle relay consisting of one swimmer from each age group or one swimmer of each sex from each age group.
- Upper Qualification Time (UQT). The fastest entry time for a particular event that the organisers of a gala will consider.