

Useful Competition Information for Parents of New Swimmers

The parents of new swimmers are often faced with a lot of new terminology about competitions and associated matters. This document attempts to provide some guidance to frequently asked questions.

Competitions - Common Terms

Long Course – a competition held where the pool length is 50 metres.

Short Course – a competition held where the pool length is 25 metres.

Open Meet – a competition open to any swimmer who meets the criteria for entry.

PB – personal best time. This is best time your child has set in a particular event and will be different for short and long course competition.

DQ (disqualification) – competition referees apply the rules of swimming and a swimmer can be disqualified for a number of reasons. Any infringement of the rules is reported on a British Swimming form which the coach can request to see. If a swimmer does get disqualified, they shouldn't get too down hearted (even swimmers in the Olympics get disqualified!) but speak to their coach to find out what happened and how to prevent it from happening again.

Masters – swimmers over the age of 18 are eligible to compete as masters swimmers (but do not have to and can continue to compete in main stream swimming). Masters swimming operates different competition rules and a different swim season.

Licensed Meet – British Swimming use a Licensing method to grade the competitive ability of the meet, 4 being the lowest and 1 being the highest. The license also dictates certain criteria such as qualifications and numbers of officials, pool format, and entry time criteria. A Level 4 licence can only be awarded for a club championship. A Level 3 meet is often aimed at development swimmers and usually has maximum entry criteria. A Level 2 meet must be held in short course pool, whilst a Licensed 1 meet must be held in a long course format. Regional qualifying times can only be achieved in a meet licensed at Level 3 or higher. National qualifying times can only be achieved in Level 1 or 2 meets of the relevant length.

Competition Age – Every competition has an “age at date” which can be either the date of the competition or 31 December of the competition year. A swimmer cannot enter an open meet until they reach the age of 9, and some competitions have other minimum age requirements for specific events. Swimmers can compete in club championships before this age, as this is not an “open” meet.

Withdrawals – Once you have been entered and accepted into the gala, if there are any events you are unable to do on the day, please speak to your coach as they will need to withdraw you from the event. It is becoming increasingly usual for swimmers to be fined for not withdrawing correctly – any fines may have to be paid by the parent before the swimmer can compete again in a competition. This procedure is typical for Licensed 1 and 2 competitions and championships (County, Regional, National).

Signing in – Some Level 3 and 4 competitions operate a sign in procedure. The swimmer must sign in for each race they have entered by a specified time (often no later than warm up start time). If they do not sign in, they will not be allowed to compete in that event on the day. If you are delayed or stuck in traffic when travelling to a gala, please call the coach urgently, who may be able to sign you in.

Rankings Database – British Swimming keep a record of all times achieved at Licensed meets – you can access this at www.swimmingresults.org. Competition results are usually loaded within a few days of a competition. Check your PB's against this when entering new competitions. Some competitions will require entry times to be retrieved automatically from the rankings database, and may apply a conversion (from short course to long course, or vice versa) to determine a swimmer's fastest time.

Competitions – General Information

Open Meets

These are Licensed at a level as referred to above. In an open meet, a swimmer is usually swimming to improve their PB and to attain qualifying times for County, Regional or National events. The club enters many open meets throughout the year and your coach will direct you towards which competitions and events to enter. We try to get these meets as local as possible however sometimes it is important to go further afield so our swimmers can compete against different swimmers. Some meets, specifically Level 3, work on a first come first served basis – i.e. the meet can only accommodate a certain number of swimmers and those applying first preference over those applying later. This is why we set application dates in advance of the meet closing date, to give our swimmers every chance of being selected. When entering, parents need to remember open meets can be tiring and draining on swimmers (and parents watching!); do not necessarily enter every event your child has qualified for.

Team Luton runs a number of ‘home’ open meets every year. Level 1 meets in April and May (within the National qualifying window), a level 3 Sprint Meet in July, a level 2 meet in September, a level 3 meet in October and a level 3 meet in December. As well as being good competitions for our swimmers these raise a significant amount of money for the club goes towards, greatly reducing monthly swim fees. We encourage all parents to put themselves forward to help, even if only for one session. Our club championships are also licensed at Level 3 so that swimmers can gain entry times for other competitions, including County and Regional championships.

What Level of swimming should my child aspire to?

Team Luton is a competitive club and we hope everyone in the club reaches a minimum standard of going to the County Championships. These are held in January/February each year, currently at our Home Pool, Inspire: Luton Sports Village. To qualify for the championships, you must achieve the minimum entry times set by the County. These times must be recorded on the British Swimming database and must have been set after 1st January in the prior year (i.e. times for County Championships 2014 must be achieved after 1/1/13).

We also want as many swimmers as possible to attain Regional qualifying times. Regional championships are held over two weekends in April and May in 50m pools at Inspire: Luton Sports Village and Norwich UEA Sportspark. Qualification is achieved by meeting minimum entry times in the 12 months prior to the current competition. Regional championship medals are awarded for the top three in each event and age group, with finals being held for all 50m, 100m and 200m events. In addition the Region runs a short course Winter Championships in November, where anyone can enter who achieves a minimum qualifying standard.

For those swimmers who reach Regional level, their next challenge is to attain National qualifying times. The National events are held over 2 Championships in July and August. British Swimmers ranked in the top 24 in their age group for an event are invited to the British Summer Championships. The next 20 ranked English swimmers are invited to the ASA National Championships. Ranking times must be set within the qualifying window (March-May).

What equipment do we need?

As a minimum your child should take to any gala:

- Team Luton swim hat (plus a spare)
- Goggles (and spare pair)
- Racing Costume (and a spare). It is generally not a good idea to wear training costumes such as ‘Uglies’ for competing as they are not streamlined and create resistance which is good for training but not racing. Older swimmers often warm up in training costumes and change into racing costumes when the meet starts.
- Pullboy and kickboard – some competitions allow you to use this equipment in warm up – please check with your coach.

- Towels – minimum of 2 and maybe 3 if there all day – swimmers have a habit of getting towels soaked very quickly!
- Other kit – wear team Luton polo shirt and hoodie, shorts / tracksuit bottoms and poolside shoes. It is also advisable to have other clothes to change into as a kit can easily get wet and there are some pools where poolside temperatures can be cool. Footwear is important as swimmers will not be allowed off poolside without some form of footwear.

What food and drink should I take to the gala?

The quantity of food depends on the duration / number of sessions you are competing in. The coach will give guidance on this however we recommend a number of drinks (non fizzy) as de-hydration can be an issue and food that can be snacked upon during the day. On the day it is not advisable to have heavy or carbohydrate foods such as pasta and crisps before racing.

How do I get there?

We do not provide transport for open meets however do encourage parents to team up and travel together where possible. Subject to parental consent, we can advise you of swimmers living local to you if this helps.

For team events we may occasionally put on a coach and will advise parents of this once the event location is known and the team selection is made. The coach is primarily for swimmers and officials and parent space will be allocated on a first come first served basis. We encourage swimmers to go by coach to make sure everyone turns up together. Coaches usually leave from Inspire and we do charge a nominal fee of £5 per person going on the coach to partially recover the cost.

What time should I turn up?

All competitions publish a warm up and start time. Please try to arrive 15-30 minutes before warm up starts. This allows the coach to brief swimmers on what they are swimming and allows for sign in and withdrawals if required.

Heat seeding

Competitions are run on a basis where swimmers of similar time ability compete against each other in a heat. This can often mean your child will swim against a similar aged swimmer but this is not always the case. Hence later heats will always be faster than earlier heats. This will explain why we often hear young swimmers saying “why didn’t I get a medal when I won my race” – it is excellent news that they won their heat, however there may be swimmers of the same age who are faster and swim in a later heat. Competition programmes can be used by parents to gauge where their child is relative to other swimmers in a competition.

How do I know what age group my child will compete in?

A swimmer competes in an age category as defined by the competition rules. Generally, the age is determined by the last day of the competition or is as at 31 December in the year of competition.

What if I need to withdraw on the day of a competition?

We hope parents only have to withdraw swimmers in exceptional circumstances as the time and administration required to make changes, particularly at last minute, is extensive. In all league/team competitions, we have to submit team sheets in electronic format in advance of entering, hence one withdrawal might impact the coach having to put swimmers in different age groups, different strokes, and even prevent a relay team from swimming if there are only 3 remaining swimmers in an age category.

Please contact the Head Coach or the Development Coach by phone as soon as possible if you have to withdraw your child. Please send email as back up but do not assume this has been received, particularly on the day of the competition.

Team Events – Leagues

Team Luton currently competes in 2 leagues, the National Arena League and the M11 League. Whilst the coaches want swimmers to swim fast and achieve personal best times, the primary aim is to gain valuable

points for the team. As in many sports, winners and losers can be promoted and relegated for the following season.

In the National League, we compete in the London League. There are 3 rounds held in October, November and December each year. Competitors swim against other club swimmers of similar age (within a 2 year age banding – under 11, 11-13, 13-15 and over 15).

The M11 League is a part of a national series of leagues called the Junior League. It takes place over 3 rounds in April, May and June each year.

Most team events usually take place over 50 events and include a mixture of individual events and relay events.

Team Events – Friendly galas

Friendly galas follow a similar format to league events and Team Luton enter if invited or if we are running our own event – currently we run 1 event in September ‘Trophy Gala’ which is run as a long course event

Selection basis

Coaches select swimmers based on a number of criteria including age, PB times and current fitness. The head coach publishes a fixture list each year and we expect swimmers to make themselves available for league fixtures if selected. Swimmers should be honoured to be selected – it should be the aim of any swimmer in a competitive club to make it into the club team. If a swimmer is unable to compete, we encourage parents to speak to the coach as soon as possible. We recognise unavailability is often a parent issue, rather than a swimmer issue hence we arrange transportation where possible to assist getting swimmers to team events.