



A New British Competition System – Consultation Paper

The visionary goal of British Swimming’s Performance Pathway is to ensure all participating swimmers have an enjoyable and fulfilling experience within the sport, and those who aspire to achieve Olympic success are fully supported in doing so.

A key element of realising this goal is ensuring that we have in place a Domestic Competition Structure that fully supports and is in synergy with this goal and our high performance aspirations.

Following a period of initial review and consultation, a set of proposals were documented at the turn of the year and circulated to key stakeholder groups. Over the last 3 months some real momentum has been gained in moving forwards with implementing changes to the domestic competition calendar in line with the pathway vision and aspirations. In combination the proposed changes are intended to create a truly integrated structure and calendar. This annual calendar would be designed to ensure dedicated time within each season for swimmers of all levels to develop and perfect new skills and then systematically implement these skills in a competitive environment through a progressive set of events. The proposals aim to optimise our swimmers preparation to perform at the target events of the year whilst at the same time learning to execute components their peak performance at any time and in any venue when required, to perfection. Finally, the proposed calendar aims to ensure appropriate rest and recuperation, as part of the preparation for the following phase.

An Implementation Group has been formed featuring representation from each home nation, our key financial stakeholder (UK Sport) and the British Swimming Coaches Association working alongside key British Swimming staff. This Group is undertaking regular meetings and will consider feedback to these initial proposals, in addition to reviewing comparisons with other swimming nations and relevant British sports. It will formulate agreement on the most appropriate changes to make, and then act on an implementation schedule ahead of the commencement of the 2014-15 competitive season. The implementation group would like to hear feedback on the proposals under consideration. If you would like to share your views as part of the consultation process then please find details at the foot of this paper.

The exciting and fresh approach to the competition framework developed through this process will be a central tenant of British Swimming’s soon to be revised optimal swimmer development model.

Proposals central to the consultation process:

We propose to raise the minimum age to compete at British level to 14 years & under in the year of competition. Home Nation and Regional/County/District competitions will operate to newly-defined progressive and relevant minimum ages to ensure a swimmer can advance through the pathway at an appropriate rate.

The reintroduction of a ‘short course’ season is being considered, in the period up to the end of December each year. This would aim to focus all swimmers on increased tempo and dynamic racing, emphasising the added need to produce high quality starting and turning skills. This part of the season would be likely to include English Regional, Scottish District and Welsh Regional meets in November as a precursor for Home Nation events positioned at the same time of the year as the major international December Short Course

competitions. Immediately post the festive period the focus would firmly switch to long course swimming.

It is proposed that for all English County, English & Welsh Regional, Scottish District, Home Nation and British Championship events, ages will revert to being defined as that at 31st December in the year of competition. This would ensure we are in complete synergy with international (LEN/FINA/IOC) Junior and Youth event entry criteria, and confirm that a swimmer will not change age within either the short or long course components of a given season. Clubs will retain the ability to choose their own criteria for determining age bandings at their own open competitions, where a diversity of approaches will be encouraged and welcomed.

We plan to introduce a new British Summer Championships at the end of the season – being the culmination of the domestic season with the exception of those swimmers selected for major championship events. These British Summer Championships would cater for a different group of athletes in each event to a set of corresponding Home Nation Championships run in a similar timeframe. We are looking to elevate the quality of the British Summer Championships to ensure it becomes a true high performance experience and an appropriate end of season event. Similarly there is a need to expose a large group of athletes to National level competition, ensuring their seasons do not conclude early. In combination, the end of season events proposed would look to cater for a larger number of talented swimmers in each event, per age grouping, spread across the Home Nations. These proposed events would aim to ensure that more swimmers are completing a full competitive season, enhancing the ability to keep the ‘late developers’ in the sport.

It is proposed that qualifying for the junior element of the British and Home Nation Summer Championships follow a new process. Swimmers would be invited to compete at the Championships based on their ranking within a specified ‘Qualifying Window’ within the Annual Calendar. This would ensure that ‘times’ aren’t being persistently chased throughout the course of the year, and that those ranked athletes determined as eligible to compete at the event can enjoy a quality experience (as numbers at the event will be guaranteed but controlled to a finite limit). Swimmers would only be invited to attend the British and Home Nation Championships to compete in the event(s) for they hold a relevant ranking position.

The proposed Qualifying Window would be positioned one training cycle prior to the culmination of the season. In addressing the issue of athletes not normally performing to their best at the ‘benchmark’ event of the season, we need to encourage our coaches to use the first 6 months of each year as true ‘development’ time, and break the cycle of simply chasing Qualifying Times. The Qualifying Window will include Regional/District Championship events, enhancing their status as an important ranking event within the window. This proposal aims to make a significant stride towards creating a generation of swimmers who focus more attention of performing ‘when it matters’, in line with the Olympic environment.

Finally, under consideration is the proposal to cease awarding multi event BAGCAT points and awards at English County, English Regional and National level. Whilst the BAGCAT philosophy has been central to developing strong generic and rounded swimmers, there is a lack of compelling evidence that it has led to improved senior international success. The proposal is that the Championship philosophy going forward will be fully aligned to our high performance aspirations, in particular the production of senior swimmers capable of producing significant medal winning performances on the World stage.

Against such significant proposed changes the Implementation Group is keen to hear your feedback. If you would like to have your say, you can send us a note to the following email address by 31st May 2014:

competitionreview@swimming.org

