

Swim England Sport Operations Committee

Minutes of the meeting held 5 March 2024

Draft minutes subject to approval at the next meeting

Present:	Joan Wheeler (JW)	Swim England Board Member (Chair)
	Neil Booth (NB)	Swim England Board Member
	Amy Bryant (AB)	Swim England Member
	Alex Harrison (AH)	Swim England Member
	Ian Mackenzie (IM)	Swim England Member
	Keith Munday (KM)	Swim England Member
	John Hidle (JH)	Regional Chairs Representative
	Ally White (AW)	Sport Development Director
	Rebecca Cox (RC)	Swim England Business Engagement Director & Institute of Swimming Managing Director (item 3)

Staff:	Claire Coleman (CC)	Head of Development
	Ali Sibcy-Allen (AS-A)	Operations Administration Manager
	Ekaterina Boyd (EB)	Head of Events

Min No:

1. Standing Items

1.1 Chairperson's welcome

Members were welcomed to the meeting. Members were advised that Jon Glenn had left SE and was therefore no longer a member of the Committee.

1.2 Apologies

Apologies received from Ellie Conway.

1.3 Declarations of Interest

None recorded.

1.4 Declarations of AOB

None recorded.

1.5 Minutes from previous meetings:

6 February 2024:

With regard to the accuracy of the minutes, one member raised a concern that the issue he had spoken on concerning the independence of Club Welfare Officers had not been included in the minutes. He further reported that this issue had been discussed at length at the recent forum for club Chairman, where many of those present had expressed concerns about the loss of volunteers arising from the change and felt that their concerns were not being listened to by Swim England. It was agreed that the minutes be amended to include this issue.

Following this amendment, the minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Action: JW to review the minutes and consider amendments.

1.6 Actions from previous meetings:

23.15: Risk Assessment Portal – transfer almost complete, club details to be passed on following renewal period.

24.03: SwimMark review: paper to be updated following the Regional Chairs' meeting on 4 March.

24.04: H&S Forum TORs: to be brought to next SOC meeting.

2. Update from the Sport Development Directorate

The supplied paper was taken as read.

AW advised that communication is ongoing with individuals regarding membership renewals, which will assist with the refinement of the process.

Responding to a question about the annual membership fees, AW clarified that the club suspension list is scheduled to be published on 12 March. A number of clubs have indicated they will be paying and regions have been advised of those which have not.

Discussions at the Regional Chairs meeting regarding principles of working together were positive with the draft document to be updated.

The World Championships have finished with Artistic Swimming achieving a silver and bronze medal as well as an Olympic qualification slot. Strong performances were also recorded in the swimming and diving events, including two England Talent Squad athletes securing Olympic qualification slots in the open water event. Water Polo also produced some excellent performances, finishing 11th overall with two wins recorded.

AB raised the late notification of issues relating to pool depth for the Artistic Swimming NAGs. AW agreed the issue should have been identified earlier but the priority now was ensuring the event could be held safely. It was further noted that the number of pools suitable for Artistic Swimming events are reducing and that work alongside other sports may be needed to lobby for suitable pool depths.

KM queried the supplied implementation plan and the KPI relating to the club support package. CC confirmed the detail was provided by HMRC and as such any imposed financial penalties would come from them.

3. Addressing Learn to Swim Workforce Shortages

Following reports of LTS programmes struggling to recruit teachers, RC provided some background detail.

Historically, there have never been enough teachers and the issue had been exacerbated by the pandemic, during which time teachers moved away from the profession. Following pools re-opening, LTS programmes experience a 20% growth, this has slowed but remains higher than in 2019, while the numbers completing training during 2023 was higher than 2022.

Swim England are working with Swim Alliance, a Sport England workforce subgroup, alongside partners to monitor this area. RC advised that rather than focussing on short-term interventions, work was being undertaken to understand the barriers to becoming a teacher, or continuing in the profession. The Swim

Alliance research across the sector will enable insight led approaches to address training and recruitment issues.

Currently the split of new teachers from within the swimming community and wider public is not known. KM suggested this was vital to enable the retention of club members.

RC highlighted the success of the recruitment academy programme, of which 60 ran during 2023. The increase in BAME representation in this programme, as opposed to courses outside of the academy, was noted.

During 2023, the IoS started a TikTok channel and contracted two influencers to deliver campaigns which delivered nearly one million views. Another influencer will also be contracted for 2024 to target an alternative market.

The time for learners to qualify as a teacher was recognised to be longer than competitors, requiring the completion of two qualifications. A review of the model is underway to determine if it is possible to expedite the process without impacting standards and the quality of the process.

RC informed members that the value of teachers has improved since Covid and operators are now considering how to complement their CPD needs and provide workshops and conferences.

KM questioned whether recruitment agencies had been contacted for potential trainees. RC agreed that this is an area which could be explored.

The need to support teachers in providing appropriate support for learners with neurodiversity was highlighted.

4. Sport England Talent Investment

AW reported on the new process being implemented for talent funding and explained that this has been started early to dovetail with British Swimming's UK Sport investment application. The plan includes all disciplines outlining generic objectives which will be developed further in individual sport specific plans.

The plan aims to ensure stability and consistency alongside a systematic approach across the sports. The plan outlines a clear framework for linking the sports and pathways and has been developed with input from all disciplines.

AW provided further details of the plan as below:

- Vision: A connected and collaborative aquatic system enabling sustained success on the world stage.
- Mission: Develop the strength and depth of the aquatic pathway through effective athlete development to achieve high performance.
- Objectives, all include the golden threads of inclusion, diversity and safe sport:
 - People Development: Ensuring a quality, high performing and diverse workforce in every area of the aquatic system.
 - Sporting Culture and Identity: Develop an inclusive and collaborative culture, striving for continuous improvement across the aquatics system that is both robust and transparent.

- Effective Athlete Development: Creating a clear aquatic athlete development philosophy, delivering an individual, progressive and connected system.
- Optimal Planning: A systematic, strategic and focussed approach to the effective delivery of the aquatic system.
- Effective Partnerships: Connecting and collaborating effectively to maximise resources, enabling long-term sustainability.
- Performance and Performance Development Environments: High quality, safe and accessible environments in Performance Centres, Performance Development Clubs and Programmes.

AW confirmed that work is ongoing to continue to develop the plan and that only talent details were presented. A review group is underway who will consider how to apply the principles to the rest of the sports.

The sharing of information and learning across sports was confirmed, with successful interventions being considered. Providing positive experiences for athletes going through the talent programme was noted to be part of the wider plan.

The presentation is to be shared with SOC members.

Action: AW to send presentation to AS-A to circulate to SOC members only.

5. Event Merchandise

EB was welcomed to the meeting with the paper taken as read.

It was confirmed that merchandise is being offered at events with limitations in place as a result of the Speedo agreement. EB advised that the current Speedo event preference for retailing their own products could change in the future. It was noted that there were other benefits from the sponsorship agreement with Speedo, such as event shirts for the volunteer workforce.

EB advised the focus is on stationery, bobble hats and event specific clothing with new items introduced as often as feasible. Work is ongoing to improve the point of sale at events as well as improving the online shop and enabling venue sales through the same portal.

The process and costs resulting from the time commitment for procuring items alongside the support provided by the Distribution Centre was noted.

Members acknowledged that whilst the income was not excessive it provides a valued service to members and contributes to the overall event budget, helping with balancing budgets.

EB was thanked for her time.

6. Listening Report

AW advised the Listening Report would be published in full at 12pm on 5 March, A link would be sent to SOC Members.

AW reminded the committee that, following the launch of the Heart of Aquatics plan one of the key pillars was to listen to members both past and present. The publication of the independent report is a significant step with all SOC members encouraged to take the time to read the report in full. AW advised that the report is not an easy read and details instances where people have had poor experiences.

A reminder of the process was outlined alongside the importance of an independent agency being contracted.

From the results, five key themes were highlighted:

- Performance Focus: Narrow focus on performance can result in excessive pressure and unequal treatment.
- Culture of Fear: Extreme competitiveness, bullying and repercussions from speaking up create a toxic environment where harmful behaviour goes unchecked.
- Closed Community: Aquatics can feel non-inclusive, with some athletes at an unfair advantage because of who they know in the sport.
- Heavy Reliance on Volunteers: Responsibilities delegated to volunteers create conflicts of interest and can put individuals and clubs under too much strain.
- Shared Passion and Commitment: Involvement in aquatics is life enhancing much of the time, providing a powerful sense of purpose and belonging.

AW continued to advise that work has begun to address the findings but that cultural shift will take time.

The report outlines 21 recommendations across the areas, including listening to continue across all areas and specifically within:

- Welfare, safeguarding and compliant management.
- Positive culture
- Support for clubs and workforce
- Preventative information and guidance

The SE response is crucial in developing the sport with a need to be transparent and balanced about the current situation while identifying and addressing the issues. The importance of not becoming defensive and disheartened and taking the opportunity to improve aquatics was conveyed.

AW clarified that the action plan is currently under consideration with timescales to be outlined once finalised. SOC will have involvement in the process moving forwards.

The need for support for SE staff was highlighted. AW advised that the results would not be personally attributed and the resulting changes will be implemented across the organisation.

7. People Development Plan

The paper was taken as read, with CC providing further details.

One of the key SE priorities is 'People' with a cohesive plan being developed across the organisation to provide clarity and focus resources to achieve. A project group to drive the priority has been formed to include Heads of from across the organisation who have a focus on people and workforce. The plan will be submitted to Sport England as part of the Code of Sport Governance submission.

The workforce within aquatics will be defined as professional, volunteer, coaching and swimming teacher with the role of tutor to be further considered.

CC outline the supporting structure as:

- Capability: Skills and abilities to achieve our mission.
- Capacity: Right number of people in the right roles.

- Culture: Safe and included with a feeling of belonging and enjoying our sports.

The aim was to launch the strategic document at the end of March with the operational detail to be built following this. The operational plan will be developed from consultation with stakeholders and will follow a partnership working model.

CC requested feedback from SOC members on specific questions with these to be circulated following the meeting.

JW queried how clubs will be consulted with CC advising the Insight team are setting up an online community.

Clarity on the categories was requested noting the wide range of roles within the volunteer category. CC is to circulate further details on the composition of groups.

Action: CC to circulate questions to SOC members following the meeting and clarify group composition details.

8. Leadership Group updates

8.1 Review of Leadership Groups – Update

JW advised that a report will be brought to the next SOC meeting on a review the LGs and how they are working. A small review group is being put together with JW leading. It was proposed that KM was included within the group which was unanimously approved by SOC members.

8.2 Minutes of Leadership Group meetings

8.2.1 Artistic Swimming

No minutes available.

8.2.2 Clubs

The minutes were taken as read.

8.2.3 Diving

The minutes were taken as read.

AH is to meet with the Chair for discussion as she has indicated that she may not be able to continue in the role, but may be willing to remain on the group in an alternative role.

8.2.4 Swimming

The minutes taken as read.

8.2.5 Water Polo

The minutes taken as read.

8.2.6 Youth Advisory Panel

Meeting held 4 March. Minutes will be circulated with papers for the next SOC meeting.

9. AOB

None recorded.

10. 2024 Meeting Dates

- Tuesday 30 April, 10.30am, SportPark
- Tuesday 18 June, 10.30am, Zoom

- Tuesday 20 August, 10.30am, Zoom
- Tuesday 26 November, 10.30am, Zoom