

# Swim England Sport Operations Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held 28 January 2025

### Draft minutes subject to approval at the next meeting

<b>Present:</b>	Joan Wheeler (JW) Neil Booth (NB) Amy Bryant (AB) Alex Harrison (AH) Keith Munday (KM) John Hidle (JH) Ellie Conway (EC) Ally Whike (AW)	Swim England Board Member (Chair) Swim England Board Member Swim England Member Swim England Member Swim England Member Regional Chairs Representative Youth Advisory Panel Representative Sport Development Director
<b>Staff:</b>	Andy Salmon (AS) Claire Coleman (CC) Andrea Startin (minutes)  Craig McCulloch (CM) Leanne Brace (LB)	CEO Head of Development Volunteering  Head of Coaching (item 3) Head of Membership Development (item 5)

### Min No:

#### 1. Standing Items

##### 1.1 Chairperson's welcome

1.1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting.

##### 1.2 Apologies

1.2.1 Received from Richard Palmer-Jones (RPJ)

##### 1.3 Declarations of Interest

1.3.1 None recorded.

##### 1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

The following change was agreed to minute 3.3:

'...~~ethical~~ compatible with the needs of athletes, coaches and volunteers. With this change, the minutes were approved as a correct record.

##### 1.5 Actions from the Previous Meeting

The actions from the previous meeting were reviewed and updated. In addition to the information in the report the following verbal updates were given:

23.15 Risk Assessment Portal – Emma Griffin, Chief Operating Officer had advised that Howdens had confirmed that the Risk Assessment Portal was planned to go live in March 2025. A further update would be given after the launch. (Action: JW - Schedule an Update for 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025)

24.09 Governance and Coach Compliance – CC gave an update on Project Tower. This project focuses in on DBS and Safeguarding Training complinace. It seeks to agree a partnership working model with all regions with a view to increasing complinace in line with the guidance received from Swim England SLT. Led by Helen Weeks it is still in its scoping process and suggest that the reporting on this project becomes a standard SOC item once the reporting criteria has been agreed

24.15 Accessible Selection Lists – AW reported that selection lists for all disciplines would be published on the web site. In response to a question Ally clarified that these would relate to selection by Swim England and would not extend to regional and county selection.

1.6 **AOB**

None declared

2. **Sport Development Directorate**

2.1. A report from the Sport Development Directorate had been circulated with the agenda. Presenting the report, AW reported that:

2.2 UK sport have now agreed their investments in sports. Aquatics GB are in the process of allocating investments in Artistic Swimming and Water Polo. AW will share details in due course.

2.3 Representatives from the 8 regions and Swim England have formed the “G9” group to translate the strategic plan, goals and objectives into operations across the whole country. The first G9 meeting is due to be held 10 February.

2.4 Moving forward the Regional Chair’s forum will focus on strategy whereas the G9 will focus on operations.

2.5 Sports

2.5.1 Water Polo - The under 18 boys’ team has been selected. Some concerns had been raised, and these were being addressed. In future a more inclusive approach will be taken in that a larger squad will be maintained before reducing to the final selection of athletes.

2.5.2 Artistic Swimming – It was noted that concerns had been raised about the effectiveness of the communication of the new gradings. CC reported that cascaded messaging had been relied upon. A plan is in place to ensure future communication is clear and timely.

2.5.3 Swimming - Planning continues for the Commonwealth Games. Richard Blackshaw has been confirmed as the Team Leader for the English Swim Team. Richard will continue to fulfil his other commitments with additional, paid support, as required. Other key positions are to be recruited.

2.6 There was some discussion around inter-school competitions, how they connect with clubs and how, or if, Swim England promote these events. It was concluded that there is a different approach in different areas. It was agreed that Learn to Swim is the priority for school swimming however there could be some potential to explore options for club links through the ESSA relationship.

### **3. Coaching update**

3.1 Craig McCulloch, Head of Coaching, shared a presentation to outline the Coaching Strategy update and the proposed approach to ethical and effective coach development.

#### **3.2 Coaching Strategy**

CM reported that the listening report had served as a stimulus for change; to achieve cultural change and develop outstanding people it is necessary to co-create rather than dictate. Coaches have an important voice in creating a strategy which is inclusive, ambitious and does what is right.

3.3 Ethical issues and relationships were discussed as was the need to support, recognise and care for coaches. There is a need for club personnel to work together and remove silos. Education and development will be available to better enable this and create the conditions for cultural change.

3.4 Swim England need to provide clear leadership on what good looks like. It is essential that those within a club have a shared philosophy and an aligned purpose. This includes the parents and athletes who will also be consulted.

3.6 With education and development being key elements in the strategy, barriers to accessing these, for example availability and course costs of coaching courses, are being addressed.

3.7 The co-creation of the strategy will be via a three-phase process: surveys, in person workshops, direct contact with who did not participate in the surveys and workshops (to insure an inclusive and representative approach). Following this Craig will provide an update.

#### **3.8 Effective and Ethical Coach Development**

Moving on to coach development, CM reported that the definition of an effective coach is contextual and subject to change. Current culture is hierarchical with success judged by competition results. In this culture athletes can be seen as a commodity. Coaches face ethical dilemmas in trying to do what is right, just and fair. This can affect coach wellness producing stress and impacting their personal lives.

3.9 During 2025/6 five interventions are planned using drama and storytelling to explore relationships and ethics. These will be accompanied by two short term projects around the athlete experience and around autonomy and power. The existing coach developer workforce (who will undergo a two-year programme) will fulfil an invaluable position as cultural architects.

3.10 It is planned that during 2026/7 further work will be done on good practice in action, the ethical framework and character skills. ELearning modules will be produced, and skills will be embedded in the coach curriculum. It was agreed that the biggest change will be in the attitudes of clubs. Craig agreed to speak to the regional chairs so they can assist in driving this change forward.

3.11 Craig will provide a further update to the Committee in the summer. (Action JW – Schedule an update for 17<sup>th</sup> June or 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025)

#### **4. Strategy update**

- 4.1 AS gave an update on progress with the Strategy and the associated scorecard. He reported that it is felt that the strategy has landed well, with good feedback on Facebook and through social channels on being clear, simple and memorable.
- 4.2 The challenge now is to deliver, particularly as not everything can be delivered at once. Work on the annual scorecard is in progress and is the focus for all staff. Zero-based budgeting has proved challenging, but was essential and, in many ways, refreshing.
- 4.3 AS has learnt much from direct engagement with members. However, the volume of contacts and complaints, particularly those made directly to him, have proved impossible to manage. Common complaint themes are around relationships with parent behaviour often at the centre of the issue. The number of Water Polo complaints are disproportionate to the size of the community. What more can be done to educate club chairs and committees on following procedures and processes to deal with issues and was discussed.
- 4.4 The priority is to move forwards, rather than looking backwards, and to plan how streams of work fit together. However, the business is in a good position to invest.
- 4.5 Stakeholder mapping is currently in progress to ensure member facing groups are engaged and aware of the expected behaviours. The need for bi-lateral communication, visibility of support available and working with the community rather than dictating to, was agreed.
- 4.6 In terms of regional engagement, the process has been patchy but is now being solidified and moved forward. With the partnership agreement now in place, the regional chairs will now focus on strategy with the G9 focussing on operational delivery. It is planned that the G9 will meet quarterly with the potential for additional meetings early on.

#### **5. Under s9 membership category**

- 5.1 A paper from Leanne Brace, Head of Membership Development, regarding a potential junior membership had been circulated with the agenda. LB provided additional context, noting that the paper was one of many ideas being considered within membership.
- 5.2 LB reminded SOC of a previous discussion regarding the need to address the reduction in members in the 0 to 9 years age groups. At that stage, it had been proposed to give free membership to under 9's to encourage new members, but this was found to not be a viable option nor was a price cap approach.
- 5.3 The current proposal under development, centres around giving the best service with appropriate newsletter content. This forms part of a larger project to get the membership categories and systems right. The focus is on user experience and culture rather than growing revenue.
- 5.4 Communication strategies were discussed and how the right messages get to the right audience. It was agreed that whatever system and communication solutions are selected need to be future proof.

5.5 The Committee was supportive of the concept of a junior membership accepting that it was one of a number of areas of interest to be addressed by a wider membership review.

## **6. Minutes of Leadership Group meetings and any reports from SOC Liaison**

6.1 Artistic Swimming Leadership Group  
No additional update

6.2 Club Leadership Group  
The next meeting will be held 31 Jan 2025

6.3 Diving Leadership Group  
No additional update. AH had been unable to attend the DLG but had caught up with the group Chair after the meeting.

6.4 Swimming Leadership Group  
No additional update

6.5 Water Polo Leadership Group  
The next meeting is in two weeks' time

6.6 Masters Leadership Group  
NB reported that the group was making good progress.

6.7 Youth Advisory Panel  
EC and CC to catch up with Matthew Jackson, Volunteering Manager to discuss the way forward for the Panel. An update would be given at the next meeting. (Action JW: – an agenda item for 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025)

6.8 Health and Safety forum  
A meeting is due to take place in the next two weeks under the new chair.

## **7. Regional update**

7.1 JH gave an update on behalf of the Regional Chairs. Further to the earlier discussion on the G9, he reported that the chairs meeting is steering towards the strategic updates required for club change. In order to address issues of workload, the role of the Regional Chair is changing as regional executives are formed.

7.2 Safeguarding and governance working groups have been formed and are working well.

7.3. Sarah Todd had been elected as Chair of the Regional Chairs Group for 2025.

7.4 It was anticipated that the nomination to fill the Member Nominated Board Member vacancy will be completed by March. It was noted that, in order to find suitable candidates for this annual process, in future years the process should start earlier.

## **8. AOB**

8.1 It was noted that members of the Committee have been requested to be set up with, and use, swimming.org email accounts. There had been limited information

on why this was necessary for volunteers and those volunteers who had swimming.org accounts were experiencing difficulties using this with other accounts.

- 8.2 After discussion it was agreed that members of the Committee would email CC with any additional concerns and CC would make contact with absent members. CC to speak to Emma Griffin to find out requirements and arrange any required education.  
(Action CC: Gather concerns, discuss with EG and update Committee members by email).