

Working Together

A Guide for Coaches, Committees
and Parents

Section Three: Defining Key Club Roles

Introduction

This guide has been designed to be a practical, hands-on resource to help strengthen the relationship between committees, coaches and parents in all types of aquatic clubs. It focuses especially on the key partnership between the head coach, the club chair, showing how they can work together to lead a positive, successful club.

We'll explore how to create a strong vision and set of values that are reflected in everyday actions and guide everything the club does. Inside, you'll find a range of downloadable templates you can adapt, along with inspiring case studies that highlight great practices in action. There are also reflection points throughout for you to think about how the topics relate to your own club.

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Full acknowledgements at the end

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Section 3: Defining Key Club Roles

How key individuals can work together to build a strong, unified team

A successful club thrives when its leadership team is united and working towards the same goals. Achieving this unity, or cohesion, means that the day-to-day operations of the club are in sync with its long-term vision. Cohesion touches every part of the club but it's especially important when it comes to the club's culture and values (see section one).

In this section, we'll focus on how the club chair and head coach can work together to ensure the club's strategic goals align with the daily coaching and activities. Both the chair and the head coach play key roles in creating a cohesive club. And like any successful partnership, understanding each other's role is essential.

Swim England encourages including the head coach in club committees whenever possible. This helps the club's leadership make informed decisions and ensures the coach's expertise is part of the conversation. Without a coach's input, the club risks losing alignment between its vision and day-to-day operations, which can lead to feelings of exclusion or confusion among the team and the messages passed onto members. On the other hand, when the coach is involved, it strengthens communication and improves decision-making across the club.

We understand that this can be tricky and that there's no one-size-fits-all approach. So here are a few things to keep in mind when deciding how the coach can contribute effectively.

When it's a good idea to include the coach:

- **Advisory role:** If the committee is discussing long-term strategies, the coach's insights can make a big difference.
- **Collaboration:** For discussions on practical issues like resources or facilities, having the coach's perspective can lead to better decisions. Plus, it's crucial for the coach to understand why decisions are made.

When it may not be appropriate:

- **Conflict of interest:** If the committee is dealing with sensitive topics, like salaries or work distribution, having the coach involved could create bias or even give the impression of unfairness.
- **Accountability issues:** Coaches often follow the committee's policies, so bringing them into decision-making might blur accountability lines.

By keeping these considerations in mind, the relationship between the chair and head coach can remain strong, balanced and focused on what's best for the entire club.

Role of a head coach

Being an aquatics coach isn't just about knowing the techniques – it's about blending a wide range of skills to make sure athletes succeed both in and out of the pool. Here's a closer look at what it takes to be a coach:

- **Strong knowledge base:** Coaches need to stay informed and make decisions based on evidence to ensure their actions benefit athletes in the long run.
- **People skills and emotional intelligence:** Coaches work with many different people, so being able to connect, support and relate to athletes, parents and workforce is key.
- **Understanding athlete development:** Coaches need to be aware of both short-term goals (like improving technique) and long-term growth (such as building strong foundations for future success).
- **Training and competition planning:** Great coaches plan, execute and review training sessions and competition strategies to keep athletes progressing.
- **Technical expertise:** Coaches must be able to deliver high-quality training sessions that help athletes to improve while making sure they're safe and well-prepared.
- **Mentorship:** Guiding and managing other coaches and assistants to help everyone work together effectively is a big part of the job.
- **Team collaboration:** Regular team meetings with coaching staff are essential to manage the aquatic pathway, squad assignments and even team selection for competitions.
- **Competition presence:** Coaches need to be at the heart of the action, attending galas, competitions, internal trials, open meets and even regional or national championships to support their athletes.

What it's really like to be a coach

Coaching isn't just a job – it's a passion. Coaches love the sport and get immense satisfaction from seeing athletes grow, improve and succeed. But it's also a role that requires dedication, hard work and a lot of energy.

The challenges? Long hours, often at unsociable times of the day, working in hot and sometimes isolated environments. There's a lot of personal sacrifice and the stress can be high. Coaching involves a lot of emotional labour, as it can be tough to balance the highs and lows of the sport. On top of that, coaches know they're always being watched – whether it's by athletes, parents, or people outside of the aquatics world. That kind of pressure can bring its own set of emotions.

Still, for many coaches, the rewards far outweigh the challenges and the opportunity to make a real difference in an athlete's life makes it all worth it.

What does a club chair do?

The club chair plays a key role in keeping everything running smoothly and guiding the club's future direction. Here's what's involved:

- **Providing direction and leadership:** The chair leads the club, stepping in to handle any issues that come up and making sure the club stays on track.
- **Managing different sports:** The chair has to oversee various disciplines within the club, balancing the needs of each sport to keep everything running smoothly.
- **Chairing meetings:** The chair leads meetings, setting the agenda to help drive the club's development forward.
- **Overseeing decisions:** The chair is responsible for ensuring decisions made by management, sub-committees and other club members align with the club's goals.

- **Annual report:** The chair works closely with the secretary to prepare and present the club's annual report (if necessary).
- **Ensuring smooth operations:** The chair makes sure that all aspects of the club run according to its rules, Swim England regulations and UK laws.
- **Delegating and motivating volunteers:** The chair delegates tasks, leads and inspires volunteers to help the club reach its goals.
- **Knowledge of clubs and sports:** A good chair has solid knowledge of how sports clubs work, aquatics, or leading an organisation.
- **Strong leadership:** A club chair must have great leadership skills to unite a group of like-minded individuals working towards the same objectives.
- **Great interpersonal skills:** The chair needs to be approachable, diplomatic, and maintain harmony among the club members.

What it's really like to be a club chair

The club chair is the backbone of the club, providing leadership and ensuring everything is running as it should. It's a role that comes with great opportunities for personal growth, making new connections and the satisfaction of leading a team toward shared goals. But, as rewarding as it is, the chair role also requires a significant time commitment.

The chair often attends regular club meetings, and may also need to meet with local authorities, pool operators, or Swim England representatives. While this role is usually voluntary, it can take up a lot of time – often alongside paid work and family life. It's a big responsibility but for those who are passionate about the club's vision, it's also incredibly fulfilling.

Working together for a stronger, effective club

The relationship between the head coach and the club chair is the key to a club running smoothly. When communication is clear, there's a shared vision and both people are working together toward the same goals, everything clicks. It's all about respecting and appreciating each other's strengths and weaknesses to make the relationship – and the club – more effective.

Here are some simple, practical ideas to help build a strong working relationship:

- **Weekly check-ins:** Set aside time each week to catch up on projects, share updates, discuss any concerns and give or receive feedback.
- **Build trust:** Be reliable, meet deadlines and be honest about mistakes. After all, we're all human!
- **Active listening:** Really listen to understand, not just to respond. Show empathy and be fully present in conversations.
- **Respect differences:** Embrace the diversity of perspectives, backgrounds and opinions – different viewpoints can lead to great ideas!
- **Develop self-awareness:** Recognise how your emotions impact others. By understanding yourself, you can better manage your reactions, especially when things get stressful.
- **Social activities:** Attend social events or informal gatherings to get to know each other outside of work and the sport. It helps build trust and camaraderie.
- **Acknowledge existing knowledge:** Recognise and appreciate the experience and understanding each person already has about the club and its workings.

To keep things running smoothly, it's helpful to outline areas of responsibility and decision-making. This adds clarity to day-to-day tasks and prevents duplicated efforts. For example, finances might fall under the committee's responsibilities but a fundraising event like an

open meet could involve both coaching and competition teams. Similarly, a growth in membership might look good financially but could put pressure on pool time and require changes to scheduling.

A strong relationship between the head coach and club chair thrives on collaboration and seamless teamwork. By understanding each other's roles and working closely together, the club will continue to grow and succeed.

Clarifying roles and responsibilities in your club

It's important to think about the different roles within your club and make sure everyone knows what they're responsible for. Who oversees each area? Where do roles overlap? And if something needs to change, how do you go about it? It's also worth considering whether there's room for fresh ideas and innovation – if so, who decides how to move forward and how can those changes be agreed upon?

Support and professional development

Beyond strategy and decision-making, the relationship between the head coach and club chair should also be about supporting each other and growing professionally. The club chair can offer valuable insights and advice that help the head coach develop in their role. In turn, the head coach's experience and knowledge can boost the club chair's confidence when making decisions for the club. This mutual support helps both individuals grow and strengthens the overall leadership of the club.

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