

Artistic Swimming Leadership Group

Minutes of the meeting held at 18:00 Monday 29th September 2025 via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Maria Ramos (MR)	Chair
Louise Ross (LR)	Coaching Lead
Hannah Secher (HS)	Technical Officials Lead
Ian Atkinson (IA)	Competition Lead
Sarah Clarke (SC)	Athlete reward and Recognition Lead
Karen Thorpe (KT)	Artistic Swimming Manager
Claire Coleman (CC)	Swim England Head of Development
Ekaterina Boyd (EB)	Swim England Head of Events
Julie Harrison (JH)	Swim England Club Development Administrator

Apologies:

Keith Munday (KM)	Sport Operations Committee Leadership Group Liaison
Gareth Picken (GP)	Swim England Sport Development Administrator

Item No:	
1.	Chairs Welcome and Apologies
	MR opened the meeting and welcomed JH who was covering for GP
2.	Action Log
	Unfortunately, due to the big item topics on the agenda and the meeting running over time this item wasn't covered.
3.	Update from each Lead
	<p>Grades - SC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next cohort of grades are already coming through; no major issues have been raised. <p>Coaching - LR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualifications remain in place in their current format. Currently working on the new coaching quals which we hope to release September 2026. Craig McCullach is hoping to get an official announcement out in January 2026. All existing quals will still be valid and an FAQ document will be produced to explain how current qualifications will align to the new ones. Further information will become available as the work progresses. LR is currently undertaking the <i>Supporting Coaches in Aquatics</i> programme, aimed at developing mentoring skills; this will hopefully help to strengthen engagement with club coaches within the national programme and regionally. This initiative is expected to support broader coach development across the sport.

Officials - HS:

- Chief recorders have a course planned for November
- Judge Level1 – the syllabus has changed slightly based on feedback from both tutors and candidates; it has been made a little bit longer which will hopefully help to increase the pass rate coming through
- On-line level 2 – planned for later this year
- Level 3 – no interest currently
- European Aquatics – have put on a course for technical controllers which can be used as a domestic training programme, meaning it could help train technical controllers locally using the same standards. Although there was initial interest from coaches across the country, only one person was available to attend at the time. The plan is to introduce an introductory session to the technical controller course to make it more accessible and increase knowledge among potential participants. It was also noted that there would likely be a cost element involved.
- South West – currently a big lack of officials; not entirely sure how this can be rectified. LR stated that some feedback she had received from the region was that the extended timelines were causing issues. CC suggested she speak to Steve Williams, regional manager, and bring back his feedback and suggestions on ways forward to help the region.
- MR asked if a summary report could be produced for the end of the year, to include, number of courses run with number of candidates and pass rates through to number of coach courses etc; this will help in benchmarking for the following year.

SOC Update:

- KM not available for an update; CC confirmed that minutes were not available but main topic of discussion was around the membership fees for 2026, and formal communication is yet to go out. There was also discussion around the 'Score Card' which is Swim England's strategy measurements; the 4 primaries, being stronger clubs, effective learn to swim, safeguarding & welfare and success on the world stage. As soon as the minutes are made available, they will be emailed out to the group.

Development Update - CC:

- The document has already been circulated; the main push is on the Club Health Tracker; action was needed to encourage all Artistic clubs and sections within clubs to complete the tracker, so this needs to be advocated by the group. There is no timeline on completing but would ideally like back by the beginning of December. All logins were supplied in September to the main contact of the club, mainly the secretary, but email clubdevelopment@swimming.org This has also been communicated out to all clubs in the newsletters. CC asked if it could also be added to the agenda for the regional managers meeting next month. SC asked if they could have a list of all Artistic clubs that have already completed it; CC will provide. MR wanted to make an observation on the report showing a lack of growth in the number of routines entered for the 2025 Combo Cup (86 routines) compared to 2024 (92 routines). This reduction was anticipated and planned, resulting from a change in the maximum number of routines clubs were allowed to enter. It's important that this context is included alongside the figures when shared publicly to avoid any misinterpretation of the data as a decline in participation.

National Talent - KT:

- A supporting document outlining all the results for 2025 was supplied; KT wanted to acknowledge and celebrate the great achievement of the squad especially with a bronze at the world championships.

- Trials were held over the weekend; A total of 40 athletes participated, with 8–10 athletes scoring particularly well, showing strong potential. For the first time DiSE were included in the trials.
- Kate Shortman and Izzy Thorpe are back and will be representing this year at some competitions, but main event will be the Senior Europeans, where they will be doing a tech duet. Izzy Thorpe and Ranjuo Tomblin will continue to work together on the mixed duet. Izzy Thorpe and Kate Shortman have also been officially selected for the world class programme with Aquatics GB.
- Selections for the new season are complete: 15 athletes named to the Senior Programme (including IT & KS) plus a Development Duet of six, with 7 Juniors and 4 Youth selected. The coaching team is unchanged: Karen Thorpe continues as Programme Manager; the Senior Programme is led by Paola Basso, Yulia Diachenko, and Cerys Hughes, supported by specialist coaches Yumiko Tomomatsu and Stefania Speroni. Yulia and Cerys, joined by Laura Turberville, will oversee the Juniors, while Laura and Paola will lead the Youth solo/duet programme, inviting selected athletes' club coaches to sessions to strengthen club–national links.

ACTIONS:

CC to provide a list of clubs that have completed the health tracker - done

CC to speak with South West Regional manager and feed back

SC to produce summary report of courses etc

EB to note feedback and add context to the report

MR to add Club Health tracker to the regional Managers Meeting All to review the data available to create an end of year report

4. 2026 Competition Decision Approvals

MR would like the decisions made for 2026 competitions formally documented as the comms needs to go out to the regional managers urgently; will also go out in club's newsletter the following week.

The dates have been locked in and agreed but the venue for Gloucester hasn't been confirmed yet; agreed TBC to be added as a caveat against the venue.

CC – qualification grade changes; do we need a communication outlining the rationale for changes; MR confirmed that the grade has been lowered, and SC stated there was no change in the content of the grade; the rationale behind it was to allow for participation from more 9-10 year-olds being able to compete sooner.

It was also agreed to include a rationale next to the changes on the competition requirements; other small changes to wording were agreed and the document will be updated by KT and recirculated for approval before it goes out.

Action:

KT to update document and circulate for approval - done

5.	Grade Fees Increase
	<p>The request for an increase in fees came from the regional managers who were faced with increased pool costs; MR asked that the fees increase to £20.00 from January 2026; this has now been formally approved and signed off.</p>
6.	Pool Depth Project
	<p>MR - A proposal was originally submitted to the Health & Safety forum in May, recommending changes to existing guidance. MR revised the document based on new information received since the initial submission. The group reviewed and agreed to the updated recommendations. EB will present the revised document to the Health & Safety forum in November for final consideration.</p>
7.	Virtual Grades
	<p>KT - Only one region currently is doing virtual grades, and no information is currently available on the website. KT and SC are willing to collaborate to update and publish relevant information. SC confirmed that nothing has changed, and processes remain the same. SC also clarified that virtual grades are run by the regions and routine grades can be run by the clubs. MR wondered if these were still needed; before any updates or changes are made, the topic will be taken to the regional managers for input.</p> <p>ACTION: MR to add to the regional managers meeting agenda</p>
8.	Official International Appointments 2026
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HS reported that we are scheduled to have a judge's course; based on conversations with some evaluators it appears that the on-line test will be sufficient with no major changes planned. • HS is attending the Aquatics conference in Europe. • The group discussed the current candidates who are on the world aquatics list and agreed a process and follow up action to check their availability. • IA asked about non-compliance of clubs not following the guidelines; CC advised that clubs need to do a robust risk assessment as it is a higher risk activity and the club need to be aware of their responsibility. <p>Action: KT, HS & SC to feedback on International judges</p>
9.	Strategy and First Steps

Competition Review – EB

A paper was circulated prior to the meeting which hopefully everyone has read; to summarise this is a big piece of work looking at all competitions from club level all the way through to national.

For 2025 work has started on insight for all disciplines; this has gone out to all stakeholders; once back and analysed 2026 will focus on putting working groups together.

Phase one will include swimming and water polo, with the other disciplines following in phase 2; the aspiration for phase 1 is that in September 2026 communications will go out to phase in for the 27/28 season. Artistic Swimming will be part of Phase 2 of the review

A discussion was had around the wording of participation in Masters competitions; MR stated that maybe more insight is needed around what the regions deliver in the way of competitions.

MR agreed that a review was needed; the last time this was undertaken for Artistic was 2016 and there are now genuine blocks on the growth of the sport; the timeline of 27/28 season is concerning,. Was it possible for the sport to make a head start into the insight and ask the questions. CC confirmed that all insight for all disciplines would be available January 2026. Would also be useful to have a 'wish list' of changes they would like to see as some could be implemented sooner. KT has already undertaken some insight and is due to meet with Ally Whyke over the next two weeks to go through it in more detail.

ACTION:

KT to reach out to EB and share insight and discussions with Ally Whyke.

10.	Regional Managers Meeting
	<p>The regional managers meeting is due to be held on 15th October; agreed areas of discussion were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition structure • Virtual grades • Competition review • Promotion of club health tracker • Conference • Masters competitions • Officials
11.	A.O.B - ALL
	<p>MR asked for an update on changes happening within Swim England; EB advised that they are currently in a collective consultation as an organisation which is due to end on 20th October.</p>
12.	Close of Meeting
	<p>Meeting closed at 20.10; next meeting will be 15th October with the regional managers</p>