

Questions and Answers on the new Regional competition format for 2020

The region has received a few questions, as well as feedback in person, via email and on social media. We thought it appropriate to share some of these questions and answers with our clubs, and so have put together the following which we hope will answer the majority of the questions we are getting.

Why has the qualifying window become shorter?

Regionals is the last stepping stone before nationals. The national qualifying window is approximately eight weeks in length so it was felt offering open window (year-long) was not helping swimmers bridge the gap between regional and national level. Offering a six month window is still ample time for qualifying to take place but allow swimmers to start moving towards a shorter qualifying window in preparation for the step to national level.

Just for some context, in the next step beyond nationals to junior international level, the qualifying opportunity to make the GB team is one meet only, i.e. less than one week. Our shorter window of six months is very progressive in the context of the bigger swimming world. We would anticipate, especially in our younger athletes who are growing and developing swiftly combined with six months of additional skill development, by the end of March that the swimmers will be swimming faster than they are in July the previous year and as such September 1st is deemed appropriate.

The change in the qualifying times

Again, just for wider understanding here, qualifying times are simply to manage the number of swimmers for each day of racing to ensure it fits within the licensing restrictions of level one meets. They are not a pass/fail standard for swimmers and should not be treated as such. If a meet was to run for 14 days, the times would be extremely relaxed and for a 1-2 day meet the times would have to be extremely tight. For 2020, there are now two strands of competition available – the traditional championships in March/April/May and the new event in July, much like the two strands available in the summer with British Nationals and Home Nations.

With the format of qualifying (minimum times for March/April/May event and upper/lower limits for the July event) swimmers will only be able to qualify for one of the two strands for each respective event they swim. This actually increases the number of swimmers that can take part across the two competitions combined. Overall numbers of swimmers racing at Regional events in 2020 will therefore increase. This is viewed as a big positive as too often we hear that the focus is too much on the 'elite'.

The new format allows swimmers further down the pathway to access regional level competition and was designed primarily to allow more swimmers to race up to the end of the season. Qualifying times are solely to allow the newly formatted events to run at their

maximum capacity within the rules of licensing. For the March/April/May championships, as the region's coaches raise the standards of swimmers, more swimmers qualify and as such numbers need to be managed via qualifying times as running over more days is not viable within the national qualifying window. Tightening of times indicates the standard of swimming is improving, which again is a huge positive.

Overall, swimmers will complete at county championships in January and February with a bigger cross section now having competitive opportunities later in the season. Swimmers will be focussing on qualifying for nationals, or one of the two regional strands available, which as mentioned will mean a bigger number of swimmers participating.

The Summer Meet in July

There has been some feedback downplaying the regional summer meet in July, however this was instigated at the request of the national talent programme, and will be run by the regional competition team and will be a high standard meet that swimmers and coaches should be proud of getting to, in exactly the same way we as a region take pride in the swimmers who qualify for both British Summer Nationals and Home Nation events. We do not downplay either as they are a great level of achievement in their own right.

We will of course continue to take on board feedback (as per the supporting document launched with the 2020 regional paperwork) and work with our members to ensure the best possible experience for athletes, coaches, spectators and volunteers. With the Bank Holiday in May moving back to Monday in 2021 this will tighten up the programme further logistically, but for 2020 the dates situation was taken out of our hands with the moving of the Bank Holiday. We hope this answers some of the questions provided and equally clarifies the rationale behind some of the decisions that were taken for the 2020 regional events.