



Swim England East Region
Minutes of the Artistic Swimming Leadership Group Meeting
20th June 2026 at 10am, via Zoom

Present:	Amy Davis (AD)	Swim England East Region Artistic Swimming Manager
	Sheila Mackenzie (SM)	Swim England East Region Director
	Karen Brennan (KB)	Aqualina
	Tom Brennan (TB)	Aqualina
	Emily Gower (EG)	Norwich
	Maddie Hammatt (MH)	Dacorum
	Laura Neary (LN)	Chelmsford
	Helen Poletti-Taylor (HPT)	Potters Bar
	Olivia Taylor (OT)	Potters Bar
	Also present: Emma Winter (EW)	Regional Administrator

26/12 **Welcome and apologies**

- 26/12.1 AD welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 26/12.2 Apologies were received from Amy Bryant (AB), Hatfield, and Kerri Clewlow (KC), Aqualina.

26/13 **Declarations of conflict of interest**

- 26/13.1 There were no declarations of conflict of interest.

26/14 **Previous minutes**

- 26/14.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14th March 2026 had been circulated and were agreed as a correct record.

26/15 **Plan and Budget 2025/2026**

- 26/15.1 AD reported that the plan and budget for 2026 continued to perform well. A profit had been made from the May grading day, which was well attended and held at a low-cost venue.



- 26/15.2 A small profit had also been made on the March competition, which AD noted was unexpected, as March typically generates lower entries and income than other competitions in the calendar.
- 26/15.3 The June competition had also returned a small profit, despite an increase in pool hire costs. AD noted that combo entries typically help offset costs for this event.
- 26/15.4 AD confirmed that the July grading day (Witham) is expected to be another good, low-cost event, given the low hire cost of the venue, even if attendance is lower than usual.
- 26/15.5 No concerns or questions were raised regarding the plan and budget.
- 26/16 Grading days 2026**
- 26/16.1 AD confirmed that entry forms for the grading day on 18th July at Witham had been circulated. Routine Grades 1 and 2 had been offered, based on the pool time available. Clubs were invited to request additional grades on the entry form. Accommodation of such requests would be subject to judge availability and numbers.
- 26/16.2 AD noted that November and December grading days had not yet been booked. She observed that the December 2025 grading day had been poorly attended (approximately 13 swimmers) and queried whether holding grading days in both November and December, so close together, remained viable. It was agreed that this would be kept under review, noting that January - the Region's regular National Age-Groups (NAGs) warm-up grading day - typically drives strong attendance at that time of year.
- 26/16.3 TB confirmed that Aqualina had provisionally requested 26th September for a Routine Grade 1 grading day at club/county level.
- 26/16.4 **New national grading and judging proposals**
- KB raised a concern regarding proposed national changes to the grading system, which is understood to allow clubs to cover Routine Grades 1 and 2 in-club rather than at regional grading days. KB and TB expressed concern that this could significantly reduce attendance at and viability of regional grading days going forward.
- LN asked whether Routine Grade 3 could also be delivered in-club under the new proposals. AD stated that Routine Grade 3 grading days can already be held in-club, but that this has historically required other clubs to be present to judge, to maintain fairness and avoid bias. AD noted that, as she is the only qualified judge at her own club, she would be unable to hold an in-club grading day without support from other clubs anyway.
- KB expressed a further concern that in-club grading could result in inconsistent standards, with swimmers potentially progressing through grades more quickly at less rigorous clubs.
- 26/16.5 KB and LN also raised concerns regarding proposed changes to the judging structure for Grades 3 to 5 under the new system, in which a panel of judges (the exact number was unclear, but was understood to be either three or five, drawn from at least three different clubs) would assess a random selection of figures (understood to



be four figures), notified to swimmers approximately 48 hours in advance, while swimmers would still be required to prepare all figures in the syllabus.

26/16.6 **Splits assessment**

LN and HPT raised uncertainty regarding how splits are proposed to be measured under the new system, noting that a swimmer who fails a splits assessment may no longer receive any score for that figure, rather than a reduced score.

No definitive answer was available to the Group. HPT expressed concern that this could disproportionately disadvantage male swimmers, who often find splits more difficult to achieve, noting this appeared to run contrary to reported efforts to make the sport more inclusive of men. AD noted that the existing 4/0 scoring approach for splits was originally designed to avoid discriminating against swimmers unable to achieve full splits and expressed concern that reverting to a stricter approach could undo this.

26/16.7 KB stated that, despite being a Level 3 judge, she had not been consulted on, or made aware of, any consultation process regarding these changes. LN confirmed that she had also not been consulted. HPT noted that Swim England had reportedly gathered some feedback following the 2025 NAGs competition, but this did not appear to have reached, or included, judges or representatives in the East Region.

It was not clear whether the Region would still be permitted to hold regional grading days at all under the new system. Clarification was needed from Swim England.

26/16.8 **Timing of implementation**

The Group discussed reports that the proposed changes may be introduced from September 2026. It was felt that this timescale was very short, given that Regions and clubs had already planned their competition and grading calendars for the year, and it was questioned why consultation was ongoing in May/June if implementation was intended so soon afterwards.

AD asked whether grades achieved before any change takes effect (for example, at the July grading day) would still be recognised.

KB confirmed that, as far as she was aware, previously achieved grades would not be affected, though this had not been formally confirmed by Swim England.

26/16.9 The Group also briefly discussed a separate, unconnected proposal to change the order of NAGs and the Championships in the competition calendar, reportedly linked to accommodating older swimmers' school examination schedules. Feedback nationally was reported to be mixed, and the Group did not think that this change would happen.

26/16.10 It was agreed to continue planning grading days on the current system for the time being and to revisit the national grading and judging changes in greater detail at the next meeting once further clarification is available.

Action: AD to circulate a reminder for clubs to send entry requirements and judge availability for the grading day on 18th July



Action: Formal clarification to be sought from Swim England National regarding the proposed changes to the grading and judging system, including the implementation timetable and the continued permissibility of regionally run grading days

26/17

Competitions for 2026

26/17.1 AD reported that three competitions had been held so far this year, the most recent being the previous weekend (Ungraded figures, Combos, and Masters Tech solos/duets). AD thanked KB for stepping in as referee, noting she had done an excellent job.

26/17.2 Running order

AD explained that routines had been run before figures at the most recent competition, having previously been run the other way around. The running order was discussed. The order had worked well as the novice swimmers did not have a long wait and Masters swimmers had more preparation time.

The Group agreed this order suited a smaller, novice-heavy competition, but noted that for competitions with a larger figures programme, the traditional order, with figures first, may better support scheduling.

26/17.3 Scheduling of Masters events

HPT asked whether it would be preferable for Masters events to be scheduled at the end of the programme, given that Masters swimmers are experienced and often also assist as helpers with younger teams.

AD explained that Masters events had been deliberately spread through the programme, rather than grouped together, to avoid solos and duets running consecutively without a break, and because some swimmers compete in both Masters and age-group/combo events and require a rest between events.

HPT commented that spreading Masters events through the programme can be confusing from a judging perspective, as judges must switch between different judging criteria.

TB confirmed that Masters judging is not currently expected to move to the new (mainstream) judging system.

There was a suggestion that Masters swimmers could compete early in the programme, to allow coaches to focus on coaching combo teams later in the day. This was considered a valid point for future scheduling.

Another suggestion was that Masters could be scheduled separately, earlier in the day, noting that Masters events do not always require a large audience.

TB commented that seeing Masters swim calmly and confidently is valuable for younger, less experienced swimmers to observe.

No decision was taken.

26/17.4 February competition and the possible move of ungraded figures

AD reported that the February competition had been unusually busy this year, requiring additional pool time to be booked. There had been discussion about moving ungraded figures from February into the March competition.



AD was supportive of this in principle but noted that ungraded figures groups would need to be kept separate from other figures groups, given the short timescale.

AD asked whether the Group would support trialling this change for next year - moving certain groups so that their figures fall in March and June, while the remainder of the competition programme continues in February and October.

The Group agreed this was worth trialling. HPT noted her club does not generally attend the March competition currently, as routines are rarely ready by then, but confirmed that the club would attend for figures under this format.

It was decided to trial moving ungraded figures from the February competition to the March competition from 2027.

26/17.5 **Confirmed competition formats**

AD confirmed that the current competition formats are expected to remain broadly unchanged for the year ahead, apart from the trial above, and subject to any national rule changes.

- February: Figures (including Masters, format to be confirmed) for 12 & under and 13–15 age groups: solos, duets, mixed teams and free teams
- March: 15 & over solos/duets, mixed duets, acrobatic teams (15 & over, Grade 5 silver and above, Championship-qualifying), Combos, and Masters Tech solos/duets
- June: Combo teams (warm-up for the Combo Cup), Masters Tech solos/duets, and Masters Tech teams
- October: Grade 1+ figures and free solos/duets, aimed principally at swimmers who do not usually get the opportunity to compete, and Masters free duets, subject to demand.

26/17.6 AD confirmed that for the October competition entries should be aimed primarily at swimmers who do not usually get the opportunity to compete, but qualifying swimmers are welcome to enter, for example to test a new routine, subject to overall entry numbers.

26/17.7 MH asked whether a small combo entry might be considered for the October competition, explaining that Dacorum's duet swimmer had recently become a full-time coach, leaving the club without a routine entry, but that they hoped to be able to enter a combo if possible.

AD agreed to note the interest and consider accommodating a small combo entry in October, subject to timings, noting that the competition is already a busy, with limited time available.

26/17.8 **Venue (Stevenage)**

AD asked whether Stevenage remained a satisfactory venue, in view of car parking and any parental feedback.

KB/TB confirmed that no complaints had been received. The new pedestrian crossing had improved the car park situation. Concern was raised, however, about the pool's uncertain long-term future, given planned redevelopment.



AD confirmed that the Region is booked at Stevenage for October 2026. She reported that the venue operator has indicated that the pool will remain in operation, with reduced car parking and the removal of some rooms, until a replacement facility becomes available. This is expected to provide at least one further year of use, though this was not treated as guaranteed.

- 26/17.9 HPT confirmed that the moveable boom floor at Potters Bar cannot, for insurance/safety reasons, be lowered below the depth of the surrounding pool floor when the venue is in full use, which limits the depth options available. KB/TB noted that this was likely a liability matter for the pool operator rather than something Swim England could resolve.

Luton was confirmed as unavailable as an alternative.

Potential other venues were discussed.

Haberdasher Askes' School (2m depth, free parking, previously used for county swimming events); Chelmsford (10 lanes, large viewing gallery, able to accommodate lifts, though a more costly venue with expensive parking); Southgate (deeper section, former diving pool); and Harrow Lodge.

AD and EW will research alternative venue options for competitions from 2027 onwards, as a contingency, with a view to trialling one or two alternative venues alongside the continued use of Stevenage.

Action: AD/EW to make enquiries with Haberdasher Askes' School, Chelmsford, Southgate and Harrow Lodge as potential alternative or additional venues

26/18

Officials' courses

- 26/18.1 AD reported that the Level 1 Judges course, historically a London-based event, has increasingly become an East Region event. Feedback from attendees at the recent competition was broadly positive, with some finding the content substantial but mainly enjoyable.

- 26/18.2 AD reported that Jenny Gray hopes to attend in July to work with those undertaking the qualification, including candidates currently completing their shadowing requirements.

HPT believed that either two or three shadowing sessions must be completed, followed by a routine assessment, before a candidate could qualify.

- 26/18.3 **Level 2 Coach courses**

KB/TB raised that the Region has several Level 1 coaches wishing to progress but noted that the only Level 2 Coach course currently being advertised is in York, which is impractical for most members owing to distance, and asked whether a more local course could be arranged.

AD confirmed that, when she had previously enquired, she had been told that course capacity was limited, and a regional course could not be guaranteed.

MH confirmed she had recently completed a Level 2 Coach course with Louise Ross in May, at Rushmoor, which she found very good. KB/TB noted having previously started a course with Jenny Gray and completed it with Louise Ross, and having also travelled to Vauxhall (South London) for a previous course.



- 26/18.4 Amy Bryant (AB) confirmed (via AD) that no club had yet contacted her to request a Level 1 Coach place and that she did not currently believe there was sufficient demand to run a course.

AD was not aware of any specific changes to the delivery format or content of the Level 1 Coach course but will ask AB to clarify if possible.

Action: Clubs with interested candidates should contact AB or AD directly

Action: Clarification to be sought from AB

- 26/18.5 **Judges' refresher training**

It was suggested that the Group considers organising an upskill/refresher session for judges.

LN explained that judges typically qualify once and are then expected to keep pace with frequent rule changes without any formal refresher provision. This placed a significant burden on volunteers, and written guidance was not always clearly explained.

KB/TB agreed, noting that even judges who officiate regularly at NAGs and the Championships continue to have new realisations when discussing scoring with colleagues, and felt that less experienced club judges would benefit even more from a shared refresher session.

AD acknowledged that she would personally benefit from a refresher, as she judges mainly out of necessity at grading days rather than through regular practice.

LN suggested that an informal, conversational format, where judges could ask questions freely, would help reduce anxiety around judging.

SM strongly supported the proposal, drawing a comparison with update sessions run for officials in mainstream swimming at county and regional level, and suggested that having an approachable, knowledgeable person deliver the session — citing Jenny Gray as an example — would encourage judges to ask questions they might otherwise avoid. Several members indicated they would specifically welcome guidance on judging criteria for the Combo Cup as part of any refresher session.

Decision: The Group agreed in principle to develop a judges' refresher/CPD session, delivered in an informal question-and-answer style, ideally before the start of the 2027 competition season.

Action: AD and LN to develop content and format for a judges' refresher session. AD to approach Jenny Gray regarding availability to help deliver it, potentially remotely.

26/19 **Regional Games**

- 26/19.1 TB reported on the Regional Games programme. The Region finished third overall nationally this year, having finished last in its first year of competing and sixth in its second year. The Region also finished first in the country for its Land Routine. TB thanked coaches Jane and Kerry, and the wider coaching team, for the achievement.



- 26/19.2 TB proposed the following provisional training dates for the 2026/27 programme at Potters Bar (subject to budget and Board approval): -
13th September 2026, 22nd November 2026, 27th/28th February 2027, and 16th May 2027 - all Sundays starting at 2pm.
Kerry and Jane have confirmed that they are happy to continue coaching. Other coaches were invited to attend, shadow or assist.
- 26/19.3 The provisional date for the competition is Friday 4th June 2027, at Bristol, again falling within a half-term week.
- 26/19.4 TB noted that the introduction of a 12-and-under age-group this year had been a significant change, and had contributed to the Region's strong overall result, reflecting well on the development of younger swimmers coming through.
AD asked whether entry criteria for the 12-and-under age group might be reviewed, and also whether 40 athletes (as seen this year) had been difficult to manage.
TB confirmed that 40 had been a large number to manage, but he does not wish to cap numbers, wanting to encourage participation, even though only around half (20 of 40) make the final squad.
TB explained that all who attend benefit from valuable additional training, including age-group-specific figures, and that squad selection is based on placings at NAGs and/or regional competitions. TB indicated that, going forward, he intends to set an expectation for 12-and-under entrants of Grade 2 (or working towards Grade 3), while acknowledging that this is an ambitious target.
LN asked whether swimmers need to attend all four training dates to be considered for squad selection.
TB confirmed that attendance at all four sessions is preferred, and that he does not wish to advertise partial attendance as a viable route into the squad, as this would be unfair to swimmers who commit to the full programme. Unavoidable individual absences would be considered reasonably, but full commitment is expected of anyone seriously seeking selection.
- 26/19.5 On behalf of the Board, SM formally congratulated all the athletes and thanked all the coaches and organisers involved in the Regional Games programme on an excellent result.
- 26/19.6 **Awards and medals at the national Regional Games event**
Concern was raised regarding the standard of awards presented to swimmers at the national Regional Games event. It was reported that individual medal winners received only a Swim England branded swimming cap. There was no medal for East Region's third-place finish. The first-place team reportedly received a bag of sweets to share between them. Individual medal winners were reportedly required to



return their medals after presentation and photographs, so that the same medals could be reused for subsequent award ceremonies.

SM asked what the competition conditions state regarding awards. This will be checked.

Action: Ian Mackenzie to raise the Group's concerns formally with the organisers of the national Regional Games event regarding the standard and availability of medals and awards, given the level of commitment, entry fees and travel undertaken by competing swimmers

The Land Routine cap was noted separately as having been well received by swimmers, being styled similarly to national team kit, notwithstanding the wider concerns about awards.

26/20

Any other business

26/20.1

Certificates and pin badges

AD confirmed that she is up to date with the distribution of grading certificates, having handed out the remaining stock at the most recent competition. However, two envelopes of pin badges appear to be unaccounted for. AD believes that these were handed to an attendee wearing red, whose identity she could not confirm.

Action: AD to check with attendees and clubs to establish who received the outstanding envelopes of pin badges, and to arrange return/redistribution as needed

26/20.2

Judges' training video

EG asked where a previously circulated video, referenced earlier in relation to the proposed grading and judging changes, could be found. AD was unable to locate the communication during the meeting, but believed it had been sent by email, addressed to head coaches.

Action: AD to locate the video/email and forward it to EG. LN to take and share screenshots of the relevant material with the Group in the meantime.

26/20.3

Regional awards evening

KC, via TB, raised the suggestion of the Region holding a regional awards evening or celebration event, noting that the Region does not currently hold any local celebration for swimmers, coaches or clubs recognised at national level. There has only been the national event at Birmingham in recent years. A small regional award presentation used to take place alongside the Regional Annual General Meeting in the past.

SM confirmed there is support in principle from the Board, with awards being presented at a competition among swimmers' peer groups rather than as a large stand-alone regional event — given that attendance at stand-alone evening events has historically been poor since meetings moved to Zoom.

SM further explained that Swim England's national award ceremony arrangements are changing, with national awards due to move to Swim England's 'Summit' event, scheduled for March 2027.



EW confirmed that she had received email correspondence from Swim England confirming this, meaning that the Region would need to select and present its own regional awards before March - likely in the December–January period, which is acknowledged as a difficult time logistically, given the Christmas period and club commitments.

The Group expressed general support for holding some form of regional celebration.

Action: SM to raise with the Board the request for a regional awards event, taking into account the national timeline change, and report back to the Group

26/21

Confidential items

26/21.1

There were none.

26/22

Next meeting

26/22.1

The dates of the meetings for 2026 are as below: -

- 12th September 2026
- 14th November 2026