

Following on from our guides to “Counties” and “Regionals”, we thought we’d complete the set with a guide to the other set of meets you must have heard mentioned, namely “Nationals”. Writing this in Sept 2023 we hope we can keep this general enough so no major changes will be needed to this document in the near future.

Any Questions?

BSSC GUIDE TO NATIONALS

BY COMMS@BSSWIMCLUB.CO.UK

The first step on the competitive ladder for BSSC swimmers is the Swim England Hertfordshire County Swimming Championships (i.e. *Counties*) and the next stepping stone would be *Regionals*. England is split into eight regions and BSSC is part of the Swim England East Region that comprises the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex (excluding those areas that are London Boroughs), Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The next step after that is *Nationals*.

Typically there are five different National events that BSSC swimmers may attend each year:

- **British Swimming Championships:** the main long course (50m) event running in April/May
- **British Swimming Summer Championships:** an invitational long course event held late July
- **Swim England National Summer meet:** an invitational long course event in early August
- **Swim England National County Championships:** an inter-county competition in November
- **Swim England National Short Course Championships:** 25m event in December

The specific information for upcoming national events can be found on the British Swimming and Swim England websites, but we've put a summary below of the key information for each event.

British Swimming Championships

This is the flagship domestic swimming event for British Swimming and it typically runs early April each year. It plays a key role in the selection process for European, Commonwealth World and Olympic Aquatic events so don't be surprised if you see the likes of Adam Peaty, James Guy, Freya Anderson & Anna Hopkin lining up in the fastest heats.

When and Where: the championships are typically held in April at the Ponds Forge International Sports Centre in Sheffield. In 2023 it ran for six days from 4th-9th April

Schedule: the exact schedule of events can change year on year, but the events are 50m/100m/200m/400m/800m/1500m for Freestyle, 50m/100m/200m for Backstroke, Breaststroke and Butterfly and 200m/400m Individual Medley.

Who can compete: there are a single set of published consideration times for each category (from 2024 that would be Male/Open and Female). Times must be achieved in a competition in a 50m pool that is designated or licensed for entry into national competitions (which for BSSC swimmers usually means a Level 1 open meet) run within the specified window. The window usually runs from 1st January the year prior to the competition to the specified closing date - the April 2023 competition accepted swims from 1st January 2022 to 14 March 2023.

What happens: each event is run in heats seeded by entry times. The fastest heats for 50m to 400m events are run in the first heats session in the morning, and rest are run in the second heats session. For 800m and 1500m events, the fastest heat is run in the finals session and the other heats are split across the two heats sessions.

The fastest sixteen competitors from the heats irrespective of age are allocated places in each of the two Open Finals (with the eight fastest in the A final and the rest in the B final). In the championships running up to the Paris Olympics, the next fastest eight age-eligible competitors were allocated places in each of the two other finals, with priority given to the Priority Paris Final. A competitor in the Priority Paris or Junior Finals may also be a reserve for the Open Final and will be moved to the Open Final as necessary.

Age groups: swimmers in the Female category will be 14 years or older by 31st December of the championship year, whilst swimmers in the Male/Open category will be 15 years or older. When selecting swimmers for finals the Junior Age Group for Female competitors is 14-17 years, whilst it is 15-18 years for the Male/Open competitors.

British Summer Championships & Swim England National Summer Meet

These long course meets provide key end-of-season competitions for swimmers and form part of a broader Performance Pathway aimed at increasing and supporting junior talent on the journey towards senior medal-winning performance.

When & Where: these events normally take place end of July and early August but exact times can change depending on clashes with other International competitions. In 2023 the British Swimming Summer Championships were held from 22-28th July and the Swim England National Summer Meet were held from 2nd-6th August at Ponds Forge in Sheffield.

Schedule: the exact schedule of events can change year on year, but the events are 50m/100m/200m/400m/800m/1500m for Freestyle, 50m/100m/200m for Backstroke, Breaststroke and Butterfly and 200m/400m Individual Medley (though they are not offered for all age groups).

Age group: in 2023 changes were made to the entry criteria for certain events depending on age (see more below), but the general age groups are slightly different for each meet:

British Swimming Summer Champs

Female: 13/14 years, 15 years, 16 years, 17 years, 18 years and over

Male/Open: 14/15 years, 16 years, 17 years, 18 years, 19 years and over

Swim England Summer Meet

Female: 12/13 years, 14 years, 15 years, 16 years and 17+

Male/Open: 13/14 years, 15 years, 16 years, 17 years and 18+

Who can compete: this gets quite complicated to explain, especially since changes were introduced in 2023, so please bear with us whilst we give it a go! We'll start with the general concept and then lay out the restrictions.

Essentially, swimmers are ranked by the times they achieved for an event (e.g. 50m Freestyle) by their sex category and age group. Times must be achieved at a Level 1 meet in the published window, which for the 2023 Summer Meets was from 10th March 2023 to 21st May 2023 (inclusive). The top 24 swimmers are invited to the British and the next 20 are invited to the English Meet.

However, it's not quite that simple...

British Summer Championships Rules:

- Youngest age groups: only swimmers invited to swim the 100m Freestyle will be invited to swim the 50m Freestyle. Swimmers are not able to swim 50m Form Stroke events (i.e. Breaststroke, Backstroke, Butterfly)
- Oldest age group: swimmers are invited to all events, including the 50m events, based on their rankings from swims in each event
- Other age groups: swimmers can swim all 50m events but entry will only be offered to those swimmers who are invited to enter the equivalent 100m event. Their 50m event ranking will not be considered.

Swim England Summer Meet Rules:

- A swimmer invited to swim an event at the British Summer Championships cannot swim that event at the Swim England Summer Meet.
- Entry to the 50m Freestyle, for all age groups, will be based on the Rankings for that event achieved within the Summer Meet Qualifying Window.
- Entry to the 50m Form Strokes events for all age groups, with the exception of the oldest groups, will be by invitation to the equivalent 100m event. Swimmers' rankings in the 50m event will not be considered.

What happens: all events have Heats and Finals, with the exception of the 800m & 1500m Freestyle which are Heat Declared Winner events. The fastest ten competitors from the heats are allocated places in the age group finals.

Swim England National County Championships

More than 900 swimmers compete from over 30 counties with races from Divisions 1 and 2 going on in two 25m pools at the same time. It's a loud, fast, furious and fun day for all involved.

When & Where: this event normally takes place early October and for many years has been at the Ponds Forge International Pool in Sheffield. In 2023 it is scheduled for Sunday 8th October.

What happens: there are 31 events on the schedule, with 100m individual races by category (Open/Male or Female) across all four strokes and three age groups, as well as single category medley relays per age group and a mixed 6x50m freestyle relay to end the day.

Age group: there are three age groups - 12/13 years, 14/15 years and 16/17 years

Who can compete: each individual County is responsible for selecting their team. Swim England Hertfordshire normally use performance in short course 100m events during the first half of the year and select their team during the summer ready for the event in October. Swimmers are invited to represent the County, attend a training session together to get to know the other team members and travel up on the day by coach together. It's a long day and they may only compete in a single relay event or one individual event, but it's a fun atmosphere for all the swimmers and an honour to represent your County.

Swim England National Short Course Championships

This is the biggest English swimming meet of the winter months, with Britain's top senior swimmers often involved.

When & Where: *Winter Nationals* normally takes place in December. In 2022 it was held over the first weekend of December at Ponds Forge in Sheffield, but in 2023 it moved to four days just before Christmas (14-17th December).

Schedule: the exact schedule of events can change year on year, but the events are 50m/100m/200m/400m/800m/1500m for Freestyle, 50m/100m/200m for Backstroke, Breaststroke and Butterfly and 100m/200m/400m Individual Medley.

Who can compete: in recent years there have been three sets of published consideration times for each category (from 2024 that would be Male/Open and Female) corresponding to three age groups (more below). Times must be achieved in a competition in a 25m pool that is designated or licensed at Level 2 that is run within the specified window. The window usually runs from 1st September the year prior to the competition to the specified closing date - the December 2022 competition accepted swims from 1st September 2021.

Age groups: swimmers in the fastest Female category will be 18 years or older by 31st December of the championship year, whilst swimmers in the fastest Male/Open category will be 19 years or older. Two junior categories are also defined as Female 16/17 years and 15/Under and Open/Male 17/18 years and 16/Under.

What happens: all individual events have heats and Open & Junior Finals, with the exception of the 800m & 1500m which are Heat Declared Winner events. The fastest ten Competitors from the heats, irrespective of age, shall be allocated places in the Open Final. The next fastest ten Competitors, aged 18 (Open/Male) or 17 (Female) or younger, shall be allocated places in the Junior Final.

Entry Process: the big difference for National (and Regional) level competitions is that swimmers (or their parents if under 18) are **responsible for entering themselves** into the championships using the entry system published by British Swimming or Swim England. The BSSC Competitions team will provide guidance and will prompt parents when the entry systems are available.