

Minutes

Swim England South West Region Water Polo Committee

Meeting held on Monday, December 1st, 2025, via online meeting, commencing at 6.30 pm.

1. Attendees and Apologies

Present: Simon Tomlinson (ST, Chair), Mike Coles (MC, SESWR Water Polo Manager), Jim Robinson (JR, Finance Officer for Water Polo), Andrew Smart (AS, Board Representative), Libby Bell (LB, SESWR Welfare and Safeguarding Representative), Phil Whiting (PW, BWWPL Representative), Nick Hume (NH, Girls Head Coach), John Spicer (JS, Boys Head Coach), Sue Webb (SW), Becky Bellett (BB, Girls Administrator), Bradly Poole (BP, Somerset Representative), Chris Selby (CS, Wiltshire Representative), Glen Mitchell (GM, Dorset Representative), Toby Hogg (TH, Cornwall Representative), Claire Coleman (CC, Swim England Head of Development), Richard Blackshaw (RB, Swim England Head of Performance).

Apologies: Laura Kania, Gloucester County Representative (submitted a report); Kit Greenslade, Devon Representative.

2. Declaration of Interests

Attendee	Interest Declared
Simon Tomlinson	Wyvern swimwear business
Others	None

3. Approval of Minutes of Last Meeting (October 6th, 2025)

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed.

Approved as an accurate record, confirmed by Toby Hogg.

4. Matters Arising and Actions

Action No.	Action/Discussion	Status	Details
06/10/25/01	MC to chase up SESWR Trophy Controller regarding the bronze medals.	OPEN	MC confirmed this is being looked into for the next Inter-County Championships.
06/10/25/02	JS to email his report to MC.	OVERDUE	JS had not submitted the report.

5. Updates from Groups (Swim England Water Polo Leadership Group)

MC reported that the last Leadership Group meeting was primarily focused on the future review of Water Polo (as discussed later in Item 10). There were no other significant updates, allowing for a focused discussion with CC and RB later.

6. County Officer Reports

Reports were taken by exception and verbally.

County	Update
Cornwall (TH)	Low activity. Working on a joint training/friendly match between Penzance and Newquay before Christmas. MC noted efforts to set up an Assistant Coach course for the county (theory online, practical at Millfield RTC). Action: ST encouraged TH to focus on getting Cornwall involved in the 2026 Inter-Counties.
Dorset (GM)	Good growth in girls and ladies' participation, with friendlies against Weymouth, Portland, and clubs in Hampshire. Noted a drop-off in older boys/men's teams (reflective of the national picture).
Somerset (BP)	Progress in coaching with Charlie Hinder achieving Level 2 and others completing Assistant Coach courses. The goal is to increase the number of game situations for juniors. MC noted the Bristol & West Water Polo League is planning a Northern Junior League (U15S/U17S) involving Western, Frome, City of Bristol, and potentially Welsh/Cheltenham clubs to boost competition.
Wiltshire (CS)	Quiet period, planning a junior tournament in the New Year and reaching out to Bradford (Bradford on Avon) to prepare for Inter-Counties.

Gloucestershire (JS)

Laura Kania's comprehensive report was noted as read and covered the following key points: **Juniors:** 9 county players selected for the 2009 GB training squads; 6 players in the U20 GB squads. Cheltenham's U15 Girls finished with Bronze at the National Age Group Championships, while the boys finished 10th. **Seniors (BWPL/Nordic League):** Cheltenham Senior Men and Women qualified for the Super 5s (second year running, one of only two clubs in the country to do this). Cheltenham Senior Men entered the Nordic League, finishing 3rd in their first weekend and progressing to the Cup level of the tournament. Bristol Men had a strong first half, joining Cheltenham Spartans in Championship 2. Bristol Women were undefeated in the Conference League at the halfway stage. JS verbally reiterated the difficulty of integrating trials and training sessions but confirmed county activity remains strong, targeting younger players.

7. Diversity and Inclusivity Updates

MC reported that Swim England is actively recruiting more female referees. ST noted the positive presence of three young female referees at the recent competition, highlighting the benefit of such tournaments for exposure and experience. LB confirmed that although the SE Head of Diversity has left, she remains available to answer questions and provide information on diversity and inclusivity.

8. Finance (Jim Robinson)

JR reported that the financial position remains stable, with only routine income and expenses. The 2026 budget has been submitted and is balanced to within £30 of a loss, receiving positive feedback from the Board on its quality and balance.

| Decision | The 2026 Water Polo budget was informally confirmed as accepted by the Board. |

9. Presentation on the Future of Water Polo

CC (Head of Development/Aquatics Clubs) and RB (Head of Performance) presented on the new Swim England strategy, focusing on **Stronger Clubs** and **Success on the World Stage**.

Key Challenges Highlighted:

- Lack of clarity and duplication between performance and development pathways.
- Lack of quality coaching time and developed coaches.
- Significant decline in numbers at the grassroots (ages 8-10).

Proposed Future Model:

- A shift from a narrow-based pyramid to a **much broader base** focusing on participation and skills development through clubs.
- The **Performance Pathway** will be rebranded from **Talent Centres to Development Centres** to reduce pressure and promote later development in the sport.
- The proposal suggests the Development Centres, which will merge the current Regional Academy and Talent Centre functions, could be **regionally administered** with central SE support.

Discussion Points:

- **SW Feedback:** ST and NH expressed strong support for the Development Centre model to eliminate clashes and improve coaching quality.
- **Participation:** JS stressed the need to support participation at the 8-10 age group and better engage swim programme coaches. CC acknowledged this, suggesting fun, less-structured activities (e.g., Club Links) and working with pool operators to be more flexible (as NH suggested, using split pools).
- **Coach/Official Development:** MC requested SE move referee courses back online, noting that classroom-based courses yield significantly lower attendance (40 online vs eight in-person). CC agreed to investigate this resistance.
- **Next Steps:** CC requested continued engagement with the region to build a bespoke SW Water Polo Development Plan, driven by local needs, and encouraged all clubs to complete the **Club Health Tracker** survey to provide essential data.

10. Competition Review by Swim England

LB noted that the competition review is ongoing and is likely to result in changes only in 2027. All members were strongly encouraged to submit their feedback via SurveyMonkey.

11. British Water Polo League Statement on Young Players

The statement regarding young players in senior teams was discussed. **Note:** The document was not circulated beforehand; MC re-sent it to all attendees.

- **Summary:** The guidance focuses on placing the **onus of responsibility and dynamic risk assessment on coaches** when selecting younger players (e.g., 14-year-olds) for senior fixtures, considering physical and psychological readiness, and exposure to inappropriate language.
- **Discussion:** BP asked if there was a minimum age limit, which ST confirmed is not black and white, making the coach's discretion vital. CC reminded the committee to check the relevant sections of **Wavepower** (specifically regarding mixing U18 and O18 players).

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Deadline
01/12/25/01	LB to review the BWPL statement on young players in senior teams and provide feedback to MC.	LB	Next Meeting
01/12/25/02	MC to check the Swim England general competition rules regarding player eligibility (home address vs. primary club) for Inter-County selection to ensure consistency across disciplines.	MC	Next Meeting

12. Updates from SESWR Head Coaches (NH and JS)

Girls (NH, SW, BB)

- **Recent Performance (U14s, Walsall):** The girls placed 4th, narrowly losing the bronze medal match by one goal. Team cohesion and performance significantly improved from Game 1 to Game 4, but SW noted a clear lack of match practice beforehand due to scheduling conflicts. Edith Clarke was the MVP of the tournament.
- **Discussion/Action:** JS, NH, and SW noted the need to select teams earlier to allow for 1-2 dedicated training sessions before major competitions.

Boys (JS)

- JS echoed the concerns regarding the lack of dedicated practice time before competition.

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Deadline
01/12/25/03	Coaching teams (NH, SW, JS, etc.) to collaborate and develop a 2026 plan to maximise the 4-hour RTC pool time (e.g., using one pod for scrimmaging for selected teams, one for general development) and introduce dedicated match practice for Inter-Region teams.	Coaches (NH, JS, SW)	Next Meeting

13. 2025 SESWR Inter-County Championships (Sept 13th)

- **U11S:** The trial inclusion of U11S was deemed a great success and should be retained.
- **Format:** The age groups for 2026 will be U11s, U13s (mixed), U15s (single sex), and U17s (single sex). Senior men's/ladies' teams were removed to focus on the development pathway.
- **Medals:** The committee agreed to introduce bronze medals for 3rd place for all categories.
- **Eligibility:** The committee agreed to clamp down on "medal chasing" players who play for counties outside their primary club/geographic area, pending MC's review of SE rules (Action 01/12/25/02). The principle of supporting counties (such as Cornwall) with low numbers through case-by-case co-operation remains.

14. SESWR Regional Academy (RTC 2026)

Decision	The committee unanimously approved moving to a Pay-As-You-Go system for the 2026 RTC sessions (costing £18 per session), replacing the upfront payment model. This change is welcome due to scheduling conflicts and the availability of the new cash payment system.
-----------------	---

15. Officials & Coaches Training Courses

MC noted that the Table Officials course prototype has been completed (and required MC to suggest improvements to clarity). Existing coaching courses are being paused and updated by Swim England, with new classes expected to launch in September 2026. MC will hold fire on referee courses pending the outcome of the push to move the theory component online.

16. Any Other Business (AOB)

- **GB Training Clashes:** SW noted that the January 10th and February 14th RTC dates clash with GB training, meaning the girls' team will only need 2 hours of pool time on those dates. JS noted the boys' session could utilise the remaining pool time.

17. Dates of Next Meeting

- Monday, February 2nd, 2026 (6:30 PM)
- Monday, June 1st, 2026
- Monday, September 7th, 2026
- Monday, December 7th, 2026

The Chair thanked all attendees for their time and contribution.

Draft Minutes