

Club Guide to introducing Open Water (OW) Training

Open water is becoming more popular, lots of people are talking about it and as a nation we have had some success all the way up to Olympic events, but in order to grow this success we need clubs to take the plunge and provide ow sessions for their swimmers. Swimming in the great outdoors can be an unnerving thought and organising an open water training session can be even more daunting.

This guide to Open Water swimming offers some practical pointers to help you incorporate open water training into your programme, safeguard against incidents and minimise the inherent risk the sport brings.

Why start OW training?

OW swimming is increasing in popularity across the country which has resulted in more venues opening, and more opportunities to take part in mass participation events as well as Swim England competitions. The benefits of introducing OW to your club and members could include:

- Help long distance swimmers onto the ow talent pathway
- Retain or increase club membership through an additional discipline
- It can be used as a potential revenue stream for swimmers who would like coaching but are not already in a club.
- Swimmers of all ages have the potential to be good open water competitors
- To help swimmers who want to enter open water events do so safely and with confidence
- Offer something different for your swimmers and add variety to training
- Ability to help swimmers train for Regional/National OW Championships
- You lack pool time and using open water can increase the amount of training on offer to your long distance swimmers.
- Give Masters or triathletes the opportunity to have a coached open water session

Getting started

There are two main options available:

1. Find a venue which already offers open water swimming and 'hire' the venue & coach
2. Ensure you have a suitably qualified coach and run your own club sessions at an open water venue

For either option you may want to think about the following:

Find a venue by searching your local area for organised open water swimming. If you would like help to do this please contact your local Club Development Officer via your regional office.
Discuss your needs with a venue and possible options e.g. opening times, services on offer, facilities available.
Check the venue has a NOP & EAP (the venue may call these documents by another name but you should ask how they run their sessions safely and what they do in an emergency)
Check the venue has regular water testing in place and the results are within safe limits
Ask the venue if they have any water quality issues e.g. lots of run off from fields or weeds which may stop a session in the future.
Check the venue or your coach has either a level 2 triathlon coaching qualification or a Swim England Level 2 qualification in Open Water
Arrange the session details and agree a contract if needed (ensure you are clear who will provide the required safety personnel and craft)
Ensure parents/guardians (or swimmer if over 18yrs) are aware of the extra risks associated with OW swimming and give consent for participation
Complete your own risk assessment for the activity (remember whilst at the venue you need to ensure you continue to follow your own procedures and practices).
Ensure you are clear what you expect your swimmers to achieve and they have all the necessary information e.g. do they need wetsuits, what are the changing facilities like, warm clothing and fluids are available.

[For more information on well run and accredited venues see www.sh2out.org](http://www.sh2out.org)

For more details and supporting information about running sessions/events please refer to the Management of Open Water Swimming Events a copy of which can be obtained by emailing facilities@swimming.org

Insurance

Swim England membership insurance will cover all swimmers who are taking part in open water swimming as a club activity if the coach is suitably qualified and a risk assessment has been completed. Coaches must have either their own insurance (e.g. IOS membership) or be a member of their club in the same way as they would in the pool. Ultimately it is the coach's responsibility to ensure all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise the risks to swimmers. If a club is going to take swimmers in to open water swimming regularly they MUST inform their regional office. The office will then add open water as a discipline to the clubs list of disciplines.

What are the extra risks for OW swimming?

- Water & air temperature – the water will be much colder than the pool and cold air will make this more noticeable. The venue should be able to give you historical information on water temperatures and times of year. In general the OW season runs from the beginning of May until the end of Sept and you should also watch out for overheating and sunburn.
- Weather conditions – you may have to cancel sessions due to adverse weather conditions e.g. thunder storms, very heavy rain, fog, high winds
- Bigger swimming area – the swimmers may be out of sight of the coach at times but safety personnel should be available to minimise the risks
- Deep water – Less able swimmers need to understand and be able to cope with swimming out of your depth for long periods. It's also worth noting deeper water tends to be cold (although shallow water can have more weed growth)
- Fear of the unknown – This could include dark water, being touched by weeds and fish, and being in a very different environment from the pool. It's important to wear a well fitted wetsuit and for swimmers to understand it will feel different. Often swimmers need time to adjust to swimming in wetsuits over a period of sessions
- Water quality – if you have checked the water quality with your venue then the risks of swimmers becoming ill should be minimised however when swimming outdoors this can never be eliminated completely.

Competitions

- Swim England Regional OW Championships – please see your regional websites
- [Swim England National OW champ](#)
- Privately organised events e.g [The Great Swim](#), [Swim Serpentine](#)

Further guidance

Please email your local Club Development Officer for any of the following:

Swim Mark Guide for Open Water Clubs

Swim England FAQs for swimmers new to open water

Swim England FAQs to competing in open water (Masters)

Please also see [Swim England website](#) for more information on open water swimming