Swimming Competition Framework & Pathway

This document combines and replaces the previous Competition Pathway and Domestic Competition Plan Notes documents. It should be read alongside the 2026-2027 Domestic Season Plan and the published meet conditions for each competition. **Where there is any inconsistency, the relevant published meet conditions shall take precedence.**

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Swimming Competition Framework & Pathway

Purpose

This document sets out Swim Ireland's domestic swimming competition framework and pathway. It explains how athletes progress from early participation-focused galas through development level meets, regional competition and national championship opportunities.

This framework is intended to provide a single, clear source of information for athletes, parents, coaches, clubs, Regions, meet managers, officials and Swim Ireland staff. It aims to:

- support age-appropriate progression through the domestic competition system;
- clarify the purpose and intended athlete experience at each level of competition;
- define common entry terminology, including qualifying times, consideration times and upper cut-off times;
- set out age classification and progression principles;
- support consistency across clubs and Regions while allowing appropriate flexibility for local delivery; and
- align domestic competition with regional, national and international performance objectives.

Competition Pathway Overview

The Swim Ireland swimming competition pathway is designed as a progressive development model. Athletes should experience competition in a way that supports enjoyment, skill development, racing confidence and appropriate performance progression.

Pathway Stage	Typical Age	Competition Type	Primary Purpose
Introduction	7+	Intra-Club Galas	Fun, participation and introduction to racing
Participation	8+	Inter-Club Galas	Team connection, relays and early racing experience
Participation	8/9+	Regional & National Schools	School competition to encourage fun and participation
Development	9+	Club Invitational/Open Meets	Skill development, entry-level times and preparation for regional series
Emerging	10-14	Regional Future Challenger Series	Regional development competition for younger athletes
Developing Performance	13+	Regional Aspiring Champions Series	Preparation for regional and national championship environments
Masters	19yrs+	Irish Masters Meets/Club Master Meets	Swimming opportunities for Adult swimmers
Regional Championship	12+ / 13+	Regional Championships	Championship racing and qualification route to national competitions
National Championship	12+ / 13+	National Meets and Championships	Domestic championship environment and progression to international benchmarking/selection opportunities

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COMPETITION PATHWAY

Consideration Standards are not usually published for these competitions however entries may be restricted. Please refer to the Meet Conditions for full information.

- Regional Schools * — from 8/9 years
- Inter club — (multiple clubs) from 8 years
- Future Challengers — 10 - 14 years
- Aspiring Champions Series — from 13 years
- Irish Schools * — from 8/9 years
- Club Open Meet — (multiple clubs) from 9 years
- Regional Swim Festival — from 10 years
- Irish Master Meet — (SC & LC) from 19 years +

The Irish Minor Schools has qualifying times that have to be achieved via the Regional Schools.

* Swimmers do not need to be a Swim Ireland member to enter.

Only swimmers who do not qualify for the Irish Summer National Age Group Championships (50m) may compete in this event.

Qualifying and Consideration Standards are published for these competitions. Please refer to the Meet Conditions for full information.

- Regional Short Course Championships — from 13 years
- Regional Age Group & Senior Championships — from 12 years

Disabled swimmers registered with a Swim Ireland club who meet the relevant eligibility criteria for Multi-Class swimming may enter Regional Championships on a provisional classification basis under the Disability Entry Qualification Standards.

- Irish Winter National Championships (25m) — from 13 years
- McCullagh International Meet — from 13 years
- Irish Summer National Age Group Championships (50m) — 12-14 years
- Irish Summer National Youth & Senior Championships (50m) — 15 years & over
- Irish Open Championships — from 13 years

DISABILITY PATHWAY

Disabled swimmers registered with a Swim Ireland club may enter these meets under the guidance of their coach. Clubs should notify the meet organisers of the athlete's disability.

Swimmers registered with a Swim Ireland club who are members of Paralympics Ireland, Deaf Sport Ireland, or the Irish Down Syndrome Association, are required to have a national classification to enter these competitions. Qualification standards will be established by Swim Ireland with support from relevant Governing Bodies

ATHLETE PROGRESSION

Season: 31st August 2026 to 31st August 2027

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General Principles, Definitions and Policies

Membership and Eligibility

All Swim Ireland competitions are open to Swim Ireland registered members, subject to the relevant qualification criteria and meet conditions. At National Meets, specific qualification criteria are available for athletes with disabilities. Clubs and Regions should make reasonable adjustments to support the inclusion of athletes with disabilities at their meets.

In all cases, coaches should ensure that athletes meet an appropriate standard before entering any competition.

Age Classification

Unless otherwise stated in the published meet conditions, athletes' ages will be defined as their age on 31st December in the year of competition. For example, an athlete born in 2014 will compete as a 12-year-old during 2026 and as a 13-year-old during 2027.

Schools' competitions use age on 31st August of the school year.

Inter-club and intra-club galas may use age on the day or year of birth, where this is stated in the meet information.

Galas, Meets and Championships

Term	Definition	Typical Emphasis
Gala	An introductory or participation-focused competition, often club or team based.	Fun, team connection, relays and early racing experience.
Meet	A licensed or sanctioned competition where athletes compete for times and/or finishing positions.	Individual and relay performance, with results often used for progression.
Championship	A qualification-led competition at regional or national level.	Performance, finals, medals and qualification to subsequent events.

Time Standards and Entry Criteria

Term	Meaning
Qualifying Time	Where a meet has qualifying times, athletes who have achieved the published standard within the stated qualification window and conditions will be accepted into that event.
Consideration Time	Where a meet has consideration times, athletes who have achieved the published standard will be considered for entry. Meet managers may apply cut-offs based on entries and session timelines.
Upper Cut-Off Time	Where a meet has upper cut-off times, athletes must be slower than the designated time to be accepted into the event.
No Standard	Where no time standard is required, entry is subject to age, membership, licensing and any meet-specific conditions.

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Swim Ireland Tech Suit Policy

Athletes aged 12 years and younger, with age defined by each meet's entry conditions, are not permitted to compete in a tech suit at any swimming competition that falls under the jurisdiction of Swim Ireland, including Swim Ireland licensed or sanctioned meets on the island of Ireland.

The following wording must be included in meet conditions or meet information for competitions in Ireland:

"Athletes aged 12 years and younger (age as defined in the meet conditions) will not be permitted to compete at this meet in a tech suit. A tech suit is defined as a suit manufactured with the following 4 elements – water repellent fabric, compressive material, taped or bonded seams, and leg grippers. Athletes aged 12 years and under will be disqualified if officials observe such an athlete competing in a tech suit."

The full policy is available here.

Conduct and Respect

All athletes, coaches, team managers and officials must agree to and always comply with the Swim Ireland Code of Conduct. All participants must be treated with respect. Any breach of the Code will be subject to appropriate action.

Offshore Meets and Qualification

Clubs attending offshore meets may nominate these meets for qualification for Irish National Meets. Approval must be sought from Swim Ireland before travel and electronic results must be submitted after the meet.

Irish athletes training offshore should send competition results to their home club for inclusion on their results database and be prepared to provide copies of the results to Swim Ireland on request.

Qualification for each meet will be determined by its published meet conditions.

Conversion times (SCM to LCM and LCM to SCM)

Where meet conditions permit LCM to SCM or SCM to LCM conversions, the approved conversion method specified in those meet conditions must be used. No other methods will be accepted.

Seasonal Competition Framework

The 2026-2027 swimming season is defined as the period 31st August 2026 to 31st August 2027.

Short Course Season – 31st August 2026 to 20th December 2026.

- All events should be competed in short course pools only during this period
- Regional culmination: Regional SC Championships
- National culmination: Irish Winter National Championships (25m)
- International culmination: World Aquatics Championships (25m)

Long Course Season – 1st January 2027 to 31st August 2027.

- Events should be competed, as far as possible, in long course pools during this period.
- Regional culmination: Regional Age Group & Senior LC Championships.
- National culmination: Irish Open Championships in the first training cycle and Irish Summer National Championships in the second training cycle.

Season: 31st August 2026 to 31st August 2027

- International culmination: Irish Open Championships for senior athletes in the first training cycle and the benchmark summer international meet in the second training cycle. In 2026-2027, this is the World Aquatics Swimming Championships (50m) for senior athletes and the European Aquatics Junior Swimming Championships for junior athletes.

Competition Progression Model

The competition structure should provide a progressive experience for athletes: early-stage participation and team connection through galas; skill development and entry-level racing through club meets; regional progression through the Future Challenger and Aspiring Champions Series; and qualification-led championship opportunities at regional and national level.

Competition	Minimum Age	Entry Standard	Can Times Be Used for Progression?	Primary Progression Route
Intra-Club Gala	7+	None	No	Inter-Club Gala / Club Meet
Inter-Club Gala	8+	None	No	Club Invitational/Open Meet
Regional Minor Schools	8/9 to 11/12	Consideration Times may apply	Yes	Irish Minor Schools Championships
Regional Senior Schools	12/13+	Consideration Times may apply	Yes	Schools Interprovincial
Irish Minor Schools Championship	8/9+	Qualification Times	Limited; see meet conditions	Club Invitational/Open Meets and Regional Future Challenger Series
Schools Interprovincial	12/13 to 17/18	Selection	Yes	Regional and National Meets and Championships
Club Invitational/Open Meet	9+	Consideration Times may apply	Yes, subject to license and meet conditions	Regional and National Meets and Championships
Future Challenger Series	10-14	Consideration Times may apply	Limited; see meet conditions	Regional Age Group & Senior LC Championships
Aspiring Champions Series	13+	Consideration Times may apply	Yes, subject to qualification window and pool format	Regional and National Championships
Masters Meet	19+	Consideration Times may apply	Yes, subject to license and meet conditions	Regional and National Meets and Championships
Regional Championships	12+ / 13+	Qualifying and/or Consideration Times	Yes	National Championships
National Championships	12+ / 13+	Qualifying and/or Consideration Times	Meet specific	International Team selection

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Competition Specifications

Intra-Club Galas

Area	Specification
Purpose	Introduction to competition within one club, with athletes competing with and against members of their own club. The emphasis should be on fun, participation and confidence-building
Age	7 years and over, based on age on the day or year of birth where stated
Entry / Qualification	No qualification standard
Format	May include individual events and relays. Recognition should normally focus on participation, such as ribbons, certificates or similar
Progression	Inter-club galas and club-level meets

Inter-Club Galas

Area	Specification
Purpose	Introductory team-based competition involving athletes from more than one club. The emphasis should be on fun, team connection and early racing experience
Age	8 years and over
Entry / Qualification	No qualification standard
Format	Athletes race for team points rather than individual awards. Awards should recognise overall club or team outcomes and/or participation
Progression	Club Invitational/Open Meet

Club Invitational/Open Meets

Area	Specification
Purpose	Club-delivered invitational or open meets used primarily to support entry into the Future Challenger Series and/or Aspiring Champions Series, while also providing opportunities to qualify for Regional Championships and National Meets where licence conditions are met
Age	9 years and over
Entry / Qualification	Consideration Times may apply to help clubs manage session timelines and meet duration
Format	Licensed/sanctioned club competition. Times may be used for progression where they meet the relevant licence conditions, qualification period and required pool format
Progression	Future Challenger Series, Aspiring Champions Series, Regional Championships and National Meets, subject to meet conditions

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Regional Meets and Championships

Regional Minor Schools

Area	Specification
Purpose	School-based competition delivered within each Region providing a qualification route to the Irish Minor Schools Championships
Age	8/9 to 11/12 years (age on 31st August 2027)
Entry / Qualification	Entry criteria are set out in the published meet conditions
Format	Delivered as a one-day competition in each Region
Progression	Irish Minor Schools Championships

Regional Senior Schools

Area	Specification
Purpose	School-based competition delivered within each Region providing an opportunity for athletes to be considered for selection to represent their Region at the Schools Interprovincial.
Age	12/13 to 17/18 years (age on 31st August 2027)
Entry / Qualification	Entry criteria are set out in the published meet conditions
Format	Delivered as a one-day competition in each Region
Progression	Schools Interprovincial via the published Selection Policy

Regional Future Challenger Series

Area	Specification
Purpose	Regional development competition providing progression from club-level competition towards regional championship opportunities
Age	10 to 14 years
Entry / Qualification	Consideration Times are required to enter the 200m Breaststroke and 400m Freestyle (see meet information). Regions may publish Consideration Times for other events
Format	Delivered in two rounds with two meets per round, giving four meets in total. Regions may split clubs across venues and may adjust event order while following the provided meet format
Progression	Times achieved by athletes aged 12 years only in 200m Freestyle, 100m Backstroke, 100m Breaststroke and 100m Butterfly may be used to enter all available events in the corresponding stroke at Regional Age Group & Senior LC Championships, provided they are within the qualification period
Additional Notes	Athletes aged 13/14 years may only compete if they are new to competitive swimming and have not previously participated in the Aspiring Champions Series or higher-level meets. Athletes cannot compete in the Future Challenger Series and Aspiring Champions Series in the same cycle i.e. the short course (September to December) or long course season (January to July). Times achieved at Future Challenger meets cannot be used to enter the Irish Summer National Age Group Championships

Regional Aspiring Champions Series

Area	Specification
Purpose	Regional development performance competition preparing athletes for regional and national championship environments
Age	13 years and over
Entry / Qualification	Consideration Times may be used to support athlete development, manage athlete and parent expectations and manage meet timelines. Club time-trial results, signed off by the Head Coach, may be accepted for entry
Format	Delivered as two two-day meets: one short course meet in October and one long course meet in February or March. Regions may adjust event order while following the provided meet format
Progression	Times achieved may be used for Regional and National Championship events where they fall within the relevant qualification window and required pool format
Additional Notes	Any meet may be utilised for entry, and LCM/SCM conversions may be accepted. Regions may limit entries per athlete and/or relay entries per club. Regions may accept entries from outside Ireland, but Irish clubs/athletes may only compete in their own Aspiring Champions Series

Masters Meets

Area	Specification
Purpose	National or Club-delivered invitational or open meets used primarily to provide opportunities for Adult swimmers to compete with their peer groups. to qualify for Regional Championships and National Meets where licence conditions are met
Age	19 years and over
Entry / Qualification	Consideration Times may apply to help clubs/organinsers manage session timelines and meet duration
Format	Delivered as one or two day events.
Progression	Times achieved at Masters competitions can generally be used as entry times for Club Inter/Intra Meets, Invitational/Open Meets and Aspiring Champions Series competitions, subject to the relevant Meet Conditions. These may include qualification windows, specific Meet Licensing Level requirements (with times achieved at the required Licensed Meet level or higher), and other special requirements. Refer to the Meet Specific Event Guides for full details. The **Irish Masters Open SC Championships** and **Irish Masters LC International Open Meets** are both Level 3 licensed meets. Times achieved at these meets may be used for Regional and National Championship events where they fall within the relevant qualification window and required pool format
Additional Notes	Masters Swimming Clubs may also apply for a Level 1, 2 or 3 Meet Licence where they wish times achieved at their Meet to be recognised for qualification purposes at other meets.

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Regional SC Championships

Area	Specification
Purpose	Regional short course championship and progression route to Irish Winter National Championships (25m) and McCullagh International Meet
Age	Minimum 12 years. Age groups for meet qualification purposes: 12-16, 17/18, 19 & over.
Entry / Qualification	Qualifying and consideration times as per Meet Conditions
Format	Two, two-and-a-half or three-day competition. Full Olympic programme of individual events plus 100m IM. A Final or A and B Finals for fastest qualifiers irrespective of age. Relays and 800m/1500m are Heat Declared Winner events
Progression	Irish Winter National Championships (25m) and McCullagh International Meet
Additional Notes	Regions may merge if required. Regions may accept entries from outside Ireland, but Irish clubs/athletes may only compete in their own Regional SC Championships.

Regional Age Group & Senior LC Championships

Area	Specification
Purpose	Regional long course championship and progression route to the Irish Summer National Championships
Age	UNDER REVIEW - DETAILS TO BE CONFIRMED BY 31/12/2026
Entry / Qualification	Qualifying and consideration times as per Meet Conditions
Format	Full Olympic programme of individual events. Finals in each age group for all events other than relays and 400m/800m/1500m, which are Heat Declared Winner events. Relay programme includes mixed 200m relays for 12 years and Olympic relay events, mixed and per gender, for 13-14 and 15 & over
Progression	Irish Summer National Age Group Championships (50m) and Irish Summer National Youth & Senior Championships (50m)
Additional Notes	All four Regions shall run the event within the designated window. Regions may merge if required. Irish clubs/athletes may only compete in their own Regional LC Championships unless two or more Regions merge.

Regional End of Season Meet

Area	Specification
Purpose	Meaningful end-of-season competition for athletes who do not achieve entry into the Irish Summer National Championships
Age	As defined by each Region
Entry / Qualification	As defined by the Regional Coaching Advisory Group and meet conditions
Format	One- or two-day competition. Schedule of events set by the Regional Coaching Advisory Group
Progression	End-of-season competition opportunity
Additional Notes	This event supports continued engagement and meaningful competition beyond the championship qualification pathway

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National Meets and Championships

Irish Minor Schools Championships

Area	Specification
Purpose	National level opportunity for athletes to represent their schools
Age	8/9 to 11/12 years
Entry / Qualification	Qualification times to be achieved at the Regional Minor Schools competitions
Format	Delivered as a one-day competition
Progression	Times achieved can be used for entry to Club Invitational/Open Meets and Regional Future Challenger Series

Irish Winter National Championships (25m)

Area	Specification
Purpose	National culmination of the short course season
Age	Minimum 13 years. Age groups for meet qualification purposes: 13-16, 17/18, 19 & over
Entry / Qualification	Qualifying times as per Meet Conditions Qualification window: 07/12/25 to 22/11/26
Format	Three-day competition. Full Olympic programme of individual events plus 100m IM. Single gender 200m freestyle and medley relays; mixed gender 200m freestyle and medley relays. Finals as per meet conditions for 50m, 100m, 200m and 400m individual events. Relays and 800m/1500m are Heat Declared Winner events
Progression	National short course championship outcomes

McCullagh International Meet (50m)

Area	Specification
Purpose	National/international long course competition and national relay title opportunity
Age	Age groups for meet qualification purposes: 13/14, 15/16, 17/18, 19 & over
Entry / Qualification	Qualifying times as per Meet Conditions Qualification window: 07/07/26 to 24/01/27
Format	Three-day competition. Full Olympic programme of individual events. Age Group athletes aged 13/14 may qualify for 50m events via the 100m/200m event in the corresponding stroke. Olympic relay events per gender and mixed are classed as the National Relay Titles for 2026. Relays and 800m/1500m are Heat Declared Winner events
Progression	Irish Open Championships and Irish Summer Nationals

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Irish Open Championships (50m)

Area	Specification
Purpose	Irish Trials for international selections and national long course championship opportunity in the first long course training cycle
Age	Minimum 13 years. Age groups for meet qualification purposes: 13-16, 17/18, 19 & over
Entry / Qualification	Qualifying times as per Meet Conditions Qualification window: 07/07/26 to 07/03/27
Format	Five-day competition. Full Olympic programme of individual events. Finals as per meet conditions for 50m, 100m, 200m and 400m individual events. 800m/1500m events are Heat Declared Winner events
Progression	International team selection

Irish Summer National Age Group Championships (50m)

Area	Specification
Purpose	National long course championship for age group athletes
Age	Minimum 12 years. Age groups for qualification and medal purposes: 12, 13 and 14 years
Entry / Qualification	Qualifying and consideration times as per Meet Conditions Qualification window: 01/01/27 to 06/06/27
Format	Four-day long course competition. Full Olympic programme of individual events. Mixed 200m medley and freestyle relays for athletes aged 12. Olympic relay events, mixed and per gender, for 13/14 years. Finals as per meet conditions for 50m, 100m, 200m and 400m individual events. Relays and 800m/1500m are Heat Declared Winner events
Additional Notes	Eligibility for Irish medals UNDER REVIEW - DETAILS TO BE CONFIRMED BY 31/12/2026

Irish Summer National Youth & Senior Championships (50m)

Area	Specification
Purpose	National long course championship for youth and senior athletes
Age	Minimum 15 years. Age groups for qualification and medal purposes UNDER REVIEW - DETAILS TO BE CONFIRMED BY 31/12/2026
Entry / Qualification	Qualifying and consideration times as per Meet Conditions Qualification window: 01/01/27 to 06/06/27
Format	Five-day competition. Full Olympic programme of individual events. Olympic relay events for 15 years and over. Finals as per meet conditions for 50m, 100m, 200m and 400m individual events. Relays and 800m/1500m are Heat Declared Winner events
Additional Notes	Eligibility for Irish medals UNDER REVIEW - DETAILS TO BE CONFIRMED BY 31/12/2026

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National Centre Full Time Athlete and National Team Athlete Provisions

The following provisions apply only to Full Time National Centre athletes and National Team athletes:

- On an individual basis, Full Time National Centre athletes may enter Regional Championships either in the Region where their National Centre is based, or in the Region of their home club.
- National Team athletes may request permission to swim in a Region other than their home Region where this supports their preparation for an Irish National Team.
- Permission to swim in a Region other than the athlete's home Region must be approved by the National Performance Director.
- Where an athlete competes in a Regional Championships outside their home Region, they may compete in heats and/or finals but will not be eligible to win medals in that Region.
- These athletes may compete in only one Region's Championships during the short course season and one Region's Championships during the long course season. The Region selected for the long course season may differ from the Region selected for the short course season.

Governance and Responsibilities

Area	Responsible Body / Lead	Notes
Domestic Season Plan	Swim Ireland	Sets competition windows and calendar structure
National Championship Programmes	Swim Ireland Performance and Competitions Team, in consultation with Performance Advisory Group	Required programme of events for National Championships
Regional Championship Programmes	Swim Ireland Performance Team, in consultation with Regional Performance Advisory Group	Required programme of events for Regional Championship Meets
Future Challenger and Aspiring Champions Programmes	Swim Ireland Performance Team, in consultation with Regional Performance Advisory Group	Regions may adjust event order to meet operational needs
National Qualifying Times	Swim Ireland Performance and Competitions Team, in consultation with Performance Advisory Group	Applies to National Championships
Regional Qualifying/Consideration Times	Regional Performance Advisory Group	Based on athlete demographics and regional delivery requirements
Regional/National Disability Programme	Swim Ireland in consultation with Relevant bodies and/or Groups	Applies to National & Regional Meets
Offshore Meet Approval	Swim Ireland	Approval must be sought before travel where offshore meets are to be used for qualification
Meet Conditions	Relevant meet organiser, aligned to Swim Ireland requirements	Published meet conditions take precedence where additional detail is required