

Dear Devon Parent, Swimmer, Volunteer,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Peter Boulton and I am one of the Referees you may have seen working poolside at Devon-based swimming galas. I now have the responsibility of arranging training for new officials in Devon.

Have you ever wondered what it takes to become a swimming official, one of those largely anonymous people, usually dressed in white, who stand around the pool at swimming galas trying to look important?

Galas can't take place without technical officials like timekeepers and judges but you'd be perhaps surprised at just how many officials are needed to ensure the swimmers get the result and time they deserve and to ensure that there is fair play for all.

Firstly you need at least one timekeeper for each lane, even when electronic timing is in operation. Timekeepers also perform turn judging (Inspector of Turns) at the starting end of the pool these days. In the new hierarchy of swimming officialdom this role has the title "Judge Level 1" or "J1" and represents the first stage of qualification.

J1s not only get to record times for the swimmers in their lane using their watches (and split times in longer events) and check that swimmers perform turns correctly, but also to check that they have the correct swimmer in their lane according to the programme, and to operate the electronic timing backup finish button, and turn the lap cards in 800m and 1500m events to let swimmers know how many lengths remain and to blow a whistle when there are 2 lengths left. They also judge relay take-overs to spot false starts. J1s can also act as turn judges at the non-starting end of the pool, sometimes one per lane but usually one each side of the pool, or as Chief Inspector of Turns, helping to pass disqualification reports to the referee, or as Chief Timekeeper.

Once they've mastered J1, the next level for officials is "Judge Level 2" or "J2".

This expands the J1 role to include judging the finishing order of the race and checking swimmers are using strokes that comply with all the rules for the event. Usually each gala needs two judges of finish and two judges of stroke to cover both sides of the pool. In 50m pools more stroke judges are often used.

After J2, officials can progress to become race starter (J2S) and ultimately Referee, for which two or three are needed at most galas.

All officials get a prime viewing position for the swimming! What's more, you get to represent your club at important competitions.

We are almost always short of qualified officials and rely heavily on a small band of dedicated individuals. Would you be interested in becoming an official and easing the burden just a little? If so, and if you are over 16, I'd like to hear from you; use the contact information at the bottom of this letter. Contact me also if you are already an official and want to reach a higher grade.

Training for J1 requires you first to attend a seminar, that we hold as required, at which you will be taught how to use a stopwatch and back-up buttons and lap cards as well as how to calculate times when there are more than one timekeeper per lane. You'll also be taught how to judge turns and relay takeovers. Then there are about 9 hours of poolside duty, spread over many weeks, working alongside experienced officials and learning from them. Finally there's an assessment based on you answering some written questions (not really an exam) and a review of your poolside work. All your training is recorded in a workbook, which is available on-line at:

<http://www.swimming.org/library/document/workbook-for-judges-level-1>

J2 follows a similar pattern, whilst adding Starter and becoming a Referee is slightly more specialised. It can take up to 4 years or more to reach Referee status but we need officials at all levels and you can stop at whichever level you feel comfortable with. However, you shouldn't undertake the training unless you really can make the commitment to attend galas (at your expense) and complete the programme for that particular level. At licensed Open Meets and County Championships you can expect to reclaim your travel expenses once qualified.

In order to be trained and registered you MUST be, or become, a full member of your swimming club and registered with the ASA, with a registration number. If you are not a competitive swimmer ASA registration costs £6.20, including ASASW and Devon County dues. This can be done quite quickly using email by your club's registration secretary. The cost for J1 training is £8, payable by cheque to the ASA. Some clubs will pay this for you as you are often seen as a valuable asset, such as when the Arena League comes around.

Once you are qualified, you will be encouraged to become a licensed member of the Institute of Swimming (IoS), a semi-professional body that represents not only officials but also coaches and teachers. From 2010, all licenced Level 1 and 2 Open Meets must use licensed officials. In return for the license fee you receive a record of duties folder, a picture identity card, and notification of continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities as well as newsletters that keep you up-to-date.

The upcoming 2010 Devon County competitions offer a great opportunity to undergo training and we hope to run a seminar for new J1 officials in early February.

By volunteering you provide an invaluable service, you are much appreciated (honestly!), you give a lot back to swimming and you get to meet like-minded and similarly dedicated people in a rewarding setting.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Peter Boulton

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Text to: 07715 420475

Email: peteboulton@btopenworld.com