



Competitive Swimming

A guide for swimmers and parents



Introduction

Dove Valley is a competitive swimming club and we encourage children to compete as it is a key way to develop faster and more efficient swimming. If you are new to competitive swimming, this guide has been designed to help you along your way and to give you an insight into the different types of competition available to you. It may look a bit daunting at first, but don't worry; your coaches and fellow club members are here to help you. More of this information will become relevant as you progress on your swimming journey.

Swim Club Manager

This is the app we use to manage most club admin. On there you will find details of your subscription payments, the weekly chairman's newsletter, times of recent swims and personal best times and it is also used to send out invites to certain training sessions and galas. You will have been sent an invitation to download the app and sign up when you joined the club – please do make sure that you do this and check it regularly for notifications. It is possible to set it up so that any invites or messages sent to your SCM account are forwarded directly to your email address. This makes it easier to keep up to date with notifications.

Galas

Going to your first gala can sometimes feel daunting. If you are new to competing, the following information should help you to prepare.

What should I bring to a gala?

- Plenty of drinks (not fizzy) and healthy snacks (NO NUTS as we have at least one swimmer with a serious nut allergy). You will not need meals except during all day competitions.
- Dove Valley club costume, plus a spare
- Dove Valley swimming hat, plus a spare
- Goggles, plus spare
- A couple of towels
- Club T-shirt to keep you warm between races
- Clean pool shoes (eg flip flops) to wear around poolside (optional)
- Something to keep you occupied during long competitions eg playing cards, top trumps
- Phones are NOT allowed poolside or in the changing rooms both at training and galas

The Club shop is open at Monday training sessions to purchase club swimsuits and general swimming requirements. Katy Faulkner can be contacted on dvascshop@gmail.com Alternatively, for club T-shirts, hoodies, bobble hats, bags etc, please order direct from Tailored Branding at <https://tailoredbranding.shop/Dove-Valley-Swimming-Club>

What happens on the day?

It's best not to eat a large meal within 2 hours of the competition but do drink plenty of water / hydration drinks throughout the day.

Dove Valley will organise coach transport to some galas, which usually departs from Uttoxeter Leisure Centre. Please allow plenty of time, so that the bus can leave promptly! If you are making your own way to the venue, aim to arrive 10 minutes before the warmup. At some galas, the coaches must submit swimmer's names before the gala starts and so if you are late, your swim may be given to another swimmer. In some cases, if a swimmer has entered an event and does not arrive, the club will also be fined.

Most pools have lockers, and we strongly recommend leaving your bag and clothes in one. A small drawstring bag is useful to take essential items onto poolside. Kit such as fins, floats etc are not needed. You are responsible for your belongings – try not to leave anything behind! It is recommended that all items are named.

During the gala

All swimmers need to sit with the team (not with parents), only leaving poolside if you have received permission from your Team Manager and returning immediately. Race programs usually move fast, and it is easy to miss your race if you are not on poolside. Your coaches will tell you when and how to warm up; never dive at the start of the warm up and always ensure that you are swimming the correct way around your lane!

Your Team Manager will let you know which events you are swimming and when they are coming up and will send you to the start or marshalling area shortly before your race. Please listen to their instructions carefully and follow them as team managers and coaches are often not allowed to go with you to the starting blocks, so it is important that you know what you are doing.

Parents

When you arrive at a gala, you will usually be asked for payment to enter and watch the races, plus a program may be charged for in addition to the entrance fee. It's worth having cash for this as not all clubs have access to card machines. There is often also a raffle.

You are not allowed in the changing rooms or on poolside.

It's advisable to bring a few provisions with you, especially for the longer meets. Some pools have good cafés, but not all! You should also be prepared for a long wait! Often a session can be 2-3 hours long, during which your child may only be in the water for a few minutes – it's not the most glamorous sport for supporters!!

Please ensure that you are available to collect your child when requested by the coaches; for some Team gala's, this will be at the end of the session; for open meets, it is usually as soon as your child has finished their swims. It is also important that you are contactable at all times in case of any medical emergency.

Types of competition

Dove Valley swimmers enter lots of different galas throughout the year. We aim to provide a variety of different opportunities to compete.

Age

The first, slightly confusing, thing to explain is that different galas have different ways of ageing swimmers. For some, it is the swimmer's age on the day of the competition, while for others it may be their age on 31st December of that year. This means that you may end up competing against or being in a team alongside a slightly different group of Dove Valley swimmers at each event.

Licencing

Galas may be unlicensed or licensed. Times from licensed events are eligible to count towards qualification times for events and will be added to the Swim England database. For an event to be licensed, it must be officiated by a specific number of qualified timekeepers, judges and referees. Unlicensed galas do not have to meet these strict criteria and while swimmers will still receive times, they cannot be used as official qualification times for events such as county championships. The times are still very useful to your coaches though, as they can provide an insight into any recent improvements you may have made and help with team selection.

1. Dove Valley Club Championships & Ratings galas

For many swimmers, these friendly events will be their first taste of competitive swimming. Ratings galas are held on Saturday nights, 2-3 times per year, with the club championships usually split over 3 Saturday nights around September / October at U.L.C. The club championships are nearly always run as a licensed event. Ratings galas may be licensed or unlicensed depending on the availability of qualified volunteers on the day.

The events are organised according to a swimmer's ability and previous times, so you may get swimmers from different age groups competing together. This ensures that no-one is competing against swimmers with a vastly different ability and helps to make it less daunting for the newer swimmers. The races are more about beating the clock and trying to improve your personal best (PB) times than trying to beat the swimmer in the next lane (although that is fun too!).

During the club championships, points are awarded for each event with 5,4,3,2,1 points being awarded for 1st to 5th place respectively. The 100m IM is the 'prestige' race and swimmers will receive double points for this one!

There are three age categories:

Junior: up to U10

Intermediate: 11-13 years

Senior: 14 & over

(The 200IM & 400IM are competed for in a single open age group).

Once all the points are added up, medals are awarded in each event for the top three swimmers of every age category (boys and girls), with the overall winner of each age group also getting a trophy to keep for the year. Everyone is invited to the awards presentation night & disco in January, which is a great way for our swimmers to kick off the New Year.

These galas are open to any DV swimmer and invitations are sent via the Swim Club Manager app.

2. Inter-Club galas

These are galas arranged between local clubs by one host club, again taking place on a Saturday afternoon or evening. These galas usually have 4 or 5 age groups (age at the date of the gala or sometimes the series final) with 4 individual events and 2 relays (made up of 4 swimmers) per age group for both boys and girls. Points are awarded for each race (usually 6 for 1st place, 5 for 2nd place etc). The gala is won by the club with the most points at the end of the evening.

Selection for these galas is done by the Dove Valley coaching team, who will ask for availability via a swim club manager request. It is your job to keep on eye on swim club manager and let the coaches know whether you are available to swim or not. Please do this as soon as you are able, as it really helps the coaches to plan the event. The squad is then picked based on availability, recent times, attendance, behaviour and performance at training.

Swimmers will be expected to swim the events that they are chosen for. This will not always be that swimmer's best or favourite stroke, but the decision will have been made to give the team the best overall chance of winning.

3. Leagues

These are very similar in format to inter-club galas but are run between a number of teams that make up a league or a division within a bigger league. They are generally over 3 rounds with trophies awarded to clubs who win their respective league or division. At Dove Valley, we enter The Junior league for our younger swimmers and The County League for swimmers across all age groups. These galas are held in various locations across Staffordshire and the West Midlands from local pool, such as Burton to further afield, such as Redditch.

4. Open Meets

These are slightly different, as although you will be representing your club, you enter to compete as an individual. This means that there is no team selection by the coaches. If you are available and keen to compete, then you are welcome to submit an entry. We suggest that newer and younger swimmers have a chat with their coach to get more information before entering their first open meet.

They are usually run as whole day or weekend events and some have qualifying time criteria to meet before entry. Open meets are structured in a similar way to club championships in that heats are organised according to times submitted on your entry form, rather than your age. This ensures that everyone should be racing against swimmers of similar ability which makes the day much more enjoyable for all. Generally, you have to be at least 9 years old to enter, but a number of meets now group swimmers according to their age on 31st December of that year, which means that 8-year-olds can also sometimes enter.

Awards or medals are usually given to the fastest three swimmers for their age group in each event. Randomly chosen heats may also be designated as 'spot prize' races, in which the winner of that heat will receive a small additional prize.

Entry to open meets is done by completing an entry form or via swim club manager. Open meets get full very quickly, so Dove Valley will try to send entries in early eg entries were submitted in January this year for the COSACCS meet in April. A message is always sent on the Dove Valley

What's app group to inform parents when and how entries for open meets can be sent in. Costs for open meets vary between around £7-£9 per race, so choose your swims wisely! Swimmers are usually unable to enter open meets on their own, without the presence of a DV team manager or coach on poolside.

5. County Championships

The county championships are a big step in a competitive swimmer's career. To compete in them, you will need to have achieved a qualifying time. They are open to swimmers aged 10 and over, with age being the 31st December in the year of competition.

The Staffordshire County Championships are generally held at the start of the year. Qualifying times come out approximately 6 months before and qualifying times must have been swum between 1st April the year before the event up to the beginning of January in the year of the championships. Any times swum at licenced meets are eligible.

County entry forms are available to swimmers in December and there is a tight timeframe to get them in. No late entries are accepted. Invites may be sent to relevant swimmers via Swim Club Manager, but it is worth checking your times to see whether you have qualified and then speaking to your coach.

There are heats and finals for the 50m and 100m events with awards going to the top 8 swimmers.

6. West Midlands Championships

Following the County Championships, the next step is to achieve a qualification time for the West Midlands Regional championships. The 'Winter Championships' takes place over a weekend in November with the main championships following over four weekends in May (two weekends for age group swimmers aged 10-13 and two weekends for youth swimmers aged 14 and over). They are always in a long course (50m) pool either in Sandwell or Coventry. Medals are awarded to the top three finishers in each age group.

7. National Championships

The final step is to achieve a time that is fast enough to compete in the National Championships. These are really for the elite swimmers across the country in all age groups with only the top 48 swimmers in each age group being eligible to compete.

And finally, please ask any of our coaches or volunteers if there is anything that you are unsure about – we're all more than happy to help!

Happy swimming!

Dove Valley Coaching Team

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