

British Triathlon Youth and Junior Pathway

SWIMMING IN 2021

THE KEY CHANGES

Swim standards in general have been falling across the pathway for the previous two to three seasons and naturally we want to address this. We are also aware that most athletes, across all three Home Nations, have had limited swimming opportunities over the last 18 months. However, after much thought and deliberation, we believe ensuring the best long-term development for our athletes is what is most important and as part of that we are making some changes to proactively address swim standards this year.

In short, the two key changes are,

1. Aquathlons - a high priority event for developing intelligent swimming skills. They will be included in the rankings for the overall Super Series and present a fantastic multi-racing opportunity, with 3 separate races over different distances in one day at each event. More details on Aquathlons can be found below.
2. Increasing youth swim distances in the later part of the season. To further support the development of swim standards, and in line with changes that would have been introduced in 2020 along with the rationale provided in this document, youth swims in events at the back end of the season (August Mallory and Grand Final) will see longer distances of 500m as will all Youth events from 2022 onwards.

WHY NOW?

Understandably you may have questions as to whether focusing on swimming when so many have had little opportunity to swim over the last 18 months is a good idea. We have outlined the rationale for implementing these changes below so you can understand the thinking and evidence that supports them.

1. Feedback we are receiving as athletes get back into the water is highlighting that swimming is picking up very quickly. Athletes, given they are fit and conditioned in the other two disciplines, are quickly adapting to swimming and the 400m TT results that have been shared from Academies after 4-6 weeks of swimming indicate athletes swimming at or very close to pre-lockdown speeds. This gives us confidence that as pools open across the Home Nations athletes will return to their previous swim levels relatively quickly.
2. Open water swimming in triathlon is very dynamic, technical and tactical and therefore swimming well in races requires a lot of practice and constant decision making – no two swims are ever the same. The skills that support this is what we term ‘intelligent swimming’ and developing this is as important as developing swimming speed. Athletes have already missed a season of racing and not focussing on swimming this season will deprive them of further valuable learning experiences. Collectively supporting our athletes to focus on learning and developing over outcome through the period until their swimming is back to normal will be very important. For more on what we mean by ‘intelligent swimming’ see the Aquathlon info below.
3. Reducing our swim focus this year might, in the short term, appear to help athletes transition back into racing. However, a season of shorter swim distances through the summer we believe does not help athletes to understand the importance of swimming to their longer-term development and risks a ‘lost’ winter of swim focus into next season.

AQUATHLON

Aquathlon’s were re-introduced into the 2020 Series that never happened, and there were 3 key reasons for this.

1. To improve intelligent swimming – we believe that at world level, senior athletes (across all nations) are not skilled enough in the nuances of open water swimming. This includes the various decisions that need making e.g., positioning for best effect, when to move up, which side of the group to be on, whether to cut inside or go outside around buoy, etc., along with having the skillset required to deliver well made decisions e.g., how to effectively move through a group, how to sit on feet properly, how to swim in a straight line, how to get around a buoy effectively, etc. Focusing on this at younger ages will give our future senior athletes a competitive advantage.
2. To improve swimming standards – as already outlined above prior to lockdowns we were aware that general swim standards in both genders were falling.
3. To make the sport more accessible – having an event each year that requires no cycling makes entry to the sport more accessible for talented swim/runners.

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AQUATHLON (cont'd)

Accessibility will also be helped as Aquathlons will be raced as a North heat or a South heat. This will mean a reduction in travel time for most athletes, especially those at the furthest points of each Home Nation, compared to staging one National event. Events will be over the following multi-race, multi-distance format;

700-800m swim / 1km run (junior) – 1km run (youth)
400-500m swim / 2km run (junior) – 1.5km run (youth)
200-300m swim / 3km run (junior) – 2km run (youth)

Racing over different distances will create different racing scenarios, especially in the water, and with that require different tactics to be employed/decisions to be made. This will in turn promote the skill development or improved intelligent swimming that we are looking for. A multi-race format also ensures athletes are given an opportunity to go through 3 separate learning cycles (plan/do/review). The combined impact of all of this is a much richer and more rounded learning experience.

How will this fit into the Super Series?

Given the development impact of Aquathlon in our Pathway going forwards each heat will carry normal Super Series points. The following Regions will attend the following heats.

North – Scotland, North West, North East, Yorkshire
South – East, South West, South Central, South East, London

The central regions – Wales, East Midlands, West Midlands - will have a choice of either going to the North or South event as best fits.