

Chairman's report 2022-23

1. This report covers the period from 1st September 2022 to date.
2. First, a huge thank you to everyone who has helped over the year, in whatever capacity. The committee, coaches, team managers and officials have all worked extremely hard and others have assisted with everything from bucket shaking in Tesco to cake baking and noticeboard fixing. We need more and from more people, but mustn't lose sight of everything we already have.

Membership

3. There have been 20 joiners since last September including, delightfully, nine from the Open Session at the start of this term. Naturally we've had some leavers too but total swimming membership is now 78, up five from last year. That increase is only small, but at the last AGM we were worried our membership would fall over the year so it is emphatically good news.

Members' activities

4. The most important thing is that a large majority of our members are training regularly and, as far as I know, enjoying their swimming.
5. Over the year James organised three informal team galas with Devonport, which had excellent feedback. They helped club cohesion and gave younger members a chance to compete alongside older swimmers and in a fun environment.
6. We had 15 Devon qualifiers, in 64 events, including four new qualifiers. Eight swimmers then qualified for either the summer or winter regionals or both and Elsie Maguire went on to be our first swimmer at Nationals since 2019. There's also been success in multi-sports and in open water, with both James Crossey and Rory Cox winning national medals in their respective triathlons and Sam Lake winning internationally in aquathlon and, closer to home, the Plymouth Breakwater swim.
7. It's not only about racing. A couple of members have helped poolside as part of their Duke of Edinburgh award and one took part in the Swim England South-West young volunteer programme. All of them have been genuinely helpful. In addition, very many of our members do an excellent job of combining their swimming with achievements in other sports and activities. Most of these I never get to hear about, but I was particularly impressed when two came almost

straight from a two-day Ten Tors training walk to the club championships. Their willingness to follow two days' yomping over Dartmoor, carrying heavy packs in challenging conditions, with racing in the 200m IM and 400m free, says a lot for them.

8. As well as all that, 31 club records were broken in 2022/23, 14 of them by Hannah Walker. More have fallen since.

Coaching

9. On the coaching side, we were sad when Amy Warnett stood down but Amber Francis, a long-time member of the club, has taken over the Wednesday evening sessions. We are extremely lucky with our coaching team, both in our regulars and with those who step in and provide cover when required. Especial thanks go to Gareth and Ieuan, both of whom give their time for free.
10. It is worth re-emphasising that coaching is hard work and often difficult. As perhaps illustrated by the absence of any takers from amongst our assistant coaches for the "Coach" qualification course which is being run at Mount Kelly/ Exeter in early 2024. For a long time, we have been complaining about the lack of such courses but, when it comes to it, it seems no-one wanted to do one anyway. On the face of it the price - £660 – appeared prohibitive, but discounts and funding bring that down to a bargain £105.40. I am not in a position to criticise: I am one of those assistant coaches turning down this apparently unmissable opportunity.

Volunteering

11. On the volunteering side, congratulations to Nicky Maguire and Ian Higham who both qualified as J1 swimming officials. That makes them extremely valuable club members: every licenced gala requires numerous qualified officials – one per lane plus several extra – and it is always a struggle to find enough. Just as importantly, we have two new team managers (the people who look after your kids at galas) and two timekeepers. However, we need more, especially team managers.

Other matters

12. By way of helping beyond the club membership, in March we joined with OCRA in running the Primary Schools' Swimming Gala for the first time since the pandemic; and we were all ready to do the swimming section of the aquathlon when it was called off due to thunderstorms.

13. We've also achieved something which has been on our wish list since well before the pandemic: we've got a noticeboard. Our old one was taken down when Meadowlands was refurbished back in late 2018. Negotiations about a replacement have been ongoing ever since, but in the end Fusion allowed us simply to rehang the old one. It seemed a pity to waste it.

What could be improved?

14. Membership: we'd like more members. There was a time when the club had over 100 swimmers. If we had more members we could afford to run more sessions.

15. I'd like to be making better use of our pool time. The evening sessions are very well attended, but we are failing to persuade people to do the morning ones. These are extremely good value – 1.5hrs at no extra cost – and I'm told the early start isn't as bad as you'd expect.

16. We need more volunteers in all areas. I, and several others, are having to do too much. As a result, opportunities are being missed: for example, there are grants out there if only someone would apply for them (or would take over some of my role so I could). This year we couldn't run our usual "Dartmoor Gala" – an event for a few local clubs which both provides a fun day of competition for the swimmers and boosts our finances – because we didn't have anyone to organise it. We're determined to do it in 2024, but we're going to need lots of help from parents.

17. We're also failing to get the engagement we would like in social events. This year's Presentation Evening was poorly attended, particularly amongst younger/newer members, which was a pity as it is as much about getting together and having fun as it is about presenting awards. I'd very much like to see a 2024 Easter party, to mark the end of next term and to hand out medals won in the club championships which will be held in February. But we'd need volunteers to organise it and people to come.

18. Finally, to all parents, please, please speak to the coaches, and especially to James if there is anything concerning you about your child's training or you'd like an update. James needs you as much as you need him. As I'm endlessly saying, he might look busy, but he is not too busy to talk to you.

Caroline Furze. TSC Chairman. 12.11.2023