



Somerset ASA

County Development Programme Pilot 2023/2024

Final Evaluation

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Executive Summary

Somerset ASA has completed its 2023/24 pilot County Development Programme (CDP). This document provides an evaluation of the pilot through analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The proposal document stated:

“Our aim is to sow the seeds of a future Somerset where swimmers, coaches and clubs are empowered to enjoy our sport in a supportive and friendly environment whilst producing more swimmers able to reach their full potential... If the pilot proves successful there is potential for this model to be extended to different age groups and to be developed to encompass opportunities for Coach CPD (Continuous Professional Development).” July 2023

Our key performance metric was to increase the number of Somerset athletes achieving Regional Qualifying Times (RQT) in the 200IM, therefore supporting holistic athlete development, and future entry into Swim England Talent Pathways. This has been achieved – see the Results section for a full analysis.

We also sought to provide participants with an opportunity to build inter-club friendships and work collaboratively across the county, thus countering negative cultural themes identified in Swim England’s recent Heart of Aquatics Listening Exercise. We explore how we have achieved this using participant feedback in the Evaluation section.

Following an Interim Evaluation completed in April 2024, Somerset ASA agreed to fund an expansion to the programme for 2024/25. This programme will offer places to 12/13 and 13/14 age group swimmers and will pilot an extensive package of support for coach development including 8 new roles within CDP, coach mentoring and outreach. With this in place we hope to raise standards across the county and establish a mechanism to support accredited Coach CPD once Swim England’s Coach licensing comes into place whilst enabling our swimmers to enjoy their journey within aquatics.



Introduction

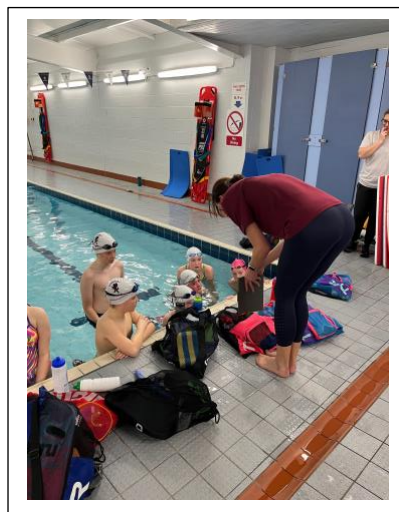
In 2023, Swim England (SE) changed the age group for the CDP from swimmers aged 11 at 31/12/23 to those aged 12. As Somerset had delivered the SE CDP model to this group of swimmers in 2022/23, we saw this change as an opportunity to innovate by piloting a new approach to county-wide development.

Instead of the two 1-day camps modelled by SE, swimmers were offered 10 sessions throughout the year. Through the provision of multiple opportunities to train, Somerset CDP better aligns with theories of learning, as providing regular opportunities that focus on key skills is proven to enable greater skill retention and improve ingrained technique.

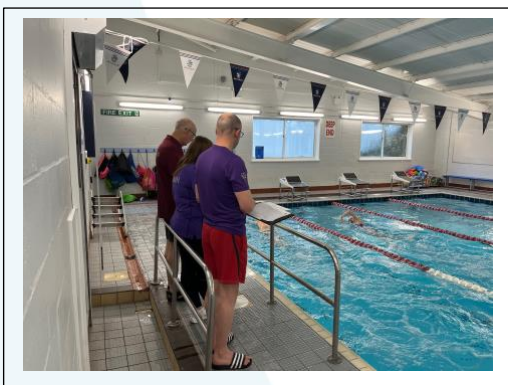
Programme Model

Selection: Selections were made based on 200IM and 100IM times taking alternate picks from the 1st and 2nd halves of the calendar year to counter the negative Relative Age Effect recently recognised in swimming.

Additionally, coaches across the county were asked to make recommendations for those they felt would benefit from the programme thus recognising the importance of attitude and technique, not just outright speed. During this process, it was noted that only a small number of swimmers in our cohort had achieved County Qualifying Times (CQT) in 200IM - just 8 swimmers (5 girls, 3 boys) at that time.



Delivery: Swimmers were offered three 2-hour Short Course (SC) sessions per term and an additional 2-hour Long Course (LC) session in preparation for the County Championships. Session plans were complementary to home club provision including stroke drills, underwater development, starts, turns and sculling.



Objective skills-based test sets were repeated throughout the programme to measure swimmer progress and times were monitored on the SE rankings database.

Once a swimmer achieved RQT, they were 'graduated' from the programme and a new swimmer invited to join.



Online Education: The 2022/2023 CDP included two online workshops about nutrition and goal setting. Rather than repeat this with the same swimmers in 2023/24, we developed an on-line library of resources which athletes could access as and when they wanted and held an informal Q and A for parents and swimmers.

Coach Engagement: Throughout the programme, club coaches were kept informed of the programme content and swimmer progress:



- All session plans were circulated to club coaches prior to delivery.
- Club coaches were invited to attend all sessions to observe and support.
- A new Somerset County Coach WhatsApp group was launched with an aim to develop a stronger network for communication, information exchange, collaboration and friendship across the county.

Results

Quantitative Outcomes:

Sessions	10 Sessions complete (9 SC, 1 LC).
Participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 47 Swimmers representing 16 out of the 20 eligible Somerset clubs 14 'Guest' Coaches representing 9 clubs, attending 29 sessions between them 29 Coaches on the Somerset Coaches Network WhatsApp group.
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of swimmers gaining RQT from 9 in 2023 (6 girls, 3 boys) to 14 in 2024 (8 girls, 6 boys). Improved Somerset representation at RQT from 16% of total cohort in 2023 to 25% at August 2024. 29% of all swimmers on RDP or RDDP are from Somerset. Improved 200IM times of 11.5 seconds on average from September 2023 – August 2024. Improved test set skills (underwater work) of 45%.

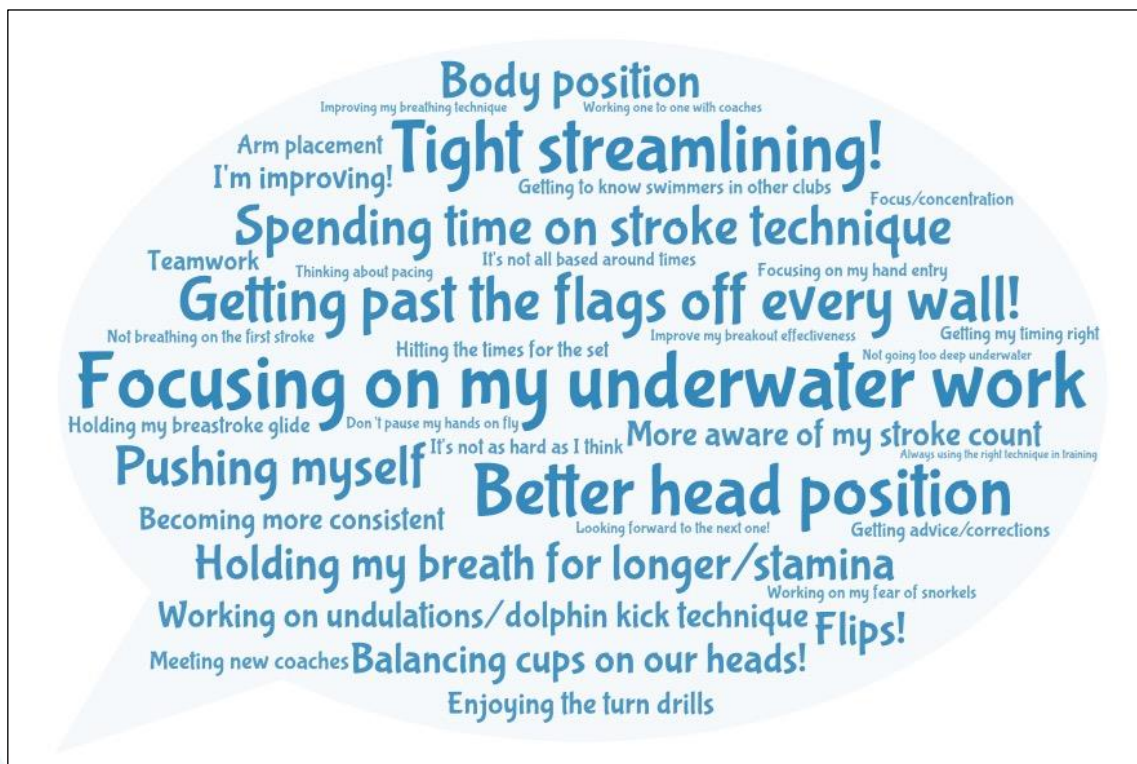
Qualitative Outcomes:

Online Education: A small online library of resources for swimmers and parents was developed. Due to the sudden and tragic loss of John our Information Officer, we suspended this work with a plan to resume in September 2024. As of April 7th, there were:

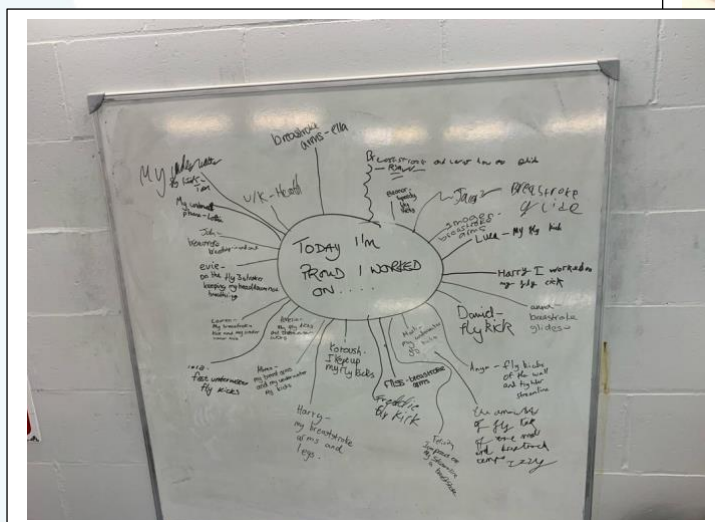
Resource	Views	Downloads
Nutrition Quizzes (x2)	311	61
Recipes (x 8)	1187	215

Formative Evaluation

After each session of Term 1, swimmers were asked for reflections and feedback by completing the SE Athlete Reflections form. This word cloud was generated:



Completing the Athlete Reflection Form did however prove administratively onerous and was replaced by a white board plenary exercise at the end of each session for Terms 2 and 3.



Comparing these reflections with the SE Action Plan each athlete completed at the outset of the programme, enabled coaches to see that swimmers have developed a better understanding of the difference between Outcome and Process Goals, and are engaged in reflective learning practices - essential for holistic athlete development.

Summative Evaluation

At the conclusion of the programme Evaluation Questionnaires were sent to swimmers and guest coaches.

Swimmer Evaluation:

The swimmer questionnaire consisted of 1 multiple choice and 9 open questions exploring expectations of the programme, outcomes achieved and suggestions for improvements.

Of the potential 47 responses, 24 were received representing a 51% return rate - extremely high for this type of evaluation activity – particularly as it was sent during the holidays.

Responses were overwhelmingly positive with two areas identified for improvement.

Question 1: Before joining the programme, what did you think you would gain from Somerset County Development Programme? ie what did you think CDP would help you to improve, or offer you to support your development?

87% of swimmers expected to receive *'high level coaching'* to *'improve stroke and racing techniques/skills'*. Other expectations included *'to gain more county times'*, to *'feel supported and meet up with other swimmers'* and to gain *'confidence to attend something different...as I am quite shy'*.

Question 2: To what extent do you feel this has been achieved?

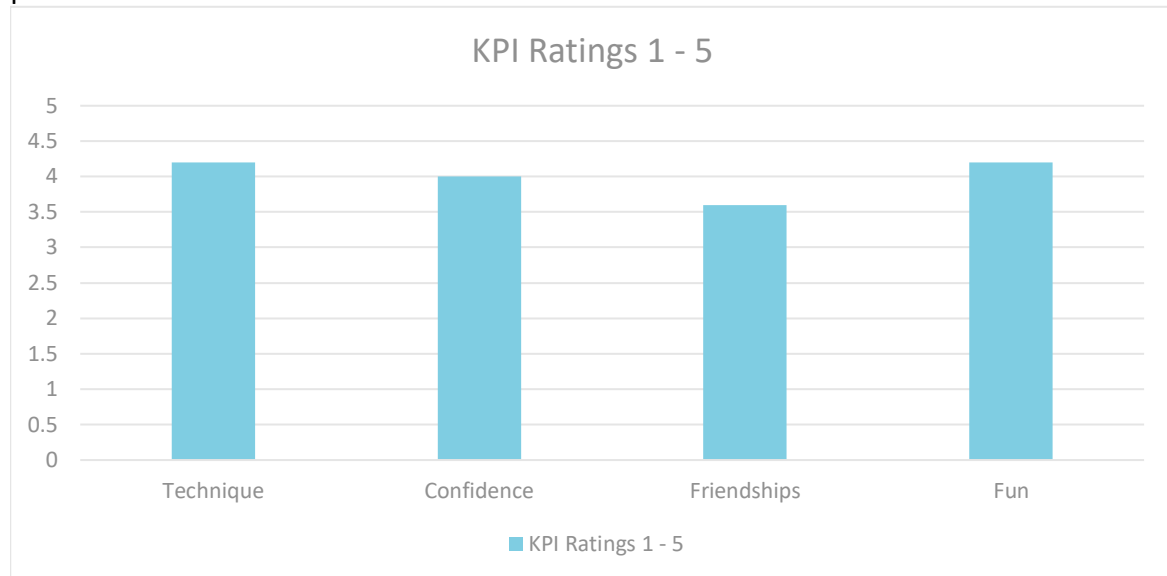
96% of swimmers responded positively citing *'stroke improvement'* *'especially breaststroke'*, *'fantastic coaching'*, *'time to finesse strokes'*, *'underwater is way better and faster'*, *'starts (dives) much better and I can go 5m off each turn'*, *'feeling more confident'* *'enjoyed the positive training attitudes'* and *'so much fun'*.

Swimmers also talked about outcome goals such as *'times improving over the 12 months'* and gaining new county, regional and national times.

However, 1 swimmer felt *'there wasn't much consistency between sessions'* and that they *'wouldn't practice a specific technique until [they] came back to the CDP'*. Another expressed a desire to have more *'individual feedback'*.

These points will be reviewed in the delivery planning stage with the aim of further improving our programme.

Question 3: This question asked swimmers to rate their experience against key performance indicators on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was 'none' and 5 was 'a lot'.



Question 4: Is there any activity/drill you particularly enjoyed whilst on CDP?

Swimmers discussed a wide variety of drills including *'balancing the cup on my head – very fun but also made sure you kept your head still'*, *'breaststroke turns through a hoop'*, *'pre-pool games'*, *'glide length drills'*, and *'the IM across the pool'*. In addition, 30% mentioned the monthly consistent test set underwater drills and 26% stated they had enjoyed the dive clinic.

Question 5: Please tell us if there is anything that inspired you whilst on CDP?

43% respondents felt the coaches themselves were inspiring, e.g. *'the way in which the coaches could give advice on small tweaks to improve technique'* or that working in a different environment *'swimming at Millfield'*, *'the chance to train... with swimmers from other clubs'* and *'building friendships'* was inspiring.

Others discussed being inspired *'to challenge myself on my underwaters'*, *'to work harder'*, and *'to keep going as there's always improvement for the next race to learn'*.

Question 6: Reflect on the version of yourself who attended your first CDP session. What do 'you now' feel most of proud of that 'you on day 1' has learnt/improved/changed?

61% of all responses felt proud of the progress they'd made through repeating the underwater test set each session: *'streamline fly-kick has improved immensely'*, *'underwater phases have improved a lot'* and *'that I now do underwaters off every wall in races'*.

30% felt proud of their attitude to training citing *'increased confidence of new places and things'*, *'continuing to work my hardest at every session'* and *'to try and not put too much pressure on myself'*.

Question 7: What 3 words would you use if you were to describe CDP to a parent, a friend/team-mate, or your home coach?

A word cloud was generated from swimmers' responses:



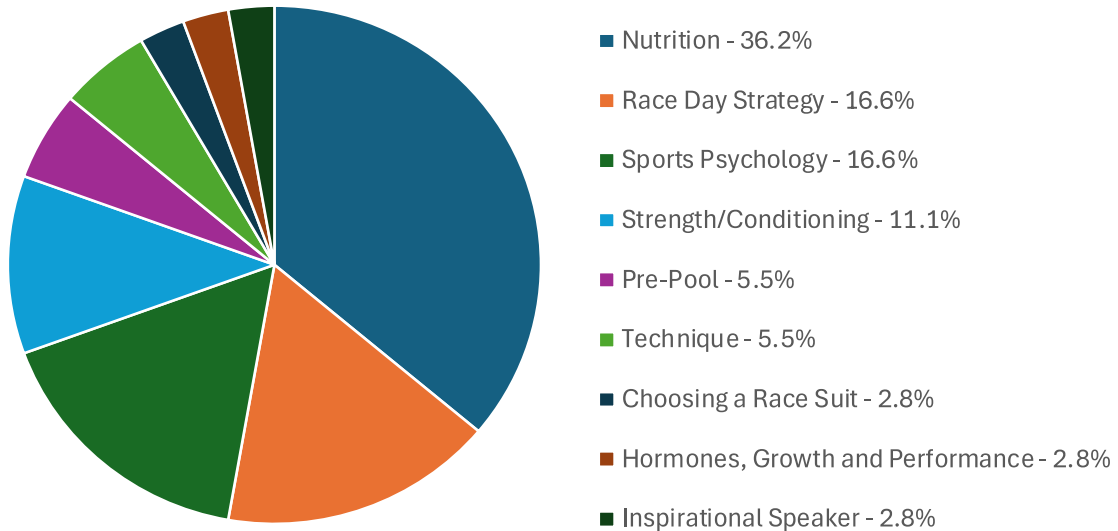
Question 8: Given what you have worked on during the CDP, what do you think are your next challenges to undertake/begin working towards?

Swimmers continued to focus on Process Goals highlighting improving underwater work, diving, fitness and technique across all four strokes.

In addition, swimmers set themselves Outcome Goals such as a wider range of CQT, achieving RQT, accessing the next Pathway and competing in a wider range of events at galas.

Question 9: If we were to deliver an online/remote learning session, what topics do you think we should cover?

On-line Learning Topics Suggested



Question 10: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about or any ideas you'd like to share with us?

Most swimmers felt they had covered their feedback already or simply reiterated their appreciation of the opportunity, however those that did respond suggested:

- 1) Allowing swimmers to do pre-pool in work-out clothes.
- 2) Having an event to work towards such as competing against CDP groups from other counties.
- 3) Encouragement for swimmers from different clubs to integrate with those who were the sole representative from their home clubs.
- 4) Video analysis of strokes.
- 5) Tailoring pre-pools for the older group.
- 6) More focus on starts and finishes.
- 7) More tailored and individual attention.
- 8) An opportunity for 50m swimming.

These points will be reviewed in the delivery planning stage with the aim of further improving our programme.

Guest Coach Evaluation:

This questionnaire consisted of 4 open questions exploring expectations of the programme, outcomes and suggestions for improvements.

Of the potential 14 responses, 8 were received representing a 57% return rate – another fantastic response rate for this type of evaluation.

Question 1: Before visiting Somerset County Development Programme, what did you hope to gain from the experience? e.g. trying new sets? networking with other coaches? improving confidence?

89% of respondents said they were looking to build skills and/or gain new ideas for sets and drills: *'building coaching skills by learning new swimming tutoring techniques'*, *'learning from high-grade coaches'*, and *'to step outside my bubble and be able to watch how other coaches help athletes to develop'*.

55% of respondents stated they were looking for a chance to network *'with other Somerset coaches to build a county-wide community of coaches.'*

Question 2: To what extent do you feel this has been achieved?

All responses were positive: *'I saw some great new ideas and watched athletes get better through directed repetition'* and *'100%'*.

There was also a suggestion for improvement: *'It would be good with a few additional coaches there, and it would be good if [guest] coaches could be involved with the delivery of some aspects to enable the coaches to get feedback'*.

Question 3: As you may already know, we are expanding our CDP to offer places to swimmers aged 13/14 and more development opportunities for coaches in the County, including 2 new Assistant Coach roles, 6 new Skills Coach roles, coach mentoring and outreach. How else could we improve our programme?

5 guest coaches provided the following suggestions:

- 1) Letting clubs know what test sets are being conducted within CDP.
- 2) A coach mentoring scheme within a 20-mile radius of the home club.
- 3) A regular coaching forum on specific topics that coaches struggle with.
- 4) Offering training to all swimmers who would like additional provision.
- 5) Inviting a swimmer from every club in Somerset.
- 6) Allowing time for feedback to be given to swimmers.
- 7) Embedding the expanded programme and then developing from that point.

These points, and that of Question 2, will be reviewed in the delivery planning stage with the aim of further improving our programme.

Question 4: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about or any ideas you'd like to share?

The following suggestions were made:

- 1) More guest coach involvement.
- 2) Better information about the selection criteria so that clubs and their swimmers can be better prepared.
- 3) A session discussing food and how important it is to eat.
- 4) Change the requirement of 4x2 qualifying times.

Guest Coaches were also asked if they were interested in participating in the 2024/25 and 100% expressed an interest at differing levels of commitment.

Delivery Team Evaluation:

The delivery team (Rachel Aldington, Pat Leaman, Isabel Blight and Kelly Podbury) held plenary sessions discussing their own experiences and ideas and those of the participants to feed into the 2024/25 programme. These were:

- 1) Manage parent expectations and improve 'buy-in' – there was clearly some misalignment of what could be achieved from 10 x 90-minute pool sessions and how the programme fits with the home coaching regime. This can be addressed by:
 - a. Drawing up a more detailed programme description outlining general content, the level of commitment required (including minimum attendance) and expected outcomes.
 - b. Allowing spectators so that parents can see for themselves the work done.
 - c. Circulating pictures of the plenary white board after each session so that parents can see how swimmers reflected on their own learning.
- 2) Continue to work on home coach communications regarding swimmer selection as the numbers racing the 200IM and achieving the CQT across the county is still low.
- 3) Increase Guest Coach involvement so that there are better development opportunities for them and more communication with participants on poolside.
- 4) Develop the SASA website CDP page to improve communications and information for both participants and those not currently in the programme.
- 5) Work closely with the SE Coach Development team to strengthen our coach development opportunities in preparation for future licensing and ongoing accredited CPD.

Conclusion:

Somerset ASA's CDP Pilot has been a resounding success and the expansion running in 2024/25 will strengthen its model, whilst providing further opportunities for swimmers and, perhaps more importantly coaches, across the county.

Somerset ASA is committed to its drive to make Somerset a Centre of Innovation and Excellence, with the aim to improve participation, inclusion and success throughout our swimming community and thus is investing in an exciting new Development Plan.

In 2024/25 Somerset ASA will:

- 1) Extend the CDP pilot to include the 13/14 age group swimmers.
- 2) Add 8 new coach development opportunities – 2 new CDP Assistant Coaches and 6 new CDP Skills Coaches to support raising standards.
- 3) Include Coach Mentoring in the CDP through 121 sessions with a County Coach with the aim of accreditation once the SE Licencing programme is launched.
- 4) Pilot a new Coach Outreach Programme by offering Skills Coaches the opportunity to deliver a home-club session in partnership with a County Coach. This could also be open to all county clubs if time permits.
- 5) Expand the CDP Guest Coach opportunity to include a more active role on poolside.
- 6) Introduce a new Distance Development Meet in our competition calendar – to be known as The John Bolton in support of the SE Distance Swimming Project.

- *see Appendix 1 for full programme details.*

Responding to the Heart of Aquatics Listening Report (March 2024): Swim England conducted a wide-reaching listening exercise throughout our sport in which five key areas of cultural concern were highlighted that negatively impacted participants' experience of aquatics:

<https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/listening-report-published/>

We believe that extending this pilot as described above and strengthening coach development across the county we will not only raise standards but will also allow Somerset to actively address several of these key cultural themes especially:

- 1) **The Performance Focus theme** – specifically the 'missed middle' - by
 - a. widening the CDP opportunity to include coach recommendations thus supporting those swimmers who show technique, commitment and potential - not just outright speed; and
 - b. including an opportunity for those who would ordinarily drop out of the SE Pathway programme at 13, who may be late starters or late developers.
- 2) **The 'Closed Community' and 'Culture of Fear' themes:** by improving collaboration and communications between coaches throughout the county via inter-club provision, mentoring, outreach and the WhatsApp group. Raising coaching standards will directly support improved opportunities throughout our clubs - and not just for those few swimmers on the SE pathway programmes.

Appendix 1: Somerset CDP Pilot Expansion 2024/25 - Model

- 1) **Recruitment:** we will be offering:
 - a. 32 places to the 12/13 age group based on 200IM/100IM rankings and coach recommendations.
 - b. 28 places to the 13/14 age group swimmers (not on either RDP) based on 200IM ranking.
- 2) **Delivery:** programme delivery will be:
 - a. 9, monthly 2-hour sessions to each group delivered simultaneously at Millfield Senior pool set up in SC format. The senior pool will cater better to the wide range of abilities (and stage of physical development) presented by this age group and would also allow movement between the two groups to enable individual tailoring.
 - b. Benchmarking and continuous evaluation of the programme through a series of repeated objective test sets.
 - c. A dedicated CDP webpage which will contain online resources covering SE units on performance lifestyle, nutrition, and sports psychology, plus good news stories, recipes, quizzes, photos, FAQs and feedback.
 - d. A termly, informal Q&A/on-line session for parents and swimmers on topics such as Nutrition, Sports Psychology and Race-Day Strategies.
- 3) **Coach Development Programme:** The County wishes to invest in its coaches and will offer the following:
 - a. 2 CDP Assistant Coach opportunities. These positions are ideal for coaches wishing to experience delivery and potentially lead county programmes and are for the length of the 2024/25 CDP.
 - b. 6 CDP Skills Coaches positions. These positions are ideal for coaches/teachers wishing to experience delivery of county programmes and are for 1 term only (i.e. 2 jobs per term).
 - c. Coach Mentoring. The 6 Skills Coaches will be offered 121 mentoring sessions with a County Coach.
 - d. Coach 'Outreach' opportunities. The 6 Skills Coaches will be offered an 'outreach' session delivered in partnership with the County Coach at their home club. This opportunity will also be open to all county clubs – time permitting!
 - e. Guest Coach CPD opportunities on CDP (see above).
 - f. Potential for one Young Volunteer role to support coaches with in-water demonstrations and assistant coach activities (e.g. D of E placement).
 - g. Three Volunteer Team Managers.
 - h. One Volunteer Administrator.
- 4) **Outcomes:** We seek to achieve:
 - a. Increased numbers of swimmers achieving 200IM CQT and RQT.
 - b. Improved Test set results – looking at a wider number of skills.
 - c. A dedicated CDP webpage with increased traffic.
 - d. 3 informal Q&A/on-line learning sessions.
 - e. Increased coach career development on the SE coaching qualifications ladder.
 - f. Increased numbers of Guest Coach CPD sessions.