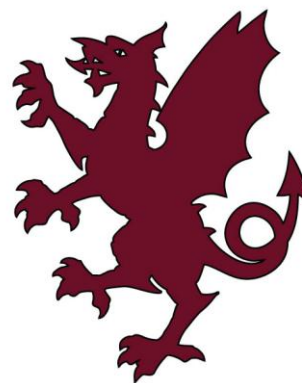


Chair's Report

Covering May 2025 – December 2025



SOMERSET ASA

Introduction & Governance

It is my pleasure to present this Chair's Report reflecting on a remarkably productive and innovative period for Somerset ASA from May to December 2025. Following our Annual General Meeting on 21 June 2025, the Management Committee has hit the ground running, holding regular sessions across the summer and autumn (including key committee meetings on 30 July and the 89th Management Committee Meeting on 13 October 2025).

Our primary administrative objective has remained clear: supporting inclusion, boosting athlete and volunteer participation, and ensuring long-term athletic enjoyment across Somerset in all aquatic disciplines. At the heart of our strategy, Treasurer Mike Riggall formally pledged the County's robust financial support for club development initiatives, maintaining open channels for clubs to apply for teacher/coach bursaries (match-funded by the Swim England South West Region) and small equipment grants to help clubs grow sustainably.

The President & County Representation

Serving as our figurehead throughout this period, our President, Karen Bowen, has represented the county with immense honour and distinction. Her presence at major competitive events and key regional gatherings has been a source of great pride and stability for Somerset ASA, embodying the very best of our values and dedication to the sport.

Athlete Development: The County Development Programme (CDP)

One of our proudest achievements this period has been the aggressive expansion of the Somerset County Development Programme for the 2025/26 season. Designed specifically to address the "missed middle" swimmers highlighted in Swim England's *Heart of Aquatics* listening exercise, we successfully grew the programme to feature three distinct training squads utilizing the full pool facilities at Millfield Senior School.

- **Squad 1 (Swim England County Development Pathway):** We match-funded and expanded our intake to 48 spaces (up from 32 in the previous season), strictly selecting committed 12-year-old athletes based on Swim England IM ranking criteria.
- **Squads 2 & 3:** We allocated an additional 44 spaces to older, dedicated club swimmers who just missed out on Regional and National pathways, ensuring they receive the specialised supplement to their home training necessary to bridge the gap.

- **Term 1 Highlights (Oct – Dec 2025):**
 - **12 October:** Launched with an extended land-based and pre-pool technique session led by guest Strength & Conditioning specialists Luke Turley and Alice Gouldby.
 - **9 November:** High-impact squad pool training.
 - **7 December:** Integrated pioneering "Developing a Positive Mindset" workshops hosted by The Thrive Academy sport psychologists Elliot Newell and Pete Barry, tailored both for the athletes and separately for their parents.

Workforce & Coach Development

A successful athlete pathway requires a highly supported workforce. To facilitate the growth of the CDP, we structurally expanded our delivery staff team to include a dedicated CDP Head Coach, four Deputy Head Coaches, and two Skills Coaches.

Furthermore, Term 1 saw the rollout of our Level 1 Assistant Coach Course for Young Volunteers. Graduates from this cohort are being provided a direct pathway into the workforce, with opportunities to apply for paid CDP Skills Coach roles heading into the New Year.

Competitions & Major Events

The mid-to-late 2025 calendar was punctuated by successful competitive milestones that brought together clubs from across the county:

- **Inaugural Somerset Masters Meet (28 June 2025):** Hosted at Millfield School, this brand-new, licensed development meet was a roaring success. Aimed at raising the profile of Masters swimming in the county, it provided prioritized competition for local competitors, with every athlete taking home a commemorative medal to mark the historic inaugural event.
- **Somerset ASA Relay & 100m Individual Medley Day (19 October 2025):** Provided high-energy short-course racing focused on team camaraderie and versatile individual tracking.
- **The John Bolton Development Meet (15 & 22 November 2025):** Promoted by Kelly Podbury on behalf of Somerset ASA, this cornerstone Level 3 licensed event took place over two weekends at Millfield School. Featuring "slower than" qualifying times to keep development racing accessible, the meet was excellently attended and heavily supported by our dedicated network of volunteer technical officials and team managers.

Valedictory & Looking Ahead

On a personal note, it was with mixed feelings that I tendered my resignation from the position of Chair in December 2025. Having secured the position of Regional Chair of Swim England South West, my focus must necessarily shift to that broader strategic role. However, I step down with total confidence, knowing I leave the county in the incredibly capable hands of Kelly Podbury, who has taken up the reins from me.

As we enter 2026, the broader aquatics landscape is entering a period of evaluation. With talk of an ongoing national consultation on a change in Governance by Swim England, our structural networks may shift, but Somerset's foundational focus remains unshakeable. We look forward to the new year and its new challenges with the distinct vigour, resilience, and collaborative spirit that have always defined our county family.

The data gathered from our 2024/25 evaluations has been fully implemented, our finances remain structurally sound, and our development pathways are thriving. My sincere thanks go out to the leaders of the County Development Programme — Isabel Blight, Rachel Adlington, and Pat Leaman — along with their exceptional team of coaches and team managers, whose tireless work has made these sessions such a triumph. Thank you as well to every club coach, committee member, parent, and volunteer who collectively spent countless hours on pool decks, in training suites, and behind laptops to keep aquatics in Somerset safe, inclusive, and highly competitive.

Report Compiled By: Mike Coles (May 20th, 2026)

