

What is a Swim England Friend?

A Swim England Friend is an individual who is readily available to provide **independent** advice to help SE members, or their parent or other representative in the case of junior members, faced with problems. The Swim England Friends are volunteers who work across the SE Regions. They offer support in the SE Regulations / Constitution and the judicial procedure.

A Swim England Friend can bring years of experience in the world of aquatics - and for some it is life itself - to assist anyone who has a problem within the sport.

Many people come across situations which they have difficulty resolving, not realising that many others have previously encountered the same or similar scenario.

If Swim England/OJA is contacted, where appropriate, you will be put in touch with a 'friend' who, through contact with a considerable number of such cases, will be able to put this experience at your disposal.

Although the common expertise of friends will be a thorough working knowledge of the SE Judicial System, even if your problem does not necessarily fall into this category, their experience of the aquatic world in general and of the problems seen in the running of a club means that they will probably be able to give guidance in resolving many seemingly insoluble situations.

The service of a friend is not just to offer a one off discussion. The member should have the opportunity to come back to the friend as their case progresses.

The friend's role is not without authorisation to contact the other party to the dispute. The advice given to the client must be confidential to them. However, those Swim England Friends who are comfortable with undertaking the role may be allowed to make attempt (with the consent of their member) to seek informal resolution of matters of dispute.

More specifically friends are nominated and assist members with the following:-

- Swim England Friends are volunteers recommended/nominated by their Region in accordance with SE Regulation 261 to the Office of Judicial Administration ("OJA") for the role on account of their experience in the sport.
- The role of a Swim England Friend has no set definition or remit in the SE Constitution, but they are referred to in SE Regulations 261 – Regional Responsibilities - Panel of Friends.
- Appointed to assist a member on request by the OJA who facilitates the se judicial complaints, appeals and disciplinary processes.

The Swim England Friend undertakes to assist members (individuals, affiliated clubs or bodies) as much as possible with regard to the following:

- i. SE Regulations / Constitution / Club Rules.
- ii. Friends automatically refer members to the SE Safeguarding Team (legal@swimming.org) if matters raised relate to the welfare of a minor (person under eighteen years of age). Adults at Risk are referred also to the SE Safeguarding.
- iii. The effects and impact of Club Constitution and Club Rules on members.
- iv. The Judicial procedure, particularly those points which need to be addressed by the member (or their chosen representative) when presenting a case.

Whilst Friends are not legally qualified and so the guidance they provide is not legal advice, they can often provide valuable information and general support, which can assist members in making their own decision.

All correspondence and discussions that take place with a Swim England Friend will remain strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to any other party, including the OJA, without the individual's prior knowledge and approval.

The Role of a Friend

A Swim England Friend is a person who is available to give independent advice to an SE affiliated swimming club committee member, an individual member of Swim England or the parent/guardian whose child (under 18 years of age) is a member of Swim England.

In the case of the committee member the advice is to try and ensure the club stay within SE Regulations and their own club constitution in their dealing with members.

If the problem is of a disciplinary nature then the Swim England Friend should be able to advise/guide the club through the regulations dealing with internal club disputes.

For welfare issues then provide information on who they may contact for advice outside the voluntary sector via Wavepower and/or via Swim England Safeguarding Team.

If the problem relates to paid employees then provide information on who they may contact for advice outside the SE Judicial Process.

When dealing with an individual member the Swim England Friend needs to be aware that the situation can be emotionally very traumatic for the parent and therefore give advice as well as provide support. The Friend should be able to explain the procedures for either Internal Club Disputes or for formal Complaints to Swim England particularly if the matter is referred to the Judicial Commissioner and/or the Dispute Resolution Panel.

The Swim England Friend has no power/authority he can only advise. It needs to be remembered the member is not obliged to follow your advice but does need to be aware that anything discussed is confidential.

In your dealings with the member you should always be honest; if you consider the complaint is vexatious then you should tell the member.

The assistance offered by a Swim England Friend should not be limited to a single call, although many do, but should be available to give advice as long as the member feels they need it.

The Swim England Friends Person Specification

- A volunteer with experience in one or more of the aquatic sports; normally experience in a senior position within the club or senior officer role.
- Is or has been an active member of a club, county, region or SE committee over a number of years.
- Has an awareness and understanding of the SE Judicial processes and procedures. Informal Friends training is provided each year.
- Access and exposure to current SE Regulations & World Aquatics Technical Rules, Model Constitution, Wavepower and SE website.
- Proficient in communications, in writing (normally email) and telephony.
- Offer members the best advice on how to progress, or not, their concern/issue under SE Club Constitution and Club Rules.
- Be available to the individual during the processes being followed.
- A good knowledge of the sport, Swim England's structure and how a swimming club operates;
- Able to give advice quickly and to be available. Remember the member, if a parent, is usually very anxious at this time and looking for help;
- Experience of working within an SE Club environment;
- To treat all correspondence and discussions that take place will remain strictly confidential;
- Provide information which can at least assist members to making their own decision;
- Act as a sounding board on any matter for example how does the club change it's constitution.

Attributes of a Friend

- There is a need for patience when dealing with a member and you need to be prepared to help find a solution.
- Has the ability to listen to members concerns and be empathetic, pragmatic and not judgemental.
- Computer literacy - should be conversant with the Swim England Website.
- Experience/knowledge of supporting people
- Ability to effectively summarise various issues and to draw out salient points.
- Good listener and facilitator.
- Have patience to listen, to sometimes convoluted problems.
- Can put a realistic slant on issues and maintain a balanced view.
- Has the time to give advice quickly when a case is received.
- Can be firm but fair with individual
- You must be able to explain SE Regulations simply and understandably, but always remember you only hear one side of the story.