

What are the 'BAGCATs'?

BAGCATS stands for **British Age Group CATegories** and applies to boys aged 9 to 14 and girls aged 9 to 13.

It is a system which has been designed to reward younger swimmers who are successful in a range of events – a combination determined by the age of the swimmer and whether they are male or female.

You can swim in as many events as you like – as long as you have met the events qualifying time. Points are awarded for each swim based on calculations by FINA (the world swimming governing body), with faster times achieving higher points. Generally the tougher and longer distance events will give more points than the shorter easier ones. The best points score from each category is added up and the swimmer with the most points is the winner.

Training sessions at Southampton cover all strokes and distances, and you will be encouraged by your coach to enter a range of events and distances.

Over the year, there are three standard competitions in which the system is used:

- **Hampshire County Championships** – Held over three weekends in February and March of each year, in 25m and 50m pools such as Southampton, Waterlooville, Aldershot or Portsmouth.
- **South-East Regional Championships** – held in a 50m pool, such as Aldershot, Crawley or Portsmouth, during May and June each year.
- **National Championships** – held in a 50m pool in Sheffield in July and August each year.

Categories vary slightly depending on the swimmers age and whether at County, Regional or National level but essentially fall into the following groups.

Age Group	Events
9/10 years boys & girls 11 years boys 4 swims count	Best 50m Best 200m backstroke, breaststroke or butterfly (form stroke) Best 200m or 400m freestyle Best Individual Medley
11 years girls 12/13 years boys & girls 14 years boys 5 swims count	Best 50m Best 100m Best 200m backstroke, breaststroke or butterfly (form stroke) Best 200m, 400m, 800m or 1,500m freestyle Best Individual Medley

[Success is Long Term](#) includes the specific detail of the BAGCAT categories across all ages and competition levels.

The BAGCATS system is used to ensure that swimmers do not specialise in one stroke at an early age. A swimmer's best stroke at age 9 may not necessarily be their best stroke one or two years later and the BAGCAT system with its requirement to swim Medleys is specifically designed to accommodate this. The Form Stroke category also ensures that variety is maintained by swimmers having to be proficient at more than one stroke.

When swimmers move into their mid to late teens, their bodies become fully developed (girls sooner than boys – hence the difference in BAGCAT upper ages) and they should start to specialise in strokes and distances. Therefore, beyond

BAGCAT ages, swimmers will compete at County, Regional and National events in individual events.

To compete in BAGCAT competitions usually involves competing in events which are spread out over two or three days and coping with a long day is crucial for success. Many swimmers fail to do well in BAGCATS because they can't cope with the long days. Don't make silly mistakes – drink & eat well – the right things – is always a good start and listen to your Coach's advice.

Just a final word of warning... A summary of BAGCAT points and age group positions are issued at regular intervals throughout competitions. If you find you are near the top places at any point BEWARE of the swimmer who has not yet swum in a category and leaves it until the last session to add a few hundred points to their total. It is a very fair system – but it can also be cruel!