



Swim Ireland Annual Congress & EGM
8th October 2016
Report for Swim Ireland Clubs and Staff Members

Congress

Swim Ireland Annual Congress was held in the Conference Centre, National Sports Campus on Saturday 8th October 2016. This is the first time that Congress was held as a stand-alone event. In recent years it has been scheduled between the AGM and the Awards Night and there was a feeling that it was losing its identity as a discussion forum for Members.

Swim Ireland President, Mary Dunne, was present to welcome everyone and referenced the fact that, not only was it the first stand-alone Congress, but a Youth Congress was also being held simultaneously with both audiences joining together at various stages of the day.

Sports Psychologist, Stephen McIvor, was the Facilitator on the day.

The first item was a panel discussion entitled '**Reflections on Rio**'. Panellists included:
Olympian – Nicholas Quinn
Paralympians – Ellen Keane & James Scully
Coaches - Damian Ball – Swim Ireland's National Diving Coach and
Dave Malone – Performance Director of Paralympics Ireland.

There was a very interesting discussion followed by a question and answer session. A number of areas were covered including:

- How the panellists first became involved in swimming.
- Their own seminal moment or significant person that made them realise "I can do this, I can go to the Olympics/Paralympics".
- What it was like in the weeks leading up to the Games and how they handled the pressures.
- What were their plans for the future and does Tokyo 2020 feature for them.
- Their career paths and plans after swimming.
- How they find dealing with the Media.
- Their hobbies or what they do for stimulation outside of swimming.

Item 2 was a discussion on the **Athlete Coach Relationship**. The delegates split into two groups with the Young People and the three Olympians/Paralympians moving to the Youth Forum which was facilitated by Kate Hills, Swim Ireland National Children's Officer. They debated the question "*Is the Coach/Athlete relationship the most important relationship?*" before returning to the main Congress to discuss their findings and those of the adult delegates.

There was a general consensus that there are a number of relationships: coaches, swimmers, parents and club mates that must be balanced for best results. Nicholas Quinn provided a unique understanding by citing how we are all aware of how drag slows swimmers down. He said that if any of the relationships around an athlete is fraught then the balance is affected and is akin to drag in the water.

While the Young People were debating, Stephen McIvor facilitated a discussion on the Athlete Coach Relationship with Marian English, Head Coach of Castlebar SC and Coach to Nicholas



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Quinn, who joined Damian Ball and Dave Malone on the panel. The main points to emerge from both discussions were:

- A coach has multiple roles which change over time. Initially the coach will make 90% of decisions but over time this will change with the athlete making more decisions. The relationship is a partnership in which both are invested.
- There is less likely to be blame when both are working as a team.
- The relationship is very important – a survey conducted by Kate Hills revealed that young swimmers consider that the most important relationship to them in swimming was their coach.
- Relationships are built on trust. Trust is earned by:
 - Consistency
 - Listening Skills
 - Respect
- Key to gaining trust is by spending a lot of time with the athletes. Listening, observing, communication and feedback is very important
- Goals – should be the Athlete's goals
- Values allow consistency. Behaviour needs to be attached to values.
- A positive and healthy relationship with parents is important to provide a balance.
- Age Group swimming is particularly challenging for coaches who may have a 'superstar' at age 13 but have to balance expectations for progression beyond that.

The final item on the Agenda was an **Open Forum Q&A – What is important to you?**

Delegates were invited to ask questions of the panel which included:

Sarah Keane, Swim Ireland CEO

Clare McGrath, Swim Ireland Chairman

Pat Donovan, National Competitions Steering Group

Gary Stoops, Officials Committee Chairman

Kate Hills, Swim Ireland National Children's Officer

Adam Cox, Swim Ireland Membership Manager.

Some of the questions asked included:

1. Why the change to Year of Birth for National Competitions and why not go to single age bands?

Answer:

- Swim Ireland changed to go in line with European and World guidelines.
- No matter when the age changes some swimmers will be disadvantaged
- There is currently not enough competition to have single bands yet.



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2. Should Swim Ireland continue to 'parachute' swimmers in who fail to qualify in own countries and has our own High Performance system failed our athletes?

Answer:

- Any athlete who wishes to compete for Ireland must comply with FINA requirements which specify that the athlete must be resident in Ireland for a year before becoming eligible to swim and they must commit to train and represent Ireland. In comparison to other sports, these are onerous restrictions and represent a very serious commitment for any athlete that wishes to transfer.
- Oliver Dingley, who transferred from the UK, has been a superb ambassador for Swim Ireland and the sport of diving as a whole. Diving lessons are fully booked at the NAC for the first time ever.
- Shane Ryan has had a very positive effect on the swimmers and is a very motivational figure.
- No Irish swimmer lost out on a place as a result and Swim Ireland will continue to review.
- Swim Ireland has not approached swimmers. Swimmers have come to Swim Ireland.
- The group as a whole were very positive about our 'newer' Irish athletes.

3. Has our own Performance System failed our swimmers?

Answer:

- We need to look at where we are in context. Irish swimming has been very successful over the course of this Olympic Cycle and we should believe in our systems. All of our athletes were debriefed post-Olympic Games and were very positive about where we are.
- There are 200 Nations competing in World swimming, every time we seem to be catching up, the world moves on.
- We know we have made mistakes and need to learn from them, for example we cannot support over 100 swimmers on national squads.
- We have been rewarding our junior swimmers but need to look more at senior swimming (average age at Olympics = Male 26, Female 22) and retaining our swimmers in our clubs with the correct supports around them until they are 18 if possible.
- The school system has not been particularly supportive and we will need to work more closely with colleges and universities with a view to setting up performance packages linked to academic needs.
- The status quo will be maintained until new Performance Team in place.

4. With a general lack of 50m pools – should we concentrate on Short Course Competition?

Answer:

- The carding pathway is around World and Olympic events, therefore 50m.
- Swim Ireland has always supported Short Course and will continue to do so.

5. Olympic Nomination Policy – why is it confined to athletes with 'A' Times?

Answer

- The Olympics is not considered a development meet. The Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI) and Swim Ireland have determined that athletes who have the potential to



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reach a semi-final should be supported. Vision = Podium medals at World and Olympics

6. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) – can this be done Online?

Answer:

- Work is already at an advanced stage in this area and it is hoped to launch a new line of online CPD courses in near future.

Swim Ireland CEO, Sarah Keane, thanked everyone for their input over the course of the day and requested feedback on the format and content of the day. She also reminded all the delegates that the Swim Ireland Board is currently preparing a new Strategic Plan for 2017–2021 and will be engaging with the Regions. Members are encouraged to engage in the process and the new plan will be launched at the Swim Ireland AGM in May 2017.

Mary Haughney
Board Secretary
Swim Ireland
11th October, 2016

EGM

It had been intended that an EGM would be held in conjunction with Congress for the purposes of voting on 12 Resolutions for changes to the Swim Ireland Constitution. However, there were only 41 voting delegates present and the Swim Ireland Constitution specifies a quorum of 50. The EGM was reconvened for 15th October 2016. At the re-convened EGM all 12 Resolutions were passed unanimously. The revised Constitution can be viewed on the Swim Ireland website.

<http://www.swimireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/10/Swim-Ireland-Constitution-151016.pdf>

Mary McMorrow,
Company Secretary
Swim Ireland
16th October 2016