



## Deben Swimming Club

**It has been less than a year since Woodbridge-based Deben Swimming Club achieved Sport England Clubmark accreditation, but it's been one of the most successful periods in the club's history.**

"It may be a coincidence," says Head Coach Ian Cotton, "but since getting the Clubmark in November 2004 the club has been better than ever. In February we won the county's winter league for the very first time, which is a great achievement for us all."

The Sport England Clubmark is used by national governing bodies of sport as part of their club accreditation programmes for sports clubs with junior sections in recognition of a quality club. By creating a single, national standard, Clubmark helps give all kinds of sports clubs a structure and direction that will benefit them in many ways.

It took eighteen months for the club to work through the accreditation process to achieve the Clubmark and Swim 21 accreditation, which is awarded at the same time by the Amateur Swimming Association. During those eighteen months, club membership swelled from 250 to 330 members, plus those on the waiting list to join, an achievement far better than the club could have hoped for.

"We decided to go for the accreditation as it seemed a good way of reviewing everything that we did," explains Ian. "We wanted to do that anyway, but using the Clubmark guidance meant that we had a template to follow and that all areas would be covered."

The process began with a questionnaire to assess exactly where the club stood in the areas of swimmer development, coaching development, club management and partnerships. The ASA then helped the club to devise an action plan to provide evidence for what was being achieved already and to highlight where further work was needed.

"We didn't think it would be difficult but we did think there would be a lot of work involved," says Ian. "Four of us were involved in the process and with the help and support we received it was not as time consuming as we'd feared."

The club met regularly with the regional development officer of their governing body throughout the process, getting support and feedback and looking at good practice examples from other clubs which had already achieved the accreditation.



The initial research highlighted some interesting points for Deben to develop. “We’d never really considered things like land training to improve fitness, or doping protocols, as these aren’t usually relevant for lower level clubs. It has made us realise that we are capable of more than we’d realised, and our great results this year really demonstrate that,” Ian explains.

A lot of protocols and procedures were tightened up or rewritten as part of the process and one of the many benefits is that the club now operates in a much more professional manner. “We know how to promote our policies now and everybody understands how the club works and what their role is.”

Other improvements have been in the delivery of the coaching and the focus on swimmers. “We use a log book system for all our swimmers now and that has made them feel much more involved in their development and that they really belong with the club,” says Ian.

The club’s hard work has not gone unnoticed. “Many of our new members have come to us through word of mouth and we’ve been a lot more proactive about spreading the word. Our website is always up to date with the latest club news and we regularly get coverage in the sports pages of our local paper.”