

Swim England's Drive to Develop Female Water Polo Referees

Swim England, in collaboration with the British Water Polo League (BWPL) and Aquatics GB, is proud to launch a new initiative in 2025 aimed at increasing female participation in water polo refereeing. With comparable male and female participation in the sport, it's time our refereeing community reflected that balance.

This initiative will focus on Grassroots development to grow the number and standard of female referees on the Swim England Referee Pathway.

The Current Landscape

Women currently make up just 18% of all qualified water polo referees in England. Of those, only 4% are actively officiating in the British Water Polo League (BWPL). These figures highlight the need for targeted support and development to ensure our officiating pathways are inclusive and representative.

Domestic Development: Creating Opportunities and Resources

Swim England will launch a Female Referees Development Programme in 2025. This will:

- Focus on topics relevant to female referees' development
- Provide a space to discuss barriers to recruitment, progression, and retention
- Generate resources to support future female referees

This initiative is designed not only to upskill current referees but also to build a sustainable and supportive environment for new recruits.

International Inspiration: Anna Goncharenko Joins the Programme

To support the launch of this initiative, Swim England is delighted to welcome Anna Goncharenko to two forthcoming national events: BWPL Women's Divisions at Liverpool, and the Under-15 Female National Age Group Championships in Coventry. Anna will referee matches, mentor female officials and lead workshops.

Anna's journey is one of resilience and excellence. A refugee from Ukraine, she has gone on to officiate at the Women's World Championships in Singapore and the Qualification Tournaments for the 2026 Women's European Water Polo Championships. She currently leads a water polo programme for the Luxembourg Federation (FLNS).



Read Anna's story – a powerful testament to strength, sport, and solidarity.

Looking Ahead

This initiative is part of Swim England's wider commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion across all areas of aquatic sport. By investing in both grassroots and elite development—and working closely with BWPL and Aquatics GB—we aim to create a more inclusive and representative officiating community.

Get Involved

We encourage clubs, coaches, and volunteers to support this initiative by:

- Promoting refereeing opportunities to female athletes
- Offering shadowing and mentoring at local matches
- Sharing stories of female officials to inspire others

Together, we can ensure that the next generation of referees reflects the diversity and dynamism of our sport.