

AASE and Aquatics

A Golden Partnership

In October 2006, the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) launched the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE) - an innovative apprenticeship programme designed to support talented young athletes in their sporting and educational pursuits.

As England's national governing body for swimming, diving, water polo, open water and synchronised swimming, the ASA organises competition throughout England, establishes the laws of the sport and operates comprehensive certification and education programmes for teachers, coaches, officials as well as its renowned learn to swim awards scheme. The ASA also supports 1220 affiliated swimming clubs through a national/regional/county structure, and ensures all Britons have an opportunity to learn to swim.

The ASA was one of the first sporting bodies to engage with the AASE framework – developed by SkillsActive in conjunction with the Learning Skills Council (LSC) and several industry bodies. The ASA believed the programme presented a unique opportunity to help nurture its young sporting stars, and also meet its corporate objectives. About 300 aquatic athletes have enrolled on the AASE to date.

The ASA's Michelle Kiff has been involved in the delivery of the AASE programme across aquatics since inception. As AASE programme manager, Michelle has been responsible for implementing the programme within the organisation – developing the resources required for delivery, as well as the generic selection policy for the aquatic disciplines. Over the past two years, Michelle has worked closely with SkillsActive and the LSC, ensuring the ASA meets the programme's specified quality and educational requirements, as well as the evolving needs of the AASE athletes.

"We heard about the programme through SkillsActive and knew it was running successfully across football so decided to look into it," Michelle says. "I immediately saw real value in the programme. Having been an athlete myself who went through the university system, I saw how it could benefit athletes who were trying to develop in their sport, but who also wanted to gain an education at the same time. The AASE provides robust funding to



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educate our athletes and puts them on a structured educational route in terms of their learning.”

Michelle says that at the time the AASE was being rolled out by SkillsActive, the ASA was evaluating its talent pathway programme. The organisation wanted to grow its current model and find new ways to keep aquatic athletes in their sport and saw the AASE as the ideal solution.

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We have a high drop out rate within the sixteen to eighteen age group and thought the AASE would be a great way to counteract that. We also saw the AASE as a means of training athletes for a career in the industry and to meet skills shortages in teaching, lifeguarding, coaching and personal training, and it has certainly done that.”

“The programme also fits in well with our current talent pathway. We have a World Class programme which is based on performance at an international level and the AASE sits just below this. The AASE brings in additional resources and staff and ensures we

have people that can go out there and identify talent and offer support that benefits us as an organisation.”

Three administration staff and 11 talent development officers help deliver the AASE at the ASA. The talent development officers work closely with the athletes, meeting with them fortnightly on a one-to-one basis, and supporting them through their AASE requirements. The athletes keep a training log-book and attend workshops every three months, which include lectures on nutrition, strength and conditioning and goal setting. The athletes also attend a week-long offshore camp once a year, where they train and complete work that connects with their NVQ evidence. Michelle is also in regular contact with the AASE coordinators at the schools and colleges to ensure the athletes’ studies are on target and that they ultimately achieve the full NVQ framework.

Michelle believes one of the best aspects of the AASE is that it ensures athletes find balance in their lives, while offering flexibility and choice.

“The AASE is great because it embraces both sport and education – not just one or the other – and reinforces to athletes that you can gain a lot of different skills from doing both. We know our athletes aren’t going to be competing forever, so when their competing days do come to an end, the AASE can ensure they have direction and the skills needed to go straight into higher education or employment and forge successful careers.”

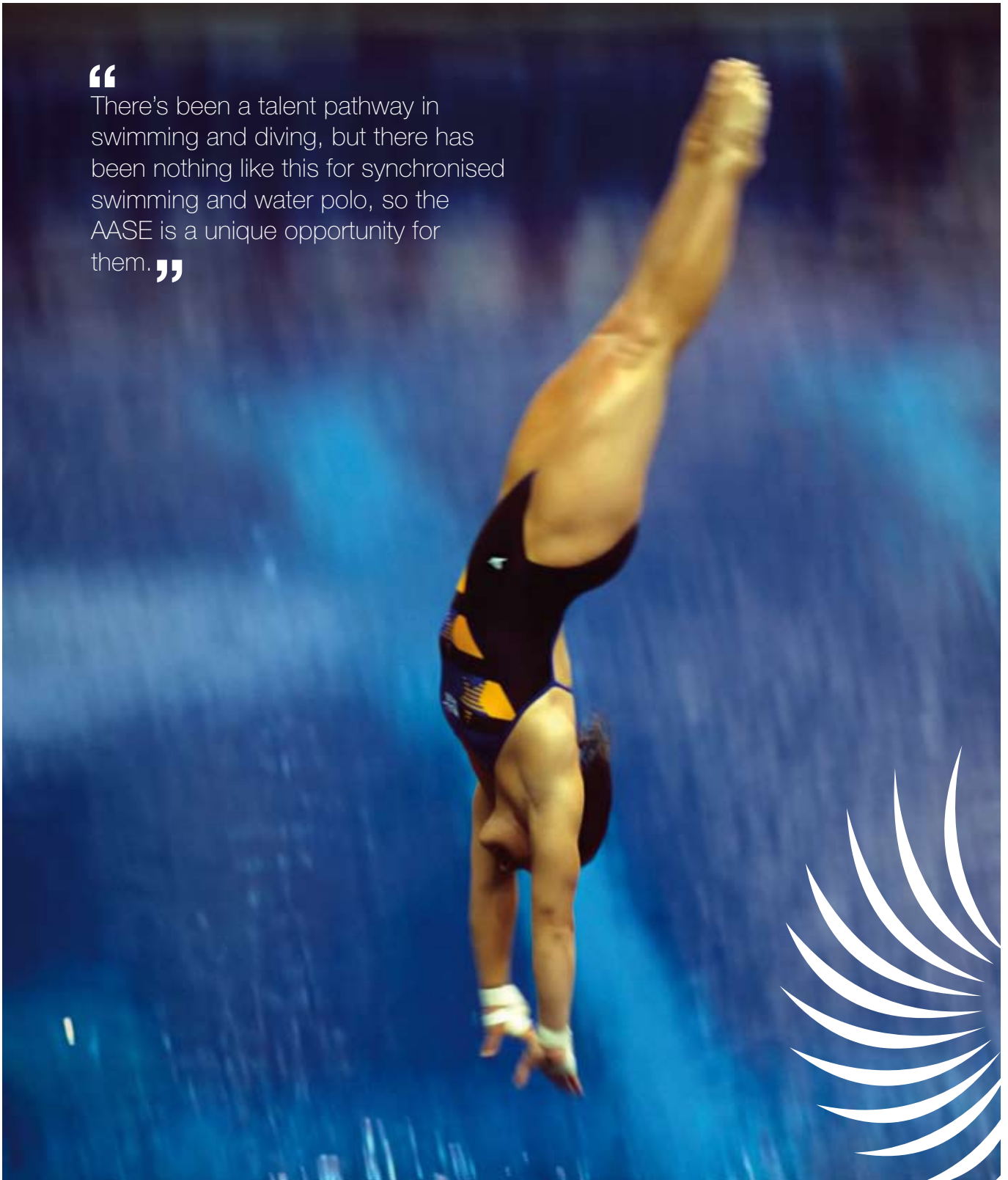


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The programme has really gone from strength to strength and we are starting to see the results. For a lot of our athletes, the AASE has increased their confidence. They feel part of a strong programme and they’re getting valuable support. It’s motivating them to succeed.”

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According to Michelle, the AASE meets the needs of a range of athletes – those whose prevailing strengths lie in the pool, and those who find greater success in the classroom. Seven AASE aquatic athletes competed at the Beijing Olympics – Jenna Randall and Olivia Allison in synchronised swimming and Jemma Lowe and double gold medallist Rebecca Adlington in swimming. Paralympic swimmers included Matt Whorwood, who won bronze medals in both the 100m breaststroke and 400m freestyle events, Kate Grey, and Rachel Latham.

ASA chief executive, David Sparkes, says 19-year-old Adlington is a prime example of how an apprenticeship programme like

the AASE can keep young people in sport, providing new pathways to success.

“The likes of swimming, diving and synchronised swimming are specialisation sports – you have to start doing them at a young age and specialise in them quite early on,” David says. “One of the issues for the ASA has been that when some of our athletes get to sixteen or seventeen, they start to face other tensions. They’re often at a stage where they would like to carry on swimming, but feel they should get a qualification. Some of them start thinking they’re not quite as good as they want to be, and are considering other options.”

CASE STUDY

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At school, I didn't do my A-Levels, but the AASE has enabled me to train for swimming and continue with my education at the same time.”

Rebecca Adlington, AASE apprentice and double Olympic gold medallist



“Rebecca Adlington is a prime example of this. Rebecca didn't make the 2006 Commonwealth Games team to go to Melbourne. Suddenly she's off the radar for World Class but is keen to continue swimming. Her parents want her to get an education and prepare for life after sport, so she enrolls on the AASE programme. It wasn't a case of them saying, 'oh well, it'll all work itself out when you get your two Olympic gold medals', because that wasn't part of their game plan.

“We're not expecting to produce a Rebecca Adlington every year – that would be beyond our wildest dreams. But from time to time an athlete like Rebecca will pop out of the woodwork, because what we know from experience is that some athletes do develop a bit later and they become world beating. Rebecca is the classic mould, and the great thing is, she's still so young and her journey isn't over yet.”

David says what is really exciting for the ASA is that while there has been a talent pathway for top swimmers through World Class, AASE embraces a much larger group of people.

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Adlington herself is experiencing first hand the benefits of an apprenticeship scheme specifically designed to encompass education and access to more quality coaching hours, modern facilities and new technologies.

“Winning two gold medals in Beijing and breaking a world record was the greatest achievement of my life. I wish the apprentices the

best of luck for their AASE programme and hopefully we'll see as many of them as possible competing for Great Britain over the next few years,” says Rebecca.

David believes the AASE will have a considerable impact on UK sport in the long term – both in terms of Olympic success and participation.

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I think a lot of our athletes will come through the programme and find their way into London 2012 – I'm absolutely confident of that. They may not all come away with gold medals like Rebecca, but they will be in the team. To get to the Olympics you've got to have talent, but also an intense passion for the sport and that's what these AASE athletes have got.”

“And if we're serious as a nation about keeping people more active, more often than it's really important that we keep these young people in sport through programmes like the AASE. We've had about 300 athletes in the programme now, some of whom will become top athletes, coaches and swimming teachers of the future, inspiring young children and maintaining their involvement in sport.”

SkillsActive
Shaping Skills for the Future

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