A combination of the National squad (numbering 12) and Age Performance squad (numbering 4) travelled to Sheffield’s Pond’s Forge in April this being a record number for the club to compete in the British Swimming Championships.

UK’s premier meet of the year was also acting as a qualification meet for the World Championships (Budapest), the World Junior Championships (Indianapolis), the European Junior Championships (Israel) and the European Youth Olympic Festival (Hungary in July).

Also looking on, no doubt, were the English, Scottish and Welsh selectors for their own selection criteria for the Commonwealth Youth Games in the Bahamas later in the summer.

With a lot at stake the Titans put their hard regime of training into practice resulting in a superb meet, coming away with multiple British Age Group, Regional records and numerous best times in what was a stand-out meet for them.

The competition between the best of the elite of British swimmers consisted of heats with the evening’s finals being made up of – the Junior Final, Target Tokyo Final and the Open Final.

**Freya Anderson:** breaks two British Age Records and selected for the World Senior and also Junior Championships:

This was to be a fantastic meet for Freya marking her rise onto the senior stage at the age of sixteen achieving personal best times in all her swims making the open final in the 200 free, 50 fly, 50 free and 100 free events.

A time of 27.02 in the 50m butterfly booked Freya a **British Age Group record** whilst her 54.40 time on the 100 freestyle also put to bed Fran Halsall’s 10 year age group record – with Freya beating Halsall’s record for a second time in the final (54.31) in a closely fought race against Olympian Siobhan-Marie O’Connor which saw Freya crowned British Champion.

These times see Freya topping the world rankings in the 50 fly, 50 free and 100 free for 16 year old girls this year, and third in the 200 freestyle.

**Charlie Hutchison** ALSO breaks two British Age Records and qualified for his first GBR selection for the European Youth Olympic Festival for Hungary in July: If Freya was the undisputed star of the meet Hutchison (still aged 14 ) was most certainly the hero for the boys fifteen year old group. He opened his campaign on Day 2 with the 200 fly (2:07.42), followed by the gruelling 400IM on day 3, where he made the Junior final and came first smashing his PB with a time of 4.26.26 and setting a new West Midlands Junior Record. Next Hutchison was the youngest competitor in the 100 fly but showed maturity beyond his years to record a new PB of 57.86.

Then it was time for the famous **Hutchison magic** to make an appearance and Charlie, who already holds British Records in the 13 yr age group went about setting **two new British Age group** records in the 14yr old age group in two of the ‘stand-out’ performances of the week.
First came the 200m IM where he smashed his PB to come first in the junior final in 2:07.52, a swim that not only set a new British Record but raises him to 5th in the World Rankings for 15 year old boys and unsurprisingly broke the West Midlands Junior Record.

Hutchison repeated his success in the 200m Backstroke where a fantastic swim of 2:03.77 against a field of older boys, took 3rd place in the Junior Final and set another new British Record for 14 yr old boys and again broke the West Midlands Junior Record. A great week for these talented young Titan’s stars of the future.

Elinor Southward wins selection for the European Junior Championships (Israel): 15 year old Southward had a busy week having entered 7 of the 8 events she qualified for. She was in action on day 1 in the 400m IM, where she recorded a new PB of 5:00.51 in the heats to finish 12th overall in the Junior category. From a PB of 5:06.41 at the beginning of March, this represents another positive step in this event.

Day 2 saw Southward in action again in the 100m Backstroke, where she a recorded a new PB of 1:02.81 in the heats to qualify third for the Junior Final in which she went better again, recording a time of 1:02.44 to finish in third place setting a new West Mids Jun Rec. She also went in the heats of the 50m Butterfly where she shaved 0.01 off her PB to finish 24th overall in the Junior category in 28.76.

After a well-earned day off on day 3, Ellie returned to the pool on day 4 recording a new PB of 2:14.84 from an early heat of the 200m Backstroke, to qualify first for the Junior Final. She went better again in a fiercely contested final, recording 2:14.32 but having to settle for 4th place. Southward had two events on day 5, the 50m Backstroke where she recorded a time of 30.28 in the heats to finish 15th overall in the junior category, and the 200IM, where a time of 2:21.71 was just enough to make the final in which she finished 7th in 2:22.19.

Southward finished her week on day 6 with a PB of 1.02.65 in the heats of the 100m Butterfly to finish 13th overall in the juniors; a swim that took her tally to 7PBs from 10 swims. The selectors had no hesitation in inviting her to represent GBR in Israel at the European Championships.

Cassie Wild wins selection for World Juniors (Indianapolis): Backstroker Wild opened her campaign on Day 2 of the competition in the 100m event. Going into the Junior final as 4th qualifier, Wild pushed on to show her true form with a spectacular PB and first place in a time of 1.02.07, putting her top of the UK rankings for the event and placing her 7th in the world rankings for 17 year olds and breaking the West Mids Jun Record.

In the 200m backstroke Wild came 5th in the Junior final with a time of 2.15.76, just off her PB. Saving her signature event until last, Wild made the Open final of the 50m backstroke, finishing in 6th place with a PB of 28.91 and firmly placing her as one of the top female backstrokers with a 4th place ranking in the World for 17 year olds. Overall a very successful meet for Wild culminating in her winning selection for GBR and joining club mates Freya and Tazmin at the World Junior Championships in Indianapolis in August.

Tazmin Pugh wins selection for World Junior Championships (Indianapolis): Still recovering from a broken bone in her wrist which has inhibited any kind of full training since January Pugh and even though having qualified for twelve of the events was only really able to compete in the 200m freestyle on the first day where she made it through to the Junior finals taking second place in a new life time best. Her performances impressed enough to make selection for the World Juniors.

Olivia Gardner: Hard working Gardner made all the training hours count when she recorded 4:59.88 in her heat of the 400IM to qualify for the Target Tokyo final. This is a gruelling event to take on twice in one day at this level and in spite Gardner giving her all in the final; she wasn’t able to improve her time from earlier in the day.
Phoebe Griffiths: wins selection for the European Junior Championships (Israel): Open water and distance swimmer 16 year old Phoebe Griffiths started the meet off in style with a PB of 2:06.41 in the 200m free event, just missing out on a place in the final. Phoebe showed her strength in the 400m IM on the same morning with a time of 5.06.88 and although this was just outside her PB it was a solid swim for day 1 in an event in which Griffiths has made big improvements of some 8 seconds in the last year. In the 800m free she powered to a personal best time and a top 10 placing in the open age group with 8.56.22.

With a packed programme Griffiths was competing again on day 4 in the 100 freestyle (60.41), and again on day 5 in the 400 free (4:26.01) after which time Griffiths was disappointed that a sickness bug prevented her competing in the invitational 1500m distance event.

Adam Metcalf: is yet another Titans in a great position having fulfilled the criteria for selection and invite by the B.O.A for the European Youth Olympic Festival:

Metcalf kicked off his week in style in the stacked 100 breaststroke touching home with a PB of 1.06.80 as the second fastest 16 year old. Next day was the 50m breaststroke where Metcalf put in a time of 30.53 equalling his own West Mids Jun Rec. Day 3 saw Metcalf out in the 100 freestyle where again he added another PB to his list, blazing home in a time of 52.45 placing him firmly at the top of the UK rankings for 16 year olds in this event and breaking the West Mids Jun Record.

Next up Metcalf was in the 100 fly putting in a season’s best time of 58.38. A time of 24.42 in the ‘splash and dash’ 50m freestyle, although slightly off his PB reinforced his position as 3rd fastest 16 year old in the UK this year. Finally for Metcalf after a busy few days was the 50 fly where he touched home in a time of 26.36.

Metcalf’s outstanding achievements have been rewarded with his first GBR selection to the European Olympic Festival.

Joseph Small: Backstroke specialist Joseph Small got the meet off to a fantastic start in the 50m back setting himself a PB with a time of 26.70 in the heats, putting him into the Junior final where he came in in 6th place, and putting him 2nd in the UK rankings for this event. Small set another PB in the 100 back, this time in the final with a time of 57.08 and again putting him in 2nd place in the UK. Gaining himself another PB in the 200 back with a time of 2.08.29 bettering his time from the recent FFN Golden Tour in France, overall a very successful meet for Joseph.

Jacob Jackson: set about swimming his events on the second day making it through the heats to eventually take 7th in the Target Tokyo final with 26.82. The third day found him in the 200m fly heats recording 2:04.91 once again making it through to the Target Tokyo final but not matching his heats time.

Gordon Mason: Another distance specialist swimming this week was Gordon Mason. A solid days racing on day 1 saw Mason compete in the 400 freestyle against some stiff competition, coming in just off his PB (4:08.44) in a time of 4.08.69. Mason was in action again on Day 3 in the a stacked heat of the 1500m, touching home in a new PB of 16.11.99 to confirm his top 10 ranking (18yr olds) in an event that has seen him improve by some 20 seconds in the last year.

Jack Shillinglaw: New Titans recruit and backstroke specialist Jack Shillinglaw, was up in the 200m event on the last day of competition – claiming a PB with 2.06.61 reflecting all the hard work carried out at the Ellesmere pool and putting him in the top 10 of the UK rankings for 18 year olds. Shillinglaw was cruelly forced to miss the early part of the week owing to illness, so this was a very satisfying performance at this level of competition & under such circumstances.
Nathan Wells: Freestyler Nathan Wells got his meet off to a fantastic start in the 400 m event hitting home with a PB of 4.05.37 – placing him 14th in the UK rankings for 18 years olds – following this up in the 200m event Wells hit home just off his PB in a time of 1.55.86.

Head Coach Alan Bircher said:

“l’m never surprised! These kids never surprise me in what they can achieve. As a coaching team we’re really lucky to be part of the journey and to look back and consider just 5 years ago we had two national age group qualifiers and now we’re looking at having 10-12 swimmers racing internationally in the summer. The first two senior World Championship Qualifiers in Conor Ferguson (Ireland) and Freya Anderson (TeamGB) just shows what we are doing and that this is the beginning.”

Titan’s Age Performance Squad are the feeding ground for the National Squad and where they hone their skills to reach excellence and on this occasion were able to perform on the National stage alongside their heroes to compete for their first GBR selection to the European Youth Olympic Festival..

For the EOYF only 8 boys and 8 girls were to be selected across Great Britain for girls 15 and under and boys 16 and under (as for Hutchison and Metcalf above) selection turned out to be tough.

Pia Murray (15) is another Titan putting herself in prime position for selection and forthcoming invite by the B.O.A for the European Youth Olympic Festival having fulfilled the criteria set down

Murray put in some stunning performances so much so it was more than enough to secure selection to the EYOF by finishing first in two events and second in two events and will now represent Great Britain for the first time. Murray came first in both the 50m backstroke in a new best time of 29.75 and the 100m butterfly also in a new best time of 1:01.47, taking her to the top of the British rankings in both events. She also progressed to the Junior Final (17 and under) in both events where she finished a phenomenal 6th and 4th respectively.

In addition Murray finished second in her age group in the 50m butterfly in a new best time of 27.65 and 2nd in her age group in the 100m backstroke also in a new best time of 1:04.17. Murray progressed to the Junior Final in 50m fly where she finished 5th. She also swam in the 200m butterfly where she finished 5th in her age group in 2:22.97. Pia Murray, her coaches, family and friends were utterly all delighted putting herself in automatic qualifying position to win her first GBR selection at the European Youth Olympic Festival.

Anna Smail (15) in contrast, heartbreakingly looks like she has just missed out an automatic selection by just 0.8 seconds in the 200m freestyle event even though this represented a great new life time best of 2:05.72 raising her in the UK rankings to second in her 15 yr age group. Smail also went on to finish 3rd in her age group in the 400m freestyle knocking three seconds off her entry time in 4:25.28 and 4th in her age group in the 100m freestyle in a new best time of 58.64, 0.6 seconds off the fastest time which gained selection.

Anna’s performances should be good enough to put her in the first reserve seats if something untoward happens to any of BOA’s selection in June and yet another invaluable experience to another ‘Titans’ star of the future.

Kyo Tanner (15) swam in the 50m freestyle, already ranked number one in Great Britain for his age in this event, he came first in his age in a new best time of 24.45 increasing his lead in his number one ranking.
**Sophie Negrine** (14) after a few months of illness and injury bravely swam in the 400m freestyle and although off her best time still managed to come 4th in her age group and gained experience of swimming at her first British Championships.

**Ellesmere College Titans** ..... is the only club to have as many as one of their members selected for the World Junior, four for the World Juniors, three for the European Junior and three, having fulfilled the criteria for invite by the BOA for the European Youth Olympic Festival. **Truly magnificent and well done to all !!**

Age Performance Coach Marc Foster said ‘**The swimmers in age performance all did a fantastic job and responded very well under the pressure of such a high profile meet ...... the perseverance and resilience the swimmers had already showed through some difficult meets this season and it paid off in spades. The swimmers should be incredibly excited and proud of their achievements......’**