

## Written evidence submitted by Swim England

### Women's Sport

Thank you for the opportunity to give oral evidence as part of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's important inquiry into women's sport.

At the end of the session you asked if we may follow up with answers to two questions. Specifically around the efforts being taken to tackle barriers to women taking up leadership roles in sport and what action is being taken to tackle sexism and misogyny.

#### **Leadership:**

I am proud of the representation of women and girls across aquatics.

The Senior Leadership Team at Swim England is majority female (five of seven) and our board is gender-balanced. We also have a female chair of our Youth Advisory Panel which is the strong youth voice within Swim England.

Beyond the leadership, our wider Swim England workforce is approximately two-thirds female and of our 170,000 members, more than 50% are women and girls.

Beyond Swim England as an organisation, swimming remains an incredibly popular activity for women and girls with 1 million more women (5.8 million) going swimming in the last year than men (4.7 million).

Girls are also more likely to say they love swimming (74%) compared to boys (62%) and more likely to say they want to swim more (80%) compared to boys (73%). Swim England's 2019 Value of Swimming report also found that girls who swim have considerably higher increases in wellbeing, health and self-confidence compared to boys, with swimming more than doubling women and girls' self-confidence.

### Misogyny

You also asked for information on how we are tackling sexism and misogyny within aquatics. The first point I would make is that I think when considering sexism/misogyny in sport is that it is reflective of the sexism and misogyny we sadly still see all too often in society at large. By challenging and tackling sexism in society at large will massively help efforts to tackle it within sport.

Lookin specifically at aquatics - despite the positive impact swimming has for millions of women and girls in England, sadly there have been incidences where poor practices and unacceptable behaviours has caused distress and harm to those taking part in our sports and activities.

Ensuring there is a positive, welcoming, safe and inclusive culture across aquatics for everyone is an issue we are committed to tackling and have already taken action to begin the process of cultural change as outlined in our Heart of Aquatics<sup>1</sup> plan.

Our approach, as set out in the Heart of Aquatics Plan is based on three pillars. Listen. Support. Resource.

While this is broader than just considering issues around sexism/misogyny, these issues would be encompassed within this work.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/heart-of-aquatics/>

As part of our support to swimmers, we are keen to listen and better improve the support which swimmers feel they require from Swim England. That is why, as part of our Heart of Aquatics Plan we have commissioned independent experts to undertake a comprehensive listening exercise, completely independently of Swim England, to give all members of the aquatics community the opportunity to share their views and experiences. This includes current and former club members, parents, coaches, teachers, workforce, club committee members, officials and pool owners/operators.

This involves a private and anonymous online 'listening space' accessible to all as well as pre-arranged interviews, focus groups and online research with the independent experts (the results of which will be anonymised before being shared with Swim England).

This work will help underpin the support which we provide to swimmers going forward.

We have also appointed eight members to a new Oversight Committee comprising independent experts as well as athlete, judicial and culture representatives alongside members of the organisation. Reporting directly to the Swim England board, the committee will manage and oversee our safeguarding, welfare and culture plan.

Following the independent work already undertaken in 2023 we will set up listening forums and groups which will continue beyond this initial phase. This is critical as it will inform where particular interventions or changes in our current approach are required and help us decide how we set our cultural standards and activities going forward.

That is then backed up by providing the development and support required by all parts of the aquatic community. In particular in the field of safeguarding and welfare to make sure that change is seen, understood and delivered by all in aquatics.

Central to our support for the community is ensuring that we have the necessary mix of formal and informal training and education available to clubs, coaches and volunteers as well as parents, whilst also providing access to key members of the Swim England team. This approach will embed support right across the community.

Finally, we are committed to providing the required resources to deliver the level of support needed to ensure we have a positive and safe culture in place for everyone, across all levels of aquatics.

We have already begun the process of increasing the resources dedicated to meeting the safeguarding and welfare needs of our participants and sports.

As mentioned, each of the three pillars is broader than just the issue of sexism/misogyny within aquatics but that would absolutely be a part of the discussions in all stages.

Thank you again for the opportunity to give evidence to the committee and to provide this additional information setting out some of the actions Swim England is taking.

Myself, my senior leadership team and the Swim England board are absolutely committed to ensuring that there is a positive culture across our sports and that the highest standards of welfare and safeguarding are in place.

Yours sincerely,

**Jane M Nickerson MBE**  
*Chief Executive Officer – Swim England*