

Swim England – Written evidence (NPS0060)

About Swim England

Swim England is the recognised National Governing Body for swimming, diving, water polo and artistic swimming in England.

Before Covid, swimming remained one of the most popular activities in England, with 14 million adults going swimming each year (31.3 per cent of the population). More than one million children learn to swim outside of school through Swim England's Learn to Swim programme each year. Over 1,000 swimming, diving, water polo and artistic swimming clubs are members of Swim England.

Swim England's recent 'Value of Swimming' report demonstrated that swimming is incredibly valuable. It is valuable for the individual and to local communities and wider society, saving the NHS more than £357 million each year.

1 How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?

1.1 The biggest improvement we could see for local delivery of sport and recreation would be to see the appropriate level of strategic investment to ensure local areas have the facilities they need to support people lead an active lifestyle.

1.2 Swimming is an ideal activity for people of all ages, and is particularly good for people with a range of health conditions which can make exercising on land difficult.

1.3 Swim England has undertaken some mapping of swimming facility provision, and one fifth of local authorities (67) in England already face a shortage of water space in their local area equivalent to at least one average sized swimming pool. This is particularly acute in areas with greater levels of social deprivation. 37% of water deprived local authorities sit within areas of high social deprivation.

1.4 This lack of facilities exacerbates health inequalities across the country. Local authorities that are short on water space are more likely to have above national average rates for inactivity. 31% (3.5 million) of the nation's inactive adults in England live in these 67 local authorities. 28% of all inactive children live in these local authorities. Swimming participation rates are below the national average for both children and adults in these authorities. Additionally, these local authorities that are short of water space are more likely to have higher proportions of its population from BAME backgrounds.

1.5 Swim England believes that leisure provision should be a statutory requirement for local authorities. As a discretionary service, councils are having

to make difficult choices about where their limited resources can go, with the legal obligations around statutory services making them a higher priority.

1.6 As well as providing a substantial settlement for local government which reflects the importance of preserving and investing in high quality, accessible aquatic facilities for all aquatic disciplines, the Government should recognise the benefits of investing in these facilities by making cross-government funding available for local authorities to draw down on. This would help improve coordination.

2 How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

Outside of school:

2.1 Swim England believes the best way to encourage children and young people to participate in sport and recreation is to make it a safe, fun and inclusive experience to incentivise them to want to continue participating.

2.2 With 1.88 million young people swimming regularly, it is clear swimming has a huge role to play in helping our young people feel happier, healthier and more self-confident as they grow up.

Girls who swim have considerably higher increases in wellbeing, health and self-confidence compared to boys, [with figures revealing swimming more than doubles girls' self-confidence](#).

2.3 A total of 1.2 million children learn to swim with Swim England's Learn to Swim Programme each year and more than 80% of swimming lesson programmes use Swim England Learn to Swim Programme syllabus content.

2.4 One success story has been developing partnerships to be able to reach out to children and young people and engage them in new and exciting ways. Swim England has been able to utilise our reputation and reach as the national governing body for swimming to partner with Disney to encourage more young people to get active in the water.

2.5 By featuring some of Disney's most-loved characters from Disney Pixar's Toy Story 4, Disney's Mickey Mouse & Friends and Disney Frozen 2 we have been able to appeal to children beyond any initial interest in the water. Already, more than 37,000 families have taken part since the programme launched in 2019 (This figure would be even higher but sessions were not able to take place for most of 2020)

2.6 Continued Sport England support for clubs will also help encourage children and young people to be active outside of school. Currently over 100,000 children are active with Swim England affiliated clubs.

2.7 It is increasingly important for sport and recreation providers to utilise technology and provide services and information in a format and style that is consistent with how people expect to consume information and engage with

organisations. Swim England developed a new 'My Learn to Swim' app to add an extra experience for children to incentivise them to continue on their swimming journey for longer and to enable us to engage in a deeper and more meaningful way with families on the Swim England Learn to Swim programme. In the first year over 20,000 families are using the app.

In School:

2.8 Since 1994, swimming and water safety has been a statutory element of the national curriculum for physical education in England. This means that every 11-year old child should leave primary school with the skills to keep themselves safe while enjoying swimming with friends and family.

The national curriculum requires each pupil to be able to do the following:
Perform safe self-rescue in different water based situations
Swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres
Use a range of strokes effectively, for example, front crawl, backstroke and breaststroke.

2.9 The Government's 'School Sport and Activity Action Plan' stated that "Government, schools and the sport sector will take further action to ensure all children leave primary school with vital swimming and water safety skills." Swim England is keen to continue to work with the Government to improve aquatic opportunities for pupils.

2.10 The success of curriculum swimming and water safety is of crucial importance in helping children be more active because for many children, school will be the only opportunity they have to learn these vital skills, skills that one day may save their life.

2.11 Additionally, gaining the ability to swim, and the knowledge of how to enjoy the water safely, is important to open up a whole range of activities beyond the obvious examples of swimming, water polo, artistic swimming and diving. An inability to swim will reduce the likelihood of children considering a whole range of other activities on the water such as canoeing, sailing and rowing.

2.12 Currently 77% of children leave primary school able to swim 25m unaided but this figure masks a worrying inequality. Whilst 84% of children and young people from the most affluent families are able to swim 25m unaided, only 41% of those from the least affluent families meet this standard.

2.13 2019 saw a 6% decline in pupils in years 1-2 undertaking school swimming which could impact on attainment rates in years to come if these pupils do not have opportunity to catch up.

2.14 Challenges remain, with issues surrounding the monitoring and enforcement of curriculum swimming, issues with accessing facilities (both pool time itself and also transport issues getting to pools for schools) and the undoubted competing pressures that will be on schools when they do return to face-to-face learning as a result of the disruption caused by Covid-19.

3 How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

3.1 Swim England was proud to be one of the first governing bodies to be awarded the 'Advanced level of Equality Standard' but we recognise there is much work to do to make our sport more representative of the communities we serve.

3.2 In order to increase activity within under-represented groups we must ensure that the offer we provide is accessible based upon the needs of each group, taking into account barriers that may prevent them from participating in 'traditional sport'. We must consider 'intersectionality' and meeting the needs of multiple demographics whilst avoiding a blanket or 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

3.3 For example, the swimming pool environment can present barriers to women both inside and outside of the Muslim faith. Swimwear is traditionally tight-fitting which leaves some participants fearing judgement whilst religious considerations may also prevent some Muslim women from participating in sessions with both men and women. Rather than creating two separate sessions, 'women only' or 'women and children only' sessions with female lifeguards can meet the needs of both of these groups successfully.

3.4 This same approach must be taken across sport, removing the barriers that have been embedded within the traditional model.

3.5 Many of the groups listed in the question are often referred to as 'hard to reach', we must work to change this misconception by ensuring that our activities aren't 'hard to access'.

3.6 Swim England has taken practical steps to address this issue, signing a partnership agreement with Sporting Equals to ensure the Swim England Learn to Swim programme and Swim Safe are delivered in appropriate locations and agree ways to engage these diverse audiences. In 2020 Swim England partnered with the Black Swimming Association to help develop projects and programmes tailored to the needs of Black and other ethnically diverse communities.

3.7 Swim England has worked with Newham & UEL Swimming Club and stakeholders (Sport England, GLL, LLDC) at the London Aquatic Centre. This involves one of our clubs with the highest percentage of ethnically diverse members in the country (167 swimmers with over 75% from ethnically diverse communities) to deliver a project where more young people from the local area can progress from learn to swim to a programme where they can fulfil their talent, participating in one of London 2012s most iconic venues."

4 Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right

priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

4.1 Yes. Swim England views the five priorities outlined in the Sporting Future strategy as the right outcome priorities. It will be important going forward that the impact of Covid-19 on the sport and recreation landscape, and supporting the sector through the pandemic and beyond, is reflected in the government's priorities.

4.2 What is now important, and is less clear, is ascertaining how successful the government has been in measuring and delivering the strategy due to the inconsistent nature of progress reporting. No annual reports have been published in the past two years.

4.3 Sport and recreation also does not feature heavily in the DCMS's Single Departmental Plan, accounting for just four of the 62 objectives.

5 Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

5.1 Swim England welcomed the change from the previous Active People Survey to the current Active Lives Survey, as well as the more recent introduction of the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey. These surveys enable us to track trends in swimming participation, and of child's swimming ability. Access to the raw datasets allows us to use the insight obtained to support and enhance our programmes.

5.2 To improve the usefulness of the data collection, Swim England would welcome more frequent and quicker reporting to allow the sector to respond to changes in a timely manner. For example, we know, anecdotally, that open water swimming grew in popularity in spring/summer 2020 when England was in lockdown, however the Sport England reporting timeframes will not show spring/summer 2020 participation until October 2021. By this time, an additional open water season will have been completed. Knowing the demographics contributing to this growth in open water swimming is important to us to help build programmes to support their continued presence in the water. Without this, we are having to duplicate the work of Sport England, on a smaller scale, to collect our own data.

5.3 Another welcome change to the data collection would be more understanding of WHY participation figures are as they are, and directly impacting funding decisions.

What are the main motivations/barriers to participate, rather than a simple collection of, WHAT, as is captured now.

However, we stress that it should not be Sport England that captures the WHY for individual sports. Instead DCMS/Sport England should collaborate with the sport specific experts (such as NGBs) to work through this. For example, the Active Lives Survey tells us that swimming participation amongst the Black community is particularly low. Sport England should be using this knowledge

they've captured to directly fund Swim England to conduct further insight and build campaigns/programmes/networks to tackle this challenge.

5.4 Swim England believes that the monitoring and enforcement of curriculum swimming and water safety could be improved through more comprehensive reporting of attainment rates.

Currently schools' online reporting is monitored through an annual sample of schools. Active Partnerships review the published information on selected schools' websites and the results are then shared with DfE.

Swim England believes every schools' reporting should be monitored and published because accessing robust data is absolutely crucial in building a better picture of the current state of school swimming, to understand what interventions produce the best results and to aid the sharing of best practice. At present it is also unclear what, if any, the practical repercussions are of not meeting the reporting requirements are.

6 How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

6.1 There should be a zero tolerance approach to racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport, and wider society as a whole.

It is important there are clear and transparent processes in place to give confidence to people wishing to report an instance of discrimination within any given sport and that any report is fully investigated.

Whilst responsibility for tackling discrimination ultimately relies on each and every individual involved in a sport, there is an important role for national governing bodies in providing practical guidance and information to ensure their sports are genuinely inclusive for all participants as well as taking action where required.

7 What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation actives at all levels?

7.1 National Governing Bodies have a huge role to play in ensuring their sports have an effective duty of care and safeguarding standards.

7.2 Swim England has introduced a 'Stronger Affiliation' process so new and existing members know clubs are well run and their personnel have the necessary safeguarding checks in place to ensure members' safety. More information on stronger affiliation can be found here:

<https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/stronger-affiliation-process/>

8 What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable? For example, accountability for representing and protecting their membership, promoting their sport and maximising participation.

Opportunities

8.1 The upcoming Olympics offer an opportunity, through continued medal successes, for elite sport to help inspire the next generation of athletes.

8.2 Sport, both through success at the elite level and by hosting flagship events, can help unify the country and be an advert for Britain post-Brexit, extending our influence internationally.

8.3 There is a real opportunity to widen the talent pool and improve the diversity of elite programmes to help engage with more diverse communities.

8.4 the range of sports receiving a multi-year funding agreement should be extended to include sports such as water polo and artistic swimming, thus enabling greater connection with more of the population and sustained development of these sports.

Challenges

8.5 The main challenge facing all aquatic sports is the looming shortage of facilities / pools or those facilities being too expensive for athletes and the clubs that nurture them.

8.6 A lack of investment in public facilities and pool stock limits the opportunities to participate – especially for those in less affluent areas.

8.7 Continuing issues with the delivery of curriculum swimming means that some children never get the chance to be part of the talent pool.

8.8 There remains a reliance on an amazing volunteer workforce that nurture the grassroots of our sports but cannot be taken for granted.

8.9 Financial challenges facing sports bodies during and post-pandemic at local, regional and national level.

8.10 The stop-start funding or no funding at all for some sports limits the long-term development of these sports.

Accountability

8.11 NGBs are already very accountable. To receive elite funding from UK Sport an organisational health check has to be passed and ongoing targets must be achieved.

8.12 For any public funding received for participation NGBs are set KPIs from the funding body and are held accountable to this.

8.13 At Swim England we have an established and well respected safeguarding team to keep our sport safe for participants.

8.14 We have implemented Stronger Affiliation – ensuring that all clubs affiliated to Swim England provide safe, effective, sustainable environments for participants

8.15 NGBS, by definition, exist to promote their sports and are hugely passionate about growing their sports, achieving success and ensuring as many people as possible take part.

9 What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

10 Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

10.1 There are definitely merits to a national plan for sport and recreation, particularly to assist in securing a 'buy-in' from non-traditional departments when it comes to sport and recreation, such as Department of Health and Defra (for access issues for outdoor sports and activities).

10.2 If sufficiently prioritised within government then a national plan would potentially help to align strategic priorities around sport and public health across government departments which would be beneficial.

However, it will be important, given the release of a new Sport England 10 year strategy, to ensure that the two are aligned and as with any government strategy, the proof will be in the delivery and implementation.

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