

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 29 November 2022

PE1891/G: Make swimming lessons a statutory requirement in the primary schools curriculum

Thank you for your further letter dated 19 October 2022 in relation to Petition PE1891, lodged by Lewis Condy which calls for swimming lessons to be made a statutory requirement in the primary school curriculum following on from discussions at your committee meeting earlier this year.

I appreciate that learning to swim is an important life skill. With regards to the provision of swimming in schools, as my previous letter to the committee on 17 September 2021 stated, there is no mandatory curriculum in Scotland therefore local authorities and individual schools have the flexibility to decide upon the content of their own lessons at the local level, ideally taking into account the local needs and circumstances of all children and young people in attendance.

I am aware that some local authorities already do offer swimming lessons to school pupils as a part of their physical education classes, however we recognise the provision, approach and effectiveness of school swimming has been varied and inconsistent across Scotland. This was the case prior to the pandemic, which has also had a significant detrimental impact on both community and school swimming programmes in Scotland. Therefore the approach taken recognises that the provision of swimming lessons should be supported within schools where there is capacity to do so and within communities.

Scottish swimming's "learn to swim" framework within the community provides a positive impact from both physical and mental health perspective. Furthermore, we have been working with Scottish Swimming, Education Scotland, sportscotland and Scottish Water to develop interventions and approaches within local communities to provide opportunities for more children to become confident, safer and competent swimmers.

The Scottish Swimming Learn to Swim Framework, coordinated by Scottish Swimming and supported by Scottish Water is delivered by 37 partners across 162 pools across Scotland. The Framework is delivered

by the main Community Learn to Swim provider in 25 out of 32 local authority areas. It is also being provided in a further two local authority areas, albeit not by the main Community Learn to Swim provider. Progress is being made within two further local authority areas towards delivering the Framework during 2023.

There was a workforce of 1,275 swim teachers delivering to over 75,000 children per week - as at 31 March 2022. The Framework is aimed at youngsters from birth to 11-years-old and provides consistently high-quality teaching at least once a week, which progresses through a series of lessons and levels over a number of years. A list of lesson providers is available through the following web link: [Lesson Providers | Scottish Swimming](#).

With regards to your request for an update on proposals to work with Scottish Swimming and sportscotland on a programme of school swimming, including information about who might benefit from it, a number of Delivery Model Pilots are taking place during 2022-23 to support schools where there is capacity to do so, to understand and consider different approaches and models of delivery to help educate and provide opportunities for children across Scotland to experience the water in a fun, safe and inclusive approach. This reflects the many different scenarios faced by schools when deciding how best to support young people to access school swimming. Inclusion is central to the approach and there will be a specific focus on targeting SIMD quintile 1.

The results of the pilots will then be shared with the wider network and the small scale pilots will take place in the following areas using the following methods:

Pilot 1 - All children in a primary school receive a block(s) of school swimming provision during the school day (targeted year group normally P4 or P5). This is assessed and monitored against a framework.

Pilot Area - North Lanarkshire Council, targeted approach to deliver lessons to full classes of P5 pupils from identified Primary School areas of SIMD.

Pilot 2 - All children in primary school receive an "assessment" of swimming ability during the school day. A targeted approach identifies non-swimmers who then receive a block(s) of swimming lesson provision during school day.

Pilot Area - East Lothian Council, targeted approach following full assessment of all P5 children in East Lothian.

Pilot 3 - A combination of pilot 1 and 2 but developing a more holistic and sustainable model for areas that have access to their own swimming pool. Collaborative approach working with a variety of stakeholders (Active Schools, Primary Schools, Community LTS providers and Scottish Swimming) to support delivery.

Pilot area - Dundee City Council, (Baldrigon High School), Secondary School with swimming pool to work with Primary School cluster to offer swimming provision supported by senior pupils.

Pilot 4 - Develop delivery model(s) for effective school swimming within a rural setting and the challenges this presents. Increase time on task per visit reducing number of visits to maximise the time spent on venue and offset cost of travel (time and money).

Pilot area - Dumfries and Galloway Council, to work with rural schools in the outskirts of Dumfries to deliver a more intense method of delivery. Increase time on task per visit reducing number of visits to maximise the time spent on venue and offset cost of travel (time and money).

However, I would add that it is not enough simply to teach people to swim - the importance of floating to live and the dangers of cold water shock should also be communicated. Water Safety Scotland and Education Scotland have launched a new education resource for schools to provide a consistent level of learning across Scotland's educational institutions to equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to reduce water-based accidents. This resource is available on Education Scotland's website through the following link:

[Water Safety | Learning resources | National Improvement Hub \(education.gov.scot\)](https://www.education.gov.scot/national-improvement-hub/water-safety-learning-resources).

These materials aim to provide consistent and curriculum-aligned information which feeds into a full progression pathway created specifically for water safety in Scotland. The learning materials are intrinsically linked to Water Safety Strategy Water Safety Code, which was created to help people enjoy Scotland's waterways as safely as possible, it follows three key pieces of advice: • Stop and Think, Spot the Dangers • Stay Together, Stay Close • In an Emergency, Call 999. Starting from children aged 3, the resource is aimed at young people

right up to the age of 18 and has been endorsed by a wealth of partner agencies.

You may also wish to note that, in March of this year, we published the interim review of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy and this is available on the Scottish Government's website through the following web link: [interim-review-scotlands-drowning-prevention-strategy.pdf \(watersafetyscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/interim-review-scotlands-drowning-prevention-strategy.pdf). Among the key actions in our Water Safety Action Plan include: new water safety promotions targeted at areas with a higher risk of drowning, improved signage at popular locations including lochs and reservoirs and a risk assessment of beaches; a continued development of the National Learn to Swim Framework delivered with local authorities; and lesson plans on water safety for pupils.