

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 3 March 2023

PE1891/H: Make swimming lessons a statutory requirement in the primary school curriculum

Thank you for your further letter to me dated 31 January 2023 regarding Petition PE1891 on making swimming lessons a statutory requirement in the primary school curriculum.

Firstly, I would like to thank the committee for engaging with the Scottish Government on this very important matter. I fully appreciate the point raised by Mr Choudhury at your meeting on 18 January 2023 about the number of water and swimming-related accidents and deaths that we have been witnessing, particularly during the summer months when those numbers increase.

I agree that teaching children and young people to swim at an early age is a very important life skill however I also believe there is no single answer to addressing the challenge of drowning prevention and, in addition to education, there's also a significant role for signage and for life-saving equipment near open water sites.

However, I do not believe it is enough to simply teach people to swim and issues such as the importance of floating to live or the dangers of cold water shock also must be communicated. It is important to note there are also many competent swimmers amongst those who drown in Scotland's waters each year.

There are many reasons why competent swimmers may still be at risk of drowning - these can include misunderstanding the challenges of swimming in open water and how it differs from indoor heated swimming pools, the impact of cold water shock, or through experiencing difficulties with using leisure equipment and this is among the primary reasons why we and our partners do not focus solely on teaching swimming skills.

Our [Water Safety Action Plan](#), which was developed by a range of key stakeholders brought together by the Minister for Community Safety last year, sets out 35 actions to improve our response to incidents and to reduce deaths by drowning.

Our Action Plan includes actions to develop water safety education tools for children and young people. The Water Safety Scotland Education sub-group successfully launched a [water safety workshop](#), suitable for young people aged 14 and over, in June 2022. The workshop is designed for anyone to use (for example Scout Groups) out with a school setting. It is a free to download resource which features engaging activities which prompts young people to think critically about the risks they take and provides clear advice on what to do in the event of an emergency.

Furthermore, Water Safety Scotland and Education Scotland are launching a full progression [pathway](#) for water safety education for schools in Scotland. This pathway focuses on the provision of age and stage appropriate water safety education to support all children and young people aged 3-18 to develop valuable lifesaving knowledge, skills and understanding.

The pathway features one lesson per key educational level and supports the embedding of water safety education and progression within Curriculum for Excellence. Third/Fourth level and Senior phase were released in advance of the school summer holidays in 2022 and are currently being used by schools in Scotland. The early years and first phases were released later in 2022, with the second phase anticipated to be released next month.

Education Scotland, in partnership with Loch Lomond Rangers Service and Scottish Swimming, also successfully delivered an [online water safety assembly](#) featuring Olympic and Commonwealth swimmer Duncan Scott via the e-Sgoil digital learning platform. Members of the Loch Lomond Education Team and Duncan Scott delivered key water safety messages and answered questions from primary aged pupils. Initial figures showed an estimated 2,032 learners watched the assembly live.

I and my colleagues across the Government take water safety very seriously and are committed to delivering on the Water Safety Action Plan, working in with our partners to further mitigate the risk of drowning.