

Safe Supervision

of Programmed Swimming Lessons
and Training Sessions



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1. Introduction

This guidance is provided for the owners and operators of swimming pools in the United Kingdom who have a duty to ensure the safety of swimming teaching and coaching activities and those who are responsible for the provision of these services such as schools, local authorities, non-profit organisations and commercial management organisations.

Safe Supervision of Programmed Swimming Lessons and Training Sessions is produced and endorsed by Swim England, Scottish Swimming, Swim Wales, the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA), The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS), the Institute of Swimming (IoS), the Association for Physical Education (AfPE) and the Swimming Teachers' Association (STA).

The guidance in this document is specifically aimed at ensuring a **safe learning environment**. It does not address the **quality** of the swimming lessons or coached sessions, or the ability of the swimming teacher to teach swimming, which is addressed by the organisations specialising in swimming teaching and coaching.

This is the third edition of Safe Supervision of Programmed Swimming Lessons and Training Sessions and supersedes all previous guidance.

2. The Legal Background

Owners, operators and occupiers of swimming pools must follow the general duties and responsibilities in the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. They are obliged to take all reasonable and practicable measures to ensure teaching and coaching activities are conducted safely. They have the overall responsibility for every person on the premises. Hirers, such as schools and clubs also have responsibilities and the relationship between the pool operator and the hirer's responsibilities should be specified in the operating procedures.

3. Programmed and Unprogrammed Activities

This publication is about certain programmed activities – those with a formal structure: disciplined, continuously supervised or controlled and continuously monitored from the poolside. This includes, amongst other activities, swimming lessons, coaching sessions and other tuition such as diving, water aerobics, synchronised swimming, water polo and teaching water activities to people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities. Teachers and coaches of these and similar activities should be competent and hold appropriate, recognised teaching/coaching qualifications.

The United Kingdom guidelines for safety in swimming pools are provided in *Managing Health & Safety in Swimming Pools*, a document produced by the Health and Safety Executive. The Role of the **Risk Assessment** and the **Safety Factors** that must be considered, which is primarily the responsibility of the Pool Operator, are detailed within that document. Additionally there are BS EN Standards addressing the safety of the design and management of swimming pools and pool equipment that can assist in formulating safe operating procedures. Local authority health

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and safety sections may also have their own guidance or policy, which should be taken into consideration particularly if they are included within the operator contract.

Following a **risk assessment** programmed/structured sessions, under certain circumstances, may have fewer lifeguards than un-programmed/un-structured sessions.

It should also be noted that structured swimming lessons often have an end of lesson '**contrasting activity**', where some swimming teachers frequently adopt a less formal teaching style and even on occasion allow the learners to swim in an unstructured and un-programmed manner. Allowing a contrasting activity to be totally un-programmed requires lifeguard supervision as per a normal un-programmed session. To be safe, a contrasting activity must still have a reasonable element of teacher control.

4. What Does Safe Supervision Mean?

Managing Health & Safety in Swimming Pools recommends that everyone providing a lifesaving role – whether as lifeguards or teachers and coaches – are competent and should hold an appropriate lifesaving award or qualification. A lifeguard may not be required in programmed sessions when the teaching and coaching of swimming is taking place. In these situations, where the risk is limited due to the nature of the activity and the degree of control exercised, the teacher or coach may provide the safety cover if they have appropriate lifesaving competency.

The appropriate lifesaving competencies should include rescue skills, Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and knowledge of relevant site specific aspects of the Pool Safety Operating Procedures (PSOP), which deals with emergency situations.

Where teachers are directly responsible for supervising the swimming pool, performing the role of lifeguards in an un-programmed pool session, they too should have the same level of competencies and skills required of a lifeguard in those circumstances i.e. a current pool lifeguard qualification.

Where programmed sessions are the only activity in the pool, teachers or coaches may provide the safety cover by holding the appropriate qualification to indicate competency.

Where the pool is in shared use and clearly divided between programmed and un-programmed swimming activities, suitably qualified teachers and coaches may take responsibility (both for lifeguard cover and teaching and coaching) – but only for the programmed area of the pool and within the agreed ratio of learners to teacher and coach established by a risk assessment of that pool and identified within that pool's PSOP. In emergencies, the PSOP should clearly identify the roles of the lifeguards, teachers and additional helpers for all areas of the pool as all staff with lifesaving competencies should be trained to manage incidents as a team.

Where the shared use is not clearly defined between programmed and un-programmed activities, supervision must be provided in accordance with the pool's normal operating plan as identified in the PSOP for a pool operating in an un-programmed session. This would require the lifeguard

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staffing of the pool to take into consideration all of the swimmers in the pool, whether within the programmed activity or not.

Helpers and support teachers who do not have a lifesaving competency can play a valuable role in supporting qualified staff responsible for the safe delivery of programmed pool activities by acting as additional 'spotters' and class organisers. Helpers are not part of the identified lifesaving cover for the pool and their roles and responsibilities must be clearly identified in the PSOP.

5. Teacher's Responsibilities

Teachers, coaches and helpers must be trained, and able to carry out their role, in the pool's **Emergency Action Plan**. They must ensure that:

- They understand the reason for and process of risk assessment
- The emergency procedures to evacuate the water and summon assistance are practised regularly in accordance with the requirements of the **Emergency Action Plan**.
- The learners understand and regularly practice their response in an emergency

Whether fulfilling the teacher role only, or fulfilling the teacher/lifesaving role the swimming teacher must exercise constant supervision and be able to observe the learners/class at all times.

Safety considerations must always be paramount. If an employer or organiser insists on a learner:teacher ratio considered by the teacher or coach involved to be inappropriate and potentially unsafe, then the teacher should express that concern:

- Verbally to the appropriate supervisor and/or employer at the time
- In writing, passed to the appropriate supervisor and/or employer
- In extreme circumstances a teacher or coach may have to consider whether it is safe to continue with a swimming lesson but this decision should not be undertaken without first notifying and consulting with the appropriate supervisor and/or employer

The role of the swimming teacher and coach in the risk assessment process

Teachers and coaches must be familiar with and practised in the relevant aspects of the PSOP and to be able to function effectively as part of the lifesaving team in emergency situations. This helps to ensure the consistency of standards.

The teacher or coach must visually risk assess the teaching environment and each class of learners as they arrive on the poolside to ascertain if there are reasons why the learner:teacher ratios as detailed in the swimming pool PSOP should be adjusted. Teachers are advised that rather than take arbitrary action the pool operator's supervisory staff should be notified of any safety issues that are identified.

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6. Teaching Position

Teaching from the poolside

Teaching from the poolside provides the best position to oversee the whole group in terms of safety and to provide appropriate feedback on the performance of each learner within the group. Teachers must position themselves so not only can they be seen and heard, but so they can always watch the entire class.

Teaching in the water

It is recognised that in some circumstances the pool operator or teacher will have assessed the risk and may feel it is more appropriate to teach from within the water. This practice should only be considered after carrying out a risk assessment giving careful consideration to all the potential factors.

Factors to take into account include pool depth, ability of learners, age of learners and the use of flotation aids and lifesaving support. At all times the teacher must be able to clearly see all learners and be close enough to provide appropriate methods of manual support should this be required. In this way it may be practicable to supervise up to six learners, ratios may need to be reduced to ensure safety and effective teaching. Ratios greater than this should not be considered unless additional helpers are available in the water.

Lifesaving provision cannot be provided from in the water

If the teacher is teaching in the water, there should be a lifeguard or someone with an appropriate lifesaving competency on the poolside.

7. Coaching

Coaching is a more complicated issue as each squad may be under the supervision of a helper and the squad training sets constructed by the coach; it is therefore important to risk assess the programme to ensure that the right level of support skills at helper, lane coach and coach level are provided to ensure a quality training programme.

Coaching activity takes place when the club swimmer is a competent swimmer, not in swimming lessons. It is part of the role of the coach to determine which training level a swimmer should be placed in accordance with the swimmers ability. As with swimming teachers all coaches, lane coaches and helpers must be competent for the tasks they are performing.

8. Learner Teacher Ratios

The ratio of learners to teacher is greatly influenced by the factors identified in the risk assessment. The following are recommended ratios as a starting point for the risk assessment, however the factors identified will have an impact upon the numbers in the class.

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Reccomended Learner Teacher Ratio

Activity	Baseline Learner/Teacher Ratio	Comments
Adult & Child Class (where adults are in the water with a child on a 1-to-1 basis)	12 babies & adult pairs to 1 teacher	Pool Temperatures are critical for young infants. Pool depth to be suitable for the adult in an adult and child class.
Younger children between 3 & 4 years old	6 to 1	Where the teacher is in the water any lifesaving competency (s)he has is diminished.
Teaching in the water	6 to 1	Teacher should preferably teach from the poolside from improver and above. When the teacher is in the water a lifesaver should be on the pool deck. It is preferable where possible for the swimming teacher to be on the poolside and the helper in the water
Beginners (children over 4 years and including adult learners)	12 to 1	Learners with or without floatation aids that cannot swim 10m comfortably and safely
Improving swimmers (Children & adults)	20 to 1	Learners who have mastered stroke technique and have the ability to swim 10m comfortably and safely.
Mixed ability groups not including beginners (Children & adults)	20 to 1	Should not include beginners and all should be able to swim 25m minimum. Mixed ability groups are often a necessity in managing school groups.
Competitive club swimmers	30 to 1	The number of swimmers should fit the lane/area. The ratio should reflect the swimming competence of the swimmer and the activity taking place.
Diving tuition from poolside (Children & adults)	20 to 1	Standing dives from the poolside should be taught into a minimum of 1.8m of water. Exercises leading to full standing dives from the poolside such a sitting and kneeling dives may be considered in shallower water for young children after a risk assessment and taking into account the size and height of the child.
Platform Diving training (Children & adults)	10 to 1	Only one diver should be on a board at any one time. Expansive diving facility configuration with safe spaces between the plunges may allow the ratio to increase.
Synchronised Swimming (Children & adults)	20 to 1	Some synchronised swimming exercises should not be taught in shallow water in case of pool bottom impact . A risk assessment should consider the depth of the water needed for the exercise in relation to the height of the learners.
Water polo (Children & adults)	30 to 1	Water space would normally preclude larger groups. Additional water polo players out of water may allow the ratio to increase in a training session.
Exercise in water Shallow water (Adults)	30 to 1	Participants need to be able to stand up from lying in the water on their front or back whether this is a session in shallow or deep water.

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Activity	Baseline Learner/Teacher Ratio	Comments
Exercise in water Deep water (Adults)	20 to 1	Unlike exercise in shallow water consideration as to be given to participants swimming ability and the use of buoyancy aids.
Learners with Special educational needs and/or disabilities (Children & adults)	1 to 1 upwards	Each situation must be considered independently as people with disabilities are not a homogenous group.

Reasons identified in the risk assessment why the ratio may be increased or decreased

- Dedicated lifeguard observing the lesson area only may permit the lesson ratio to increase
- Additional helper(s) in the water may allow the ratio to increase
- Shallow water area may allow the ratio to increase (shallow water is defined by the risk assessment in relation to the height of the learner)
- Teaching learners in 'waves' keeping a % of the learners out of the water may allow the ratio to increase but reduces the quality of the lesson.
- Poor definition of the teaching area may require the ratio to decrease.
- Sharing the space with another activity may require the ratio to decrease
- If the area is deeper than is suitable for that level of lesson the ratio may need to be decreased (deep water is defined by the risk assessment in relation to the height of the learner)
- Poor water clarity (although not so bad as to require pool closure) may require the ratio to decrease
- Steep floor gradients or uneven pool floor may require the ratio to decrease in water of standing depth
- Poor effectiveness of the pool bottom non-slip tiles may require the ratio to decrease in water of standing depth
- Language and learning difficulties may require the ratio to decrease

This is not an exhaustive list, there may be many other reasons specific to the pool or type of lesson

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9. Further Information and Guidance

- 'Swimming Pools Part 2: Safety requirements for operation' BS EN 15288-2:2008
- 'Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools' HSE publication HSG179
- '5 steps to risk assessment' INDG163 (rev) HSE Books 1998
- 'Specially safe' (Guidance for supervision of people with disabilities) RLSS UK 1995 ISBN 0907082 718
- 'Integration of Swimmers with a Disability' published by the Amateur Swimming Association
- 'Diving & Jumping in Swimming Pools and Open Water Areas' ISRM ISBN 1 900738 60 0
- 'The Swim England Learn to Swim Pathway' published by Swim England
- 'Specification for the management and operation of swimming pools' PAS 81:2008 STA ISBN 978 0580 620027
- 'Safe Practice in Physical Education and School Sport' 2016 edition, available from Coachwise www.1st4sport.com

10. Supporting Organisations

► Swim England

Pavilion 3, SportPark, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3QF
Tel: 01509 618700
Email: customerservices@swimming.org
Website: www.swimming.org

► Scottish Swimming

National Swimming Academy, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA
Tel: 01786 466520
Email: info@scottishswimming.com
Website: www.scottishswimming.com

► Swim Wales

WNPS, Sketty Lane, Swansea SA2 8QG
Tel: 01792 513636
Contact: www.swimwales.org/contact-us
Website: www.swimwales.org

► Institute of Swimming (IoS)

Pavilion 3, SportPark, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3QF
Tel: 01509 640640
Email: iosadmin@swimming.org
Website: www.swimming.org/ios

► The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA)

Pavilion 2, SportPark, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3QF
Tel: 01509 226474
Email: info@cimspa.co.uk
Website: www.cimspa.co.uk

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▶ **The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK)**

Red Hill House, 227 London Road, Worcester, WR5 2JG
Tel: 01789 773994
Email: lifesavers@rlss.org.uk
Website: www.rlss.org.uk

▶ **Swimming Teachers' Association (STA)**

Anchor House, Birch Street, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 8HZ
Tel: 01922 645097
Email: sta@sta.co.uk
Website: www.sta.co.uk

▶ **The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)**

RoSPA House, Edgbaston, Birmingham B6 7ST
Tel: 0121 2482000
Email: help@rospa.com
Website: www.rospa.com

▶ **Association for Physical Education**

Room 117, Bredon, University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ
Tel: 01905 855584
Email: enquiries@afpe.org.uk
Website: www.afpe.org.uk

▶ **The Swimming Pool & Allied Trade Association (SPATA)**

4 Eastgate House, East Street, Andover SP10 1EP
Tel: 01264 356210
Email: admin@spata.co.uk
Website: www.spata.co.uk

▶ **British Swimming Coaches Association**

PO Box 13816, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B60 9DQ
Tel: 01527 871626
Email: info@gbswimcoaches.co.uk
Website: www.gbswimcoaches.co.uk

