

# Safe Supervision

of Programmed Swimming Lessons  
and Training Sessions



# Safe Supervision

## 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 the 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 in the Work Place 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.

## 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 and safety sections may also have their own guidance or policy, which must be consulted.

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Managing Health & Safety in Swimming Pools indicates that programmed sessions, under certain circumstances, may have fewer lifeguards than un-programmed 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 – is 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 staffing of the pool to take into consideration all of the swimmers in the pool, whether within the programmed activity or not.

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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 practiced 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 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 those identified above particularly 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.

## 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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## Recommended Learner Teacher Ratio

Activity	Baseline learner/ teacher ratio	Reasons why the ratio may be increased or decreased	Comments
Adult and child class (where adults are in the water with a child on a 1-to-1 basis)	12 babies and adults to 1 teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional helper(s) on the poolside may permit a larger ratio</li> <li>• Poor definition of the teaching area may require the ratio to be decreased</li> <li>• Sharing the space with another activity may require the ratio to decrease</li> <li>• If the area is deeper than is suitable for that level of lesson the ratio may need to be decreased.</li> <li>• Dedicated lifeguard observing the lesson only may permit the lesson ratio to increase</li> </ul>	Pool temperatures are critical for young infants
Younger children between 3½ and five years old	6 to 1		Pool depth to be suitable for the adult in an adult and child class
Teaching in the water	6 to 1		Where the teacher is in the water any lifesaving competency(s) he has is diminished
Beginners (including adult learners)	12 to 1		Teacher should preferably teach from the poolside from improver and above
Improving swimmers (children and adults)	20 to 1		Learners who have mastered stroke technique and have the ability to swim 10m comfortably and safely
Mixed ability groups (children and adults)	20 to 1		Should not include beginners and all should be able to swim 25 metres minimum
Competitive club swimmers	30 to 1		The number of swimmers should fit the lane/area, stroke age and ability
Diving tuition from poolside (children and adults)	20 to 1		The ratio should reflect the swimming competence of the swimmer and the activity taking place
Diving training (children and adults)	10 to 1		Only one diver should be on a board at any one time
Synchronised Swimming (children and adults)	20 to 1		



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## Recommended Learner Teacher Ratio Continued

Activity	Baseline learner/ teacher ratio	Reasons why the ratio may be increased or decreased	Comments
Water polo (children and adults)	2 teams to 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional water polo team out of water may allow the ratio to increase in a training session.</li> </ul>	Water space would normally preclude larger groups
Exercise in water Shallow water Deep water (Adults)	30 to 1 20 to 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steep floor gradients or uneven pool floor may require the ratio to decrease</li> <li>Poor effectiveness of the pool bottom non-slip tiles may require the ratio to decrease</li> </ul>	Participants need to be able to stand up from lying in the water on their front or back without undue stress whether this is a session in shallow or deep water
Swimmers with special educational needs or disabilities (Children and adults)	1 to 1 upwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language and learning difficulties may require the ratio to decrease</li> <li>Additional helper(s) in the water may allow the ratio to increase</li> </ul>	Each situation must be considered independently as people with disabilities are not a homogenous group

Note: The various deliverers of swimming lessons all have their own terminologies for the levels of learner competency in this document:

*'Beginners' means learners who are unable to swim 25 metres in a recognised stroke*

*'improvers' are learners who are able to swim 25 metres in a recognised stroke*



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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 ASA Learn to Swim Framework' published by the Amateur Swimming Association
- '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](http://www.1st4sport.com)

## 10. Supporting Organisations

### ► Swim England

Pavilion 3, SportPark, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3QF  
Tel: 01509618700  
Email: [customerservices@swimming.org](mailto:customerservices@swimming.org)  
Website: [www.swimming.org](http://www.swimming.org)

### ► Scottish Swimming

National Swimming Academy, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA  
Tel: 01786 466520  
Email: [info@scottishswimming.com](mailto:info@scottishswimming.com)  
Website: <http://scottishswimming.com>

### ► Swim Wales

WNPS, Sketty Lane, Swansea SA2 8QG  
Tel: 01792 513636  
Contact: [www.swimwales.org/contact-us](http://www.swimwales.org/contact-us)  
Website: [www.welshasa.co.uk](http://www.welshasa.co.uk)

### ► Institute of Swimming (IoS)

Pavilion 3, SportPark, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3QF  
Tel: 01509618700  
Email: [customerservices@swimming.org](mailto:customerservices@swimming.org)  
Website: [www.swimming.org](http://www.swimming.org)

### ► 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](mailto:info@cimspa.co.uk)  
Website: [www.cimspa.co.uk](http://www.cimspa.co.uk)

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

River House, High Street, Broom, Warwickshire, B50 4HN  
Tel: 01789 773994  
Email: [lifesavers@rlss.org.uk](mailto:lifesavers@rlss.org.uk)  
Website: [www.lifesavers.org.uk](http://www.lifesavers.org.uk)

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

Anchor House, Birch Street, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 8HZ  
Tel: 01922 645097  
Email: [sta@sta.co.uk](mailto:sta@sta.co.uk)  
Website: [www.sta.co.uk](http://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](mailto:help@rospa.com)  
Website: [www.rospa.com](http://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](mailto:enquiries@afpe.org.uk)  
Website: <http://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](mailto:admin@spata.co.uk)  
Website: [www.spata.co.uk](http://www.spata.co.uk)

