



Swimming Top Up

Evaluation Summary, August 2012

Main findings from the evaluation report

By the Sport Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University

Background

The Swimming Top Up (STU) was a pilot programme funded by the Scottish Government to support the improved delivery of swimming lessons for primary school children across Scotland. The total funding of £800,000 was managed by **sportscotland** through their local authority integrated investment process and programme development and support was provided by Scottish Swimming.

The programme ran from September 2010 to December 2011 and aimed to increase both the opportunities for school children to learn to swim, and the number of primary school children able to swim by the time they leave primary school. This was measured through the number of children achieving the Scottish Swimming National School Swimming Award.

STU gave local authority staff the opportunity to try new approaches and work with different partners, this resulted in learning that would not have been gained through using more traditional methods.



The approaches adopted can broadly be categorised into eight interventions:

- **Additional teachers to current provision**
- **Additional lessons to current provision through school programmes**
- **Additional lessons to current provision through Learn to Swim programmes**
- **Targeted lessons for identified children**
- **Intensive lesson blocks targeted at specific children for a short period of time**
- **Investment in minor infrastructure upgrades e.g. platforms**
- **Continuous professional development activity for swimming teachers**

A majority of local authorities used a combination of these interventions as part of the roll out of the programme. To measure the impact of the programme a monitoring system was introduced, an external evaluation was commissioned and each local authority was asked to complete a case study to capture the learning from the process.

The findings outlined in this summary are taken from the external evaluation report completed by the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University. The evaluation is based on analysis of the local authority actions plans, monitoring data, self completed case studies and follow up interviews. A selection of case studies and the case study pack are available on the **sportscotland** website

Main results

Swimming levels were assessed at the start and at the end of the programme using the Scottish Swimming National School Swimming Award standard. Results show that around 59% improved their swimming level, 40% remained the same and less than 1% regressed. These results are based on the completed monitoring returns for around 10,000 primary school children across 18 local authorities.

Greater levels of improvement were seen in children that started from a lower level. Almost 80% of children who started at a 'non-swimmer' level improved compared to only 38% of children who were assessed at a 'developer' level. This is consistent with the findings reported through case studies that it was easier to improve children's confidence in water compared to their swimming ability.

Further analysis of these findings show that the biggest changes are seen in children from the age of 8. Younger children did not improve on the whole but the data shows that as age increases beyond the age of 8 so does the proportion of children who improve.

Although only a small proportion of the pupils taking part had disabilities, this group were more likely to improve. Their results show that 75% improved – well above the overall improvement rate of 59%. However it should be noted that this is based on a small sample size and some monitoring returns did not provide information on disability.

Issues and barriers

The main aim of this pilot programme was to increase the number of P7 pupils able to swim by the time they leave primary school. It was clear from the start that it was going to be a challenge to affect this with such a short term programme delivered in so many different ways across a wide age range.

Although the programme has not been able to evidence this change there have been a number of significant changes in swimming ability among children as outlined above. Feedback from local authorities through case studies and interviews has been very positive, with significant lessons learned through the process which will benefit future learn to swim programmes.

There were a number of management issues identified in the programme. The main issues relate to timing of the programme and underspend by a number of local authorities. The programme was delayed and missed the start of the school term, this led to delays in some of the programmes. A lack of take up and difficulties with spending all of the allocation meant that a number of local authorities had an underspend. Some local authorities also struggled as transport costs were not eligible for this funding. This was a particular issue for some rural areas or where the nearest swimming pool was some distance away.

There were also issues around attendance by children outside curriculum time – although some lessons were offered for free, take up and attendance of these opportunities was low as they relied on parents/guardians taking children to the lessons. This was true for both holiday programmes and extra curricular lessons within the academic year.

Some of the local authorities also identified the challenge of there being a stigma or embarrassment for some children who could not swim. This is particularly relevant where children are older and can often be put in groups with much younger children. One local authority took steps to overcome this by creating a programme that allowed children of a similar age to learn to swim together.

Critical success factors

Along with the monitoring data local authorities provided qualitative information through self completed case studies. Through analysis of these a number of critical success factors for the programme were identified:

1. Commitment to the programme

More than half of the case studies identified staff commitment to the programme as critical to the success of the programme.

2. Improved quality of delivery

Quality was improved in two main ways. Firstly additional staff allowed the programme to run with a decreased staff student ratio, and the programme allowed a number of staff to increase their skill levels through the CPD opportunities they were able to take through the funding.

3. Partnership working

Half of the case studies stated that partnership working between local authority, leisure trusts and schools was a central catalyst for the success of the programme.

4. Local relevance

The funding allowed local authorities to create a programme that would work for their local area as there was no prescribed elements.

5. Cost issues and the elimination of risk

The programme allowed lessons to be provided at low or no cost to the children and therefore eliminated any additional costs to parents or schools.

6. Targeting children/management information systems

Some local authorities took the programme as an opportunity to systematically identify children with the greatest need and then to prioritise the resources. This allowed a much more targeted approach and provided good information for future planning.

7. Fun and enjoyment

Local authorities added a fun element to programmes to encourage attendance and engagement especially for children who may feel they are being singled out.

Learning

There are a number of learning points that can be taken from this pilot programme.

1. **Co-operation across education, Active Schools and sports development is essential at the planning stage.**
2. **A multi agency approach is effective in identifying children that would benefit from programmes.**
3. **Important to get staff commitment to the programme – staff need to be engaged in the process to drive it forward.**
4. **Transport costs – important to deal with issues around transport costs by either allowing some portion of funding for this or working with local authorities to identify alternative funding sources.**
5. **Learn to swim programme engagement more likely in curriculum time – issues around take up of the programme outside curriculum time.**

Steps have already been taken to ensure that the learning from the programme is passed to the relevant people through the publication and distribution of the case study pack to local authorities. There will also be a seminar with swimming professionals in September where there will be a presentation on the findings from the evaluation.

Although there have been a number of issues and barriers identified through the programme the overwhelming experience of local authorities has been positive and they feel the learning from it will enhance the delivery of learn to swim programmes in the future.

Individual case studies and the case study pack are available to download at www.sportscotland.org.uk