



School Swimming Phase 1 Pilots in Scotland: Evaluation - Scottish Borders Pilot

For sportscotland and Scottish Swimming
Final Report | 14th September 2023

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

sportscotland and Scottish Swimming supported four school swimming pilots during 2023. This included pilots in Dundee City, East Lothian, North Lanarkshire, and Scottish Borders. The pilots were to have a focus on increasing swimming skill and confidence for children and young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland. That is, a focus on closing the equalities in sport gap. The School Swimming Phase 1 Pilots were part-funded by the Scottish Government, and the overall project was managed by **sportscotland**. Scottish Swimming supported implementation of the pilots at a local level.

EKOS Ltd and Integratis Consulting were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the pilots to better understand how each pilot progressed and to evidence their impact. It should be noted that the pilots started prior to the evaluation getting underway. This report provides a summary of the Scottish Borders pilot and sits alongside separate documents including: a main report which provides an overview of evaluation findings at a programme level; a summary report for each of the other three pilots; and a standalone executive summary.

1.2 The Scottish Borders pilot

Each pilot adopted a different approach to delivery in their local authority area (**Appendix A**). This recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach to delivery may not be appropriate. In the Scottish Borders a **rural approach** was adopted. As the number of children in each primary class or year group may be small in rural primary schools, a whole school approach was, in the main, adopted in the Scottish Borders. Three schools took part - two schools involved all pupils (Primary 1 - Primary 7), and a larger school involved its Primary 4 class. The delivery model was originally designed to support school swimming within a rural setting and the challenges this presents. A more intense delivery model was anticipated - that is, increased time on task per visit and a reduced number of visits to maximise the time spent at the venue and offset the cost of travel (for example, time and money).

This report outlines the evaluation findings relating to the pilot in the Scottish Borders, and the information provided in the following sections is based on: a review of background information and monitoring data provided by Live Borders; and remote consultations undertaken with nine individuals within Live Borders. This includes those involved in project management and delivery such as the Aquatics Manager and swim teachers.

2 Project management and delivery

2.1 Introduction

This section sets the scene for the Scottish Borders pilot. It provides an overview of the project management arrangements and the underpinning rationale for the project.

2.2 Pilot overview

The pilot was tailored to the needs of the region and schools and designed in collaboration between the Aquatics Manager within Live Borders (the regional sports and leisure trust) and the participating schools' Physical Education (PE) teaching staff.

This customised model of delivery concentrated on smaller schools located in rural areas, encompassing all children within these schools (except for Lauder Primary School), irrespective of their ability to swim.

The objective was to foster a comprehensive and inclusive project, strategically directed to enhance aquatic skills across the entire student body, notwithstanding their initial proficiency levels.

2.3 Project management and delivery arrangements

The implementation of the pilot was overseen by a small and committed team, under the leadership of the Aquatics Manager within Live Borders. The Aquatics Manager's role involved a close collaborative relationship with the management teams and swimming instructors at the pool venues, all of whom are also employed by Live Borders. Equally crucial was the Aquatics Manager's continuous engagement with school Head Teachers, fostering a well-coordinated effort across different stakeholders.

This team also comprised Duty Managers and Swimming Teachers - all Scottish Swimming Teacher Qualification (SSTQ) Level 2 qualified - who were engaged at each of the pool venues used for the pilot - Selkirk Leisure Centre and Galashiels Swimming Pool. This ensured that delivery maintained a high standard of professionalism and safety. Live Borders operates these two venues on behalf of the Scottish Borders Council, reflecting a cooperative partnership between the Council and its arm's length service provider.

A pivotal component for the successful delivery of the school swimming pilot was the commitment from the schools and its teaching staff. Within the Scottish Borders, the provision of school swimming is not universally mandated; rather, the decision rests at the discretion of the respective primary school's Head Teacher.

If a school chooses to engage in school swimming, it then shoulders the responsibility of coordinating involvement with the Aquatics Manager and the specific pool venues. Participating schools are then tasked with arranging their own transport logistics to and from the swimming pool.

This structure promotes autonomy and flexibility, while necessitating a robust commitment from the schools.

2.4 Pilot project development and rationale

The pilot project was built upon the existing school swimming model but adopted a more targeted approach in terms of selecting schools which were typically located in more rural settings.

Many local schools were initially contacted to see if they wished to participate in the pilot, but most declined the offer as they were located too far from swimming pool venues and the cost and time away from school were felt to be too great by many Head Teachers.

Despite initial challenges, including a short lead-in time for the pilot, cost implications, and concerns regarding academic time allocation, the Aquatics Manager successfully engaged several schools in the pilot. The selection of participating schools required careful negotiation of suitable dates and detailed planning to synchronise the efforts of the Head Teachers and venue teams.

A cornerstone of the delivery model was the effective transportation of children between school and the swimming pool venues. This element was managed by the schools in conjunction with established external transport providers. Schools drew on their experience in arranging transport for various events and activities, and this ensured a smooth and efficient service.

The success of the school swimming pilot was inherently tied to these key elements and partnerships. Their combined efforts ensured streamlined and effective execution, maximising its benefit to the children involved.

Although Live Borders has a framework for the delivery of school swimming in the region, there is no universal approach to the delivery of school swimming. It is left to Head Teachers to decide on the length of the programme and which ages are targeted for lessons.

In the case of the pilot, a period of six weeks was originally allocated. However, two schools actually received five weeks (Kirkhope and Yarrow) and one school (Lauder) received four weeks delivery due to school closures resulting from industrial action.

While the established framework for school swimming includes defined objectives, the pilot itself lacked explicitly articulated goals. Nonetheless, there exist overarching objectives that guide the provision of school swimming. These encompass:

- The recognition of swimming as a fundamental life skill necessary for all children.
- Given the prominence of open water in the Scottish Borders, it becomes critical for children and young people to acquire knowledge about water safety, swimming, and survival skills.
- By providing children and young people with opportunities to become competent and safe swimmers, the pilot encourages them to maintain physical activity throughout their lives.

The pilot provided opportunities for children and young people from rural locales have access to swimming facilities, a feat that might otherwise be challenging due to the remoteness of their location and limited accessibility outside school hours.

3 Implementation

3.1 Introduction

This section provides more detail on the implementation of the Scottish Borders school swimming pilot and on the primary schools and pupils who took part. Additional contextual information about the Scottish Borders (for example, population, deprivation, urban and rural classification) can be found in **Appendix B**.

3.2 Primary schools and pupils involved in pilot

Schools involved

Three primary schools - Yarrow Primary School, Lauder Primary School, and Kirkhope Primary School - took part in the pilot in the Scottish Borders. Key points to note include that:

- **Yarrow Primary School (Yarrow Valley)** is situated in a remote rural area, with 1.6 full-time equivalent teachers serving a total roll of 28 pupils, leading to a pupil-teacher ratio of 17.5 and an average class size of 28. All of its 28 pupils enrolled in the school swimming pilot and undertook their lessons at the Selkirk Leisure Centre, which is a considerable distance of 12.3 miles away.
- **Lauder Primary School (Lauder)** is in a more accessible rural area and is larger in size, with 16.1 full-time equivalent teachers instructing a pupil roll of 238. This results in a pupil-teacher ratio of 14.8 and an average class size of 26.4. Despite the larger size of the school, 100% participation was achieved in the school swimming programme, with all 28 Primary 4 pupils taking part. Their lessons were held at the Gala Swimming Pool, located 11.3 miles away.
- **Kirkhope Primary School (Ettrickbridge)** is also located in an accessible rural area, and has a smaller pupil roll of 30, managed by 2.7 full-time equivalent teachers. The pupil-teacher ratio at this school is 11.1, with an average class size of 15. Kirkhope, too, recorded 100% participation in the swimming programme with 30 pupils involved. The swimming lessons for these pupils were held at the Selkirk Leisure Centre, which is 7 miles away from the school.

Despite the differences in their locations, sizes, and distances from the swimming venues, all three schools successfully achieved full participation in the school swimming pilot. This underlines the commitment of the schools and the effectiveness of the pilot in engaging children, regardless of the logistical challenges posed by rural locations.

Deprivation

The pilots were to have a particular focus on increasing swimming skill and confidence for children and young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's standard approach to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. It is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones). The SIMD is formed from more than 30 indicators of deprivation which have been grouped together into seven domains - income, employment, health, education, housing, crime, access to services. The latest data was updated in June 2020.

None of the primary schools which took part in the pilot are in SIMD Quintile 1, and very few children at the schools live in the 20% most deprived data zones, **Table 3.1**. Data was, however, suppressed for Kirkhope Primary School - this means that the numbers were small and suppressed to protect confidentiality.

While this provides an assessment of deprivation at a school and school pupil population level (all pupils - not just those pupils who took part in the pilot) - a fair assumption to make is that the Scottish Borders pilot did not engage children who live in the most deprived areas.

However, as noted above "geographic access to services" can be real challenge and indicator of deprivation among many rural and remote communities.

Table 3.1: Proportion of school roll who live in SIMD Quintile 1

Primary school	Is the school located in SIMD Quintile 1	Proportion of pupils who live in SIMD Quintile 1
Kirkhope Primary School	No	-
Lauder Primary School	No	0%
Yarrow Primary School	No	0%

Source: The Scottish Government, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Note: Data is suppressed for Kirkhope Primary School.

An alternative measure of deprivation is the percentage of pupils registered for free school meals. [Eligibility](#) for free school meals in Scotland used to be based on receipt of benefits (for example, Universal Credit, Income Support). This is perhaps not the best measure of deprivation. Now in Scotland, children at local council schools can get free school meals during term-time in Primary 1 to Primary 5¹ (that is, their family's financial circumstances do not matter).

¹ Since August 2021, free school lunches during term time was extended to all Primary 4 children, and to all Primary 5 children by January 2022.

The Scottish Government has made a further commitment to work with local authorities to extend universal provision to all pupils in Primary 6 and Primary 7 by 2024.

Free school meals is therefore a less meaningful measure of deprivation than the SIMD. The latest data is for 2021, and so some of the changes outlined above do not yet feature in the data.

Points to note for the Scottish Borders pilot are that:

- 100% of Primary 1 to Primary 4 pupils at all three primary schools are registered for free school meals.
- There is either no or limited registration for free school meals among the schools Primary 5 to Primary 7 class groups.

Table 3.2: Primary schools involved in the pilot - proportion of pupils registered for free school meals - Primary 1 to Primary 4 and Primary 5 to Primary 7

Primary school	Proportion of pupils registered for free school meals - Primary 1 to Primary 4	Proportion of pupils registered for free school meals - Primary 5 to Primary 7
Kirkhope Primary School	100%	0%
Lauder Primary School	100%	-
Yarrow Primary School	100%	0%

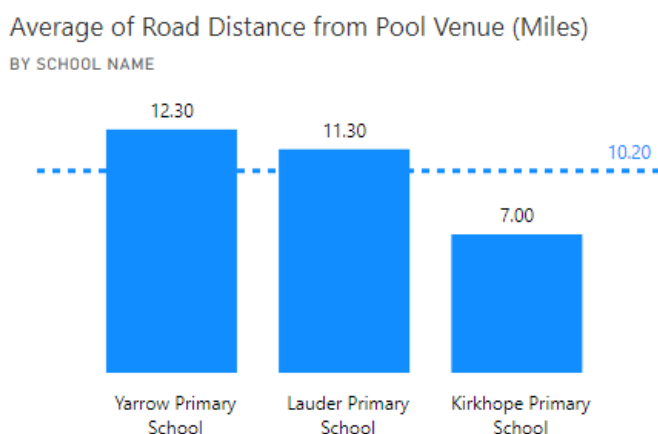
Source: The Scottish Government, Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland (2021).

Note: Data is suppressed for Lauder Primary School.

3.3 Swimming pool venues

Figure 3.1 shows the average distance each of the three Scottish Borders primary school children had to travel to access their designated swimming pool venue for the pilot.

Figure 3.1: Average road distance from pool venue (miles)



Yarrow Primary School had the longest journey, with an average distance of 12.3 miles to the pool. Meanwhile, Lauder Primary School had a slightly shorter travel distance, averaging at 11.3 miles. Kirkhope Primary School had the shortest travel distance with an average of 7 miles to the pool.

The overall average distance travelled across all three schools is approximately 10.2 miles. This suggests that, while Kirkhope Primary School had the advantage of closer proximity to the pool, for schools like Yarrow and Lauder, the extended travel distance could potentially introduce logistical challenges and extra time commitments to an already packed school day.

This data underlines the importance of considering geographical factors when implementing and planning for such activities, particularly in rural or remote areas where travel distances can be significant. Strategies to mitigate the impact of this on the project's effectiveness may be necessary to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities across all schools involved.

Of the four local authorities involved in the pilot, schools within the Scottish Borders region had the longest average travel distance to their swimming venues. The significantly longer average travel distance for Scottish Borders schools compared to the other regions involved in the pilot (that is, Dundee City, East Lothian, North Lanarkshire), indicates potential logistical challenges and additional time constraints these schools may need to contend with. Consideration may need to be given to the geographical contexts of schools to ensure equitable access and optimal delivery. For instance, future iterations of the pilot could consider solutions such as subsidies for travel costs to address these disparities.

3.4 Timing

The pilot for Kirkhope Primary School commenced on 22nd February 2023 and concluded on 29th March 2023. Kirkhope is a very small school and focussed on delivering lessons to all school children in Primary 1 to Primary 7. The school has combined classrooms for multiple school years, and it is easier to plan for all children to do swimming lessons. The school used Selkirk Swimming Pool.

Kirkhope Primary School had a five-week programme of lessons for 30 pupils. The lessons involved 30 minutes pool time and 15 minutes out of pool on water safety. The pupils were split into older and younger age groups with the two groups alternating between in pool and water safety activities. The children were also split into two groups within pool swimming lessons based on levels of existing competency which were tested at the beginning of the pilot and at the end.

The pilot for Yarrow Primary School also commenced on 22nd February 2023 and concluded on 29th March 2023. Yarrow Primary School is also a very small school, and the swimming lessons were delivered to all school children in Primary 1 to Primary 7. This school also has combined classrooms for multiple school years, again making it easier to plan for all children to do swimming lessons. The school also used Selkirk Swimming Pool and had a five week programme of lessons for 28 pupils. The lessons involved 30 minutes pool time and 15 minutes out of pool on water safety. The assessment and split of children into two groups was the same as that for Kirkhope.

The pilot for Lauder Primary School commenced on the 8th March 2023 and concluded on 29th March 2023, spanning a period of only four weeks. Lauder is a larger primary school and focussed on delivering swim lessons to all children in Primary 4 (28 pupils). The school used Galashiels Swimming pool. The lessons for Lauder Primary School involved 30 minutes pool time but did not include the 15 minutes out of pool on water safety. As outlined above, the children were split into two groups based on levels of existing competency.

3.5 Lesson structure, content and attendance

The Scottish Borders School Swimming Assessment Framework is a comprehensive, structured approach that delineates the swimming competency progression of children into four stages. Each stage encapsulates crucial aquatic skills, safety measures, and competence levels that a child or young person should accomplish before progressing to the subsequent stage. This well-defined framework ensures systematic learning, gradual skill acquisition, and to become confident, safer, and competent swimmers.

Stage 1 serves as the foundation and emphasises the importance of safety. Children learn how to enter and exit the pool without assistance, which is an essential basic skill promoting autonomy and confidence in the water.

Stage 2 builds upon the rudimentary skills acquired in Stage 1. It introduces children to a new set of skills such as demonstrating movements across shallow water, experiencing deep water, and full submersion jumps into shallow water. Children at this stage also begin to develop their aquatic breathing skills, leading to more significant water familiarity and comfort.

In **Stage 3**, the emphasis shifts to enhancing children's independence in the water. They are taught to demonstrate flotation without the aid of any floating devices. In addition, they learn to kick on their front or back unaided for 10 metres, thereby enhancing their control and mobility in water. At this stage, they are also introduced to the primary skill of swimming over a short distance of 10 metres.

Stage 4 encompasses advanced skills designed to ensure children become confident, safer, and competent swimmers. At this stage, children are expected to enter deep water independently, recover from a jump or fall into deep water, and demonstrate their ability to float on their back for at least 10 seconds. Moreover, they are taught to tread water for up to 20 seconds, a vital survival skill in deep water. Children also learn to swim 15 metres after rotating to a horizontal position.

This structured framework empowers children to master key swimming skills systematically, helping them attain a level of competency where they can safely enjoy water activities and potentially use these skills in life-saving scenarios.

3.6 About the children that participated

Only Lauder Primary School provided data about the children that took part in the pilot (28 children). As such there are significant data gaps. From the monitoring data provided, points to note about participants from Lauder Primary School include that:

- The gender distribution of children was 21% - female, 50% - male, and 29% 'blank'.
- No children had a reported disability.
- 7% were registered for free school meals.

3.7 Costs

The focus of the evaluation was not to compare the cost of each of the pilots (not least as each pilot adopted a different approach). Rather, the focus was to better understand the extent to which the pilots were successful in getting children and young people to improve their water safety and swimming skills. For the Scottish Borders pilot, costs would in reality be incurred for the following broad cost headings:

- Project management team/administration support.
- Swim teacher costs.
- Pool hire.
- Lifeguard costs.
- Equipment.
- Transport.

In the current financial climate, tough decisions require to be made by local authorities and other public sector organisations about how they target and prioritise scarce financial resources. Any school swimming provision is better than no provision at all.

4 Experience and impact

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides our analysis of the monitoring data for the Scottish Borders pilot provided by Live Borders - the baseline and end of pilot data on technical ability for the primary school pupils who took part, and additional qualitative feedback.

Scottish Swimming provided each pilot with details of the information and data to be captured (and when), and a template for recording this.

4.2 Draft Scottish Swimming school swimming framework

Scottish Swimming and partners have developed a draft school swimming framework to support delivery of effective school swimming provision. This is part of a wider project to support local authorities and their partners with the planning, development, and delivery of school swimming.

The framework itself has defined aims, objectives, and outcomes, and the different stages are briefly described below:

- Stage 1 - Aim: Develop confidence in the water and introduce basic aquatic skills.
- Stage 2 - Aim: Increase competency of basic aquatic skills.
- Stage 3 - Aim: Utilise basic aquatic skills to produce safer pupils.
- End point - "Aquatics for life".

Each stage, and the swimming outcomes (or skills) within each stage, become more technical as the children advance.

4.3 Context

There were many data gaps for the Scottish Borders pilot. Data was provided for one of the three schools who participated (that is data for 28 children out of a total of 86 who took part). It should be noted that the data presented below is for a school in a more accessible rural area and larger in size than the other two schools that participated.

This school involved its Primary 4 pupils in the pilot. The other two schools involved in the Scottish Borders pilot were smaller and more rural and the whole school was involved (that is, all Primary 1 to Primary 7 pupils).

The findings reported below may not be representative of the wider results and may be skewed in some way. The sample size is small, and caution should be taken in inferring any conclusive results.

In the case of Lauder Primary School an initial assessment was carried out in week one to assess their current competency levels. A further assessment was carried out on the final week of the pilot to assess the progress each pupil had made.

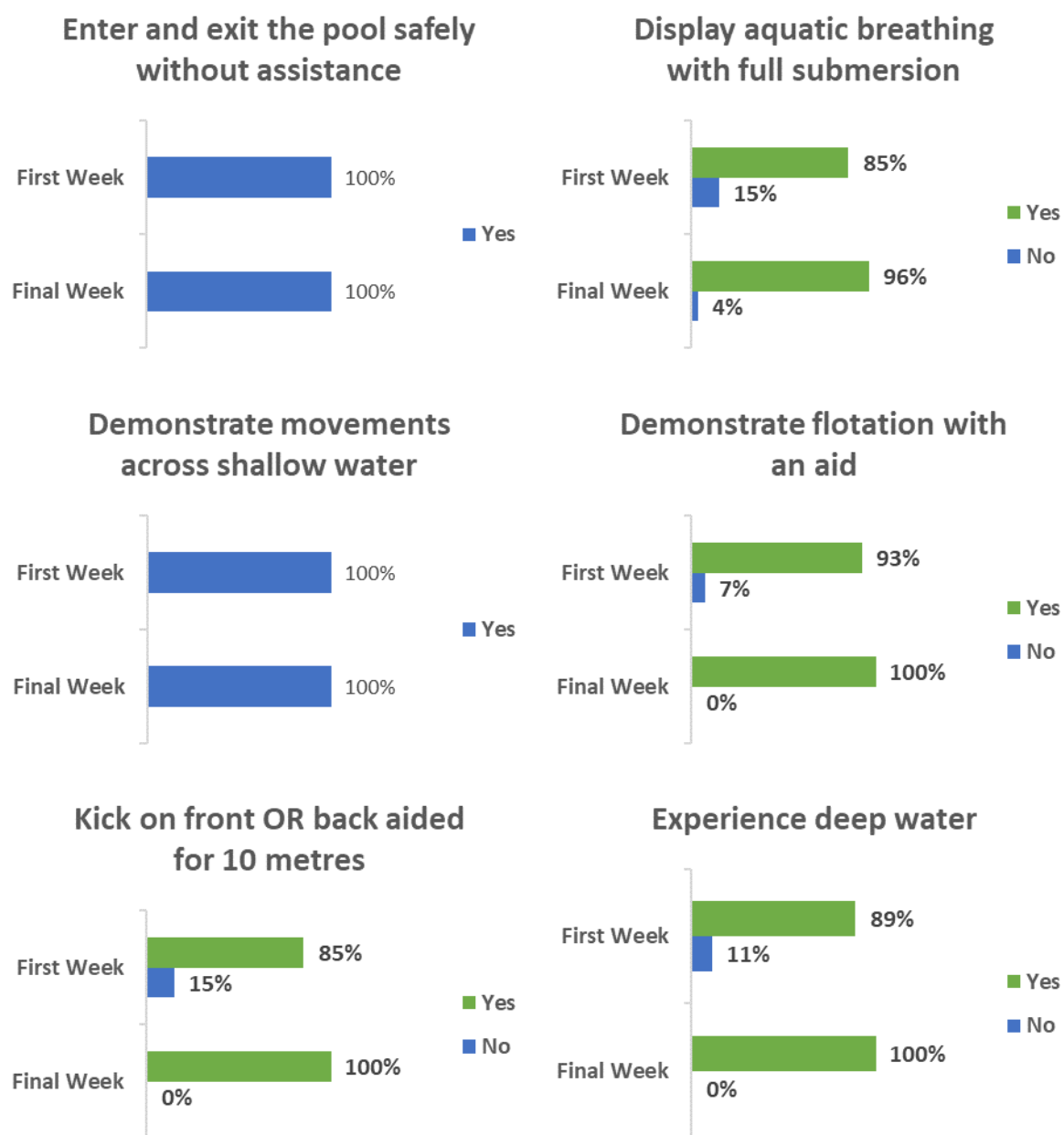
In the case of Kirkhope and Yarrow Primary Schools, there was no formal assessment made of the children's progress at the end of the block of swimming lessons. However, in discussion with swimming teachers who delivered the pilot, it was identified that ad-hoc informal assessment of children's progress was implemented on a weekly basis. Children received no formal certificate of achievement for taking part in the programme.

Progress was not recorded and there is no computerised system that allows results and information to be recorded and shared digitally. However, the Community Learn to Swim Programme benefits from regular assessments which are recorded on the "Learnto" swimming lesson digital programme and the teachers have tablets to allow them to input assessment data.

4.4 Overall performance

Figure 4.1 shows Lauder Primary School pupils assessed against Stage 1 swimming outcomes (or skills) on week one and the final week of the pilot. This shows that most (or all) pupils were able to complete these successfully in week 1. There was also an improvement in completion rates by the end of the pilot.

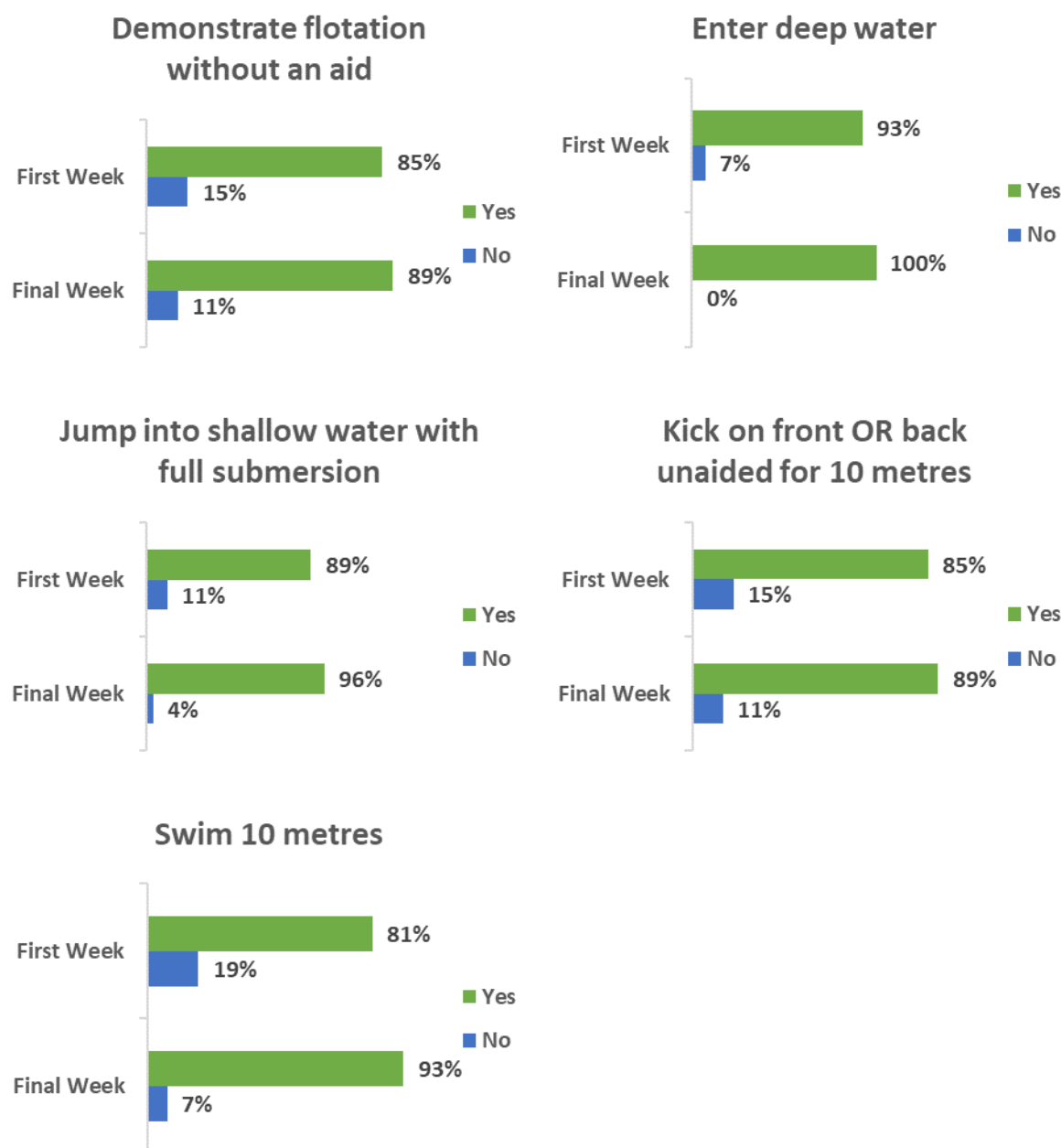
Figure 4.1: Stage 1 assessment (Lauder Primary School only)



Source: Live Borders

Figure 4.2 shows pupils assessed against Stage 2 skills on week one and the final week of the pilot. This shows that in all of the skills, high proportions of pupils completed these successfully in week 1. The number of pupils successfully completing all skills increased by the end of the pilot. However, not all pupils were able to complete Stage 2 skills by the end of the pilot.

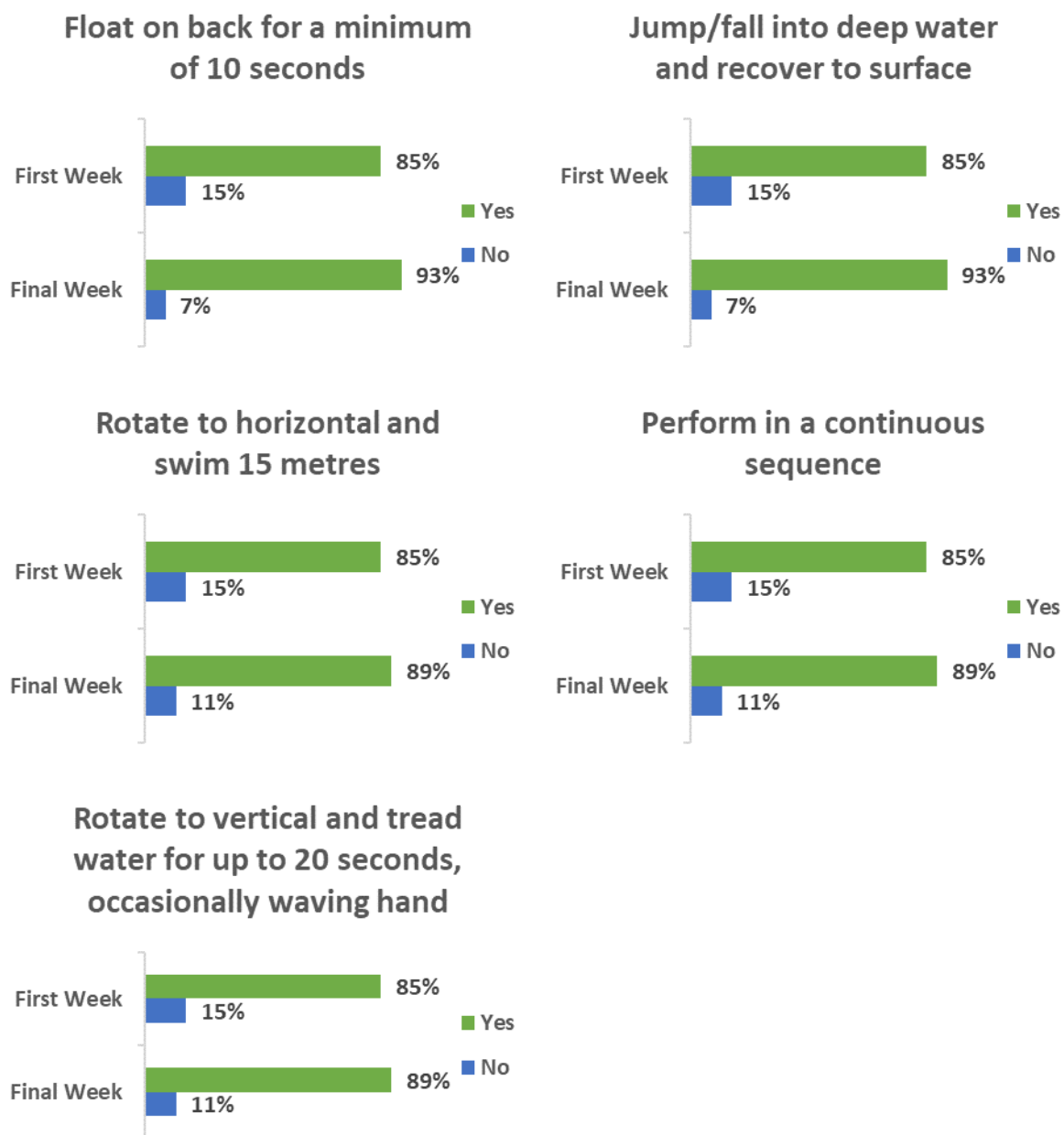
Figure 4.2: Stage 2 assessment (Lauder Primary School only)



Source: Live Borders

Figure 4.3 shows pupils assessed against Stage 3 skills on week one and the final week. It shows that in all of the skills, high proportions of pupils were able to complete these successfully in week 1. The number of pupils successfully completing all skills increased by the end of the pilot. However, not all pupils were able to complete Stage 3 skills by the end of the pilot.

Figure 4.3: Stage 3 assessment (Lauder Primary School only)

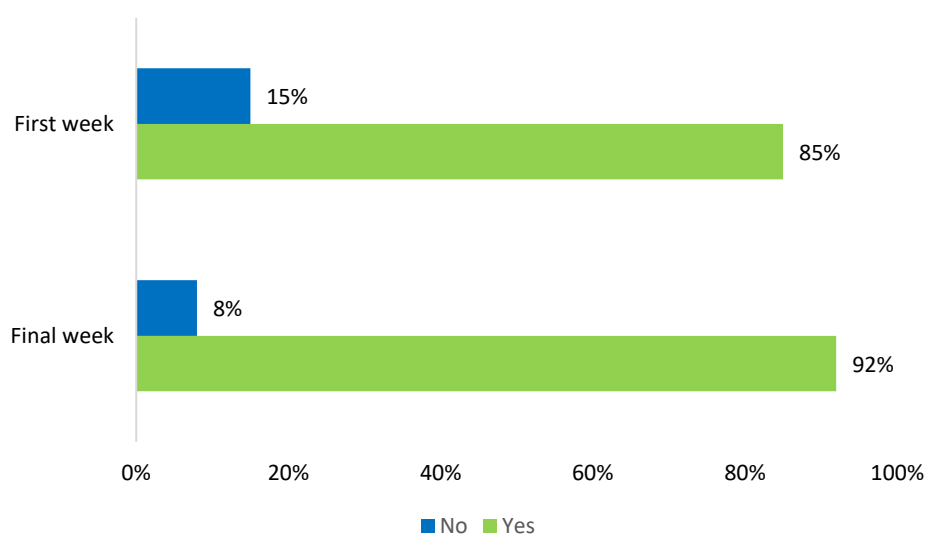


Source: Live Borders

Figure 4.4 shows pupils assessed against Stage 4 skills on week one and the final week. It shows that in all of the skills, high proportions of pupils were able to complete these successfully in week 1. The number of pupils successfully completing all skills increased from week one to the final week. However, not all pupils were able to complete Stage 4 skills by the end of the pilot.

In terms of impact a fair assessment is that most of the children who took part in the pilot from Lauder Primary School had a good level of swimming ability at the start (85%). This differs from the other three pilots where most children lacked swimming ability and/or confidence at the start. There has, however, been an increase by the end of the pilot (up seven percentage points) - this suggests that some children in Lauder Primary School with less swimming ability and confidence at the start made progress because of the pilot.

Figure 4.4: Scottish Borders - completed all stages of the draft school swimming framework (one school)



Source - EKOS analysis of Live Borders monitoring data
N=28

4.5 Additional monitoring data

This section provides our analysis of additional monitoring data requested by Scottish Swimming.

Similar to the technical ability data presented in the sections above, the intention was for some additional monitoring data to be captured from the children at the baseline stage and then at the end of the pilot (that is, so that we could monitor any change). Children were asked to review some short statements about the school swimming provision and about swimming more generally.

No additional monitoring data was provided by Live Borders so it was not possible to assess the wider impact that the school swimming pilot provided in terms of increasing confidence.

Wider observations

Discussions with members of the school swimming delivery team identified a range of other benefits that children accrue through participation in the pilot. These include:

- Opportunity to visit and use swimming pools which not all children have when living in remote and rural communities.
- The confidence and ability to use forms of public transport.
- The confidence and ability to use public services.
- Learning behaviours that are required when attending public events and facilities.
- How to use changing rooms, dressing and undressing themselves.
- Participation in activities with peers and developing confidence and enhancing communication skills.
- Acquiring skills and knowledge that help them to lead active lives.
- Acquiring skills and knowledge that enable them to help others.

4.6 Areas for improvement

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the school swimming pilot, it is essential to consider not only the previously mentioned improvement opportunities but also explore additional avenues for optimisation. One such area involves tracking the progress of participants who do not successfully complete the school swimming pilot and subsequently join the community Learn to Swim programme.

Currently, there is no established system for monitoring the engagement and outcomes of these participants as they transition from the school-based pilot to the community programme. Implementing a tracking mechanism could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the community Learn to Swim programme in addressing the learning needs of those who did not succeed in the initial school-based lessons.

By collecting and analysing data on the participants' progress and achievements in the community programme, it will be possible to identify areas for further improvement in both the school and community-based programmes. These insights could lead to the development of targeted strategies, additional support resources, or modified teaching methods that better cater to the needs of the participants who require additional assistance. Ultimately, investing in a comprehensive follow-up system and integrating the findings from the tracking data into the continuous improvement efforts of the swimming programme will help ensure that all participants have the opportunity to develop essential swimming skills and contribute to the overall success of the initiative.

5 Strengths, challenges, and lessons learned

5.1 Introduction

This section summarises the main strengths of the Scottish Borders pilot, challenges encountered, and lessons learned. It is based on the evidence presented in the previous chapters and from our consultations with project partners.

5.2 Strengths

The main strengths of the Scottish Borders pilot were identified as follows:

- There is an established framework for school swimming that is aligned to the curriculum for excellence.
- The framework combines not only aquatic skills but also provides participants with water safety knowledge and first aid skills.
- The lessons are (in some cases) delivered to two schools at a time to maximise teacher/participant ratios and to maximise the use of swimming pool time.
- There are good relationships in place with schools that enables those schools who wish to participate in school swimming to do so easily and with minimum disruption.

5.3 Challenges

The main challenges were reported as:

- There was a short lead-in time for the pilot which discouraged many schools from participating as they had already planned the school/class programme for the term.
- Information and resources on the pilot were provided once the block had already commenced in the Scottish Borders - this made it difficult to capture monitoring data retrospectively.
- Many schools (particularly following COVID-19) are prioritising time in the classroom to make up for time lost learning during the pandemic. Further, competition in schools from other activities means many schools do not prioritise school swimming.
- For some primary schools the costs were also prohibitive, although for the pilot part-funding was provided by the Scottish Government.

- Scottish Borders Council and Live Borders have no systems in place to capture attendance, assessment and wider outcomes of the children in a digital format.
- School swimming is not mandated in Scottish Borders, and so participation is left to the personal discretion of school Head Teachers.

5.4 Lessons learned

The main lessons learned are outlined below:

- Early communication with schools is essential to encourage participation in school swimming.
- Financial assistance makes it much easier for schools to participate when budgets are under increasing pressure and reducing in many cases.
- The pilot involved 30-minute sessions in the pool for five weeks for two schools (and four weeks for one school - less than the six-weeks envisaged). The duration of pilots and time poolside is considered important. Any school swimming provision should, however, be encouraged - as this pilot shows, progress was evident for the children. For the other three pilots, most children were not confident, safer, and competent swimmers by the end of the pilot (data is potentially skewed for the Scottish Borders pilot), and this suggests that longer sessions (duration and/or blocks) may be needed as well as going swimming out with the school sessions. There are cost and time implications associated with all of this.
- Aligned to the point above, there is also a need to encourage more children to go swimming out with the school day. There are, of course, several barriers at play here (and are out with the scope of the pilot project to achieve on its own).
- The inclusion of lifesaving and CPR skills is beneficial to enhancing the outcomes of the pilot.
- The need to have better systems in place to capture attendance, assessment and communication information digitally.
- There is a need to have a structured form of assessment to be able to measure and report on the progress of each child.
- Each child should receive some formal recognition of participation and achievement.
- Collaboration between various stakeholders, such as schools, the council, and leisure facility operators, is key to the pilot's successful operation and resource management.
- Monitoring and follow-up measures are essential to understand the long-term impact of the pilot on children's swimming abilities, confidence, and future participation.
- Addressing the diverse needs of children, including those with disabilities or socio-economic challenges, is vital to ensure inclusive and equitable access to swimming lessons.
- Continuously adapting and refining the pilot based on children's feedback and performance data can help improve the overall effectiveness and impact of the school swimming pilot.

- Support from Scottish Swimming and **sport**scotland have been a positive enabler that have allowed the pilot to progress and data captured to allow the effectiveness of the pilot to be evaluated. Without this support, monitoring progress and impact would be limited.
- A more integrated approach to data gathering on lesson participants, progress and impact needs to be given consideration.
- Scottish Borders deliver water safety and first aid sessions to primary schools, independently of the school swimming programme. These have been very successful and provide school pupils with knowledge and skills which contribute towards a better understanding of the risks associated with water and how to deal with situations if they were to get into difficulty.
- Some schools in the Scottish Borders were very engaged in school swimming with the school head teacher visiting the pool during their school lessons and school teachers attending on pool side during lessons in order to provide assistance to swimming teachers.
- School swimming costs are supplemented by fundraising activities of the parent council's and sponsorship from local companies which reduces the cost burden of swimming on schools.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This section presents some suggested recommendations for consideration by **sport**scotland, Scottish Swimming, and partners.

6.2 Recommendations

Our recommendations are as follows:

- Enhance initial assessments: strengthen the initial assessment process to better identify and target children who require swimming lessons, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively.
- Implement consistent and appropriate progress monitoring: regularly assess children's progress throughout the pilot to adapt lesson plans and address individual needs, boosting success rates and overall learning outcomes.
- Strengthen teacher training and support: provide additional training and resources for swimming teachers, enabling them to better address the diverse needs of children and improve the overall quality of instruction.
- Improve communication with parents and guardians: develop a more robust communication strategy to keep parents and guardians informed about their child's progress, fostering a supportive home environment that encourages continued swimming practice.
- Enhance stakeholder collaboration: foster stronger collaboration between schools, transportation providers, and leisure facility operators to minimise disruptions and ensure seamless delivery.
- Develop targeted interventions for underrepresented groups: implement specific strategies to address disparities in swimming abilities and outcomes among children from low-income backgrounds, disabled children, and other under-represented groups.
- Evaluate and refine project structure: regularly review and update the project's structure, content, and delivery methods to ensure it remains relevant, engaging, and effective for all participants.

- Establish improved feedback between lesson providers, schools and parents and carers to ensure there is an awareness of the progress that each child has made and the potential impact participation may have. It also provides an opportunity to refer children into community Learn to Swim programmes and ensure pupils have an opportunity to take up the free swimming offers that are made available throughout the process.
- Consider lengthening the number of weeks for the school swimming pilot - albeit any provision should be encouraged. Also recognising the length of the pilot was short because of the lead in time as the end date had already been set.

Appendix A: The other three pilots

Universal approach

North Lanarkshire - a cluster of primary schools located in deprived areas were invited to take part in the pilot in North Lanarkshire. A whole class or year group took part and were provided with a block of 'quality' swimming lesson provision during the school day. Five schools took part and the year groups ranged from Primary 5 to Primary 7.

Targeted approach

East Lothian - all Primary 5 children in East Lothian were assessed for swimming ability in the second week of the school term. Nineteen schools took part in the pilot and 216 children who were assessed as non-swimmers took part in the pilot and were provided with a block of 'quality' swimming lesson provision during the school day. Additional features include that:

- Primary 5 children assessed as not requiring swimming lessons receive vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools.
- Children assessed as needing school swimming lessons receive follow-on support on completion of their block: those who can now swim are provided with vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools; and those who are unable to swim are offered the opportunity to continue their swimming lessons within the community Learn-to-Swim programme offered by Enjoy Leisure (eight vouchers).

Holistic approach

Dundee - the approach adopted in Dundee was a combination of the universal and targeted approaches and sought to develop a holistic and sustainable model of delivery. The collaborative approach involved a range of stakeholders to support delivery, including Active Schools. One cluster primary school took part in the pilot with all Primary 4 children provided with a block of 'quality' swimming lesson provision during the school day at a secondary school with its own pool (Baldragon Academy). Delivery was supported by some senior pupils of Baldragon Academy who undertook training to achieve the Scottish Swimming Teacher Qualification (SSTQ). This was with a view to providing opportunities for skills development and developing a pipeline for the future workforce.

Appendix B: The Scottish Borders

Population

The Scottish Borders has a population of circa 116,000, of which around 17,500 are under 15 years (15% of the region's total population). The age profile of the Scottish Borders is slightly older than the national average.

Table B.1: Population by age group (2021)

Age group	Scottish Borders		Scotland	
	Population	% of total population	Population	% of total population
0-14	17,501	15%	853,730	16%
15-24	11,299	10%	615,608	11%
25-34	10,642	9%	754,051	14%
35-44	11,843	10%	692,525	13%
45-54	16,305	14%	728,089	13%
55-64	18,775	16%	762,036	14%
65+	29,655	26%	1,073,861	20%
Total	116,020	100%	5,479,900	100%

Source: NOMIS.

Looking at population projections (among other things, for example local housing developments, developments within the school estate), are important to better understand how an area is expected to change in the medium to longer-term - as well as to understand implications for the demand for services, including sport and leisure.

- Population projections for the Scottish Borders show that:
- The population of the region is forecast to growth slightly (+1%) between 2023 and 2033.
- The child population (0-15 years) is forecast to decline by 7% over the same period, albeit this is not the age group with the largest forecast decline.
- The Scottish Borders is forecast to have a growing older population (65 years+ will grow by 18%) over the decade to 2033.

Table B.2: Scottish Borders - population forecast (2022-2033)

Age group	2023	2033	Population change (2023-2033)	Population change (2023-2033) (%)
0-14	17,277	16,126	-1,151	-7%
15-24	11,188	11,553	365	3%
25-34	10,800	10,186	-614	-6%
35-44	12,213	13,142	929	8%
45-54	14,832	13,798	-1,034	-7%
55-64	19,133	15,704	-3,429	-18%
65+	30,430	36,045	5,615	18%
Total	115,873	116,554	681	1%

Source: The Scottish Government, Population Projections (2018-based).

Urban and rural classification

The [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification](#) can be used to classify geographies as urban, rural, and remote. The classification for the Scottish Borders and Scotland is outlined in **Table B.3**. Over half of the Scottish Borders geography is classed as remote or rural - this has various implications, including for service delivery.

Table B.3: Percentage of population in each 6-fold Urban Rural category (2020)

Categorisation	Scottish Borders	Scotland
Large Urban	0%	37.8%
Other Urban	25.3%	33.9%
Accessible Small Towns	21.7%	8.6%
Remote Small Towns	6%	2.6%
Accessible Rural	38.3%	11.6%
Remote Rural	8.8%	5.5%

Source: The Scottish Government, Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification.

Deprivation

Key points to note for the [Scottish Borders](#) include that:

- There are 143 data zones in the Scottish Borders.
- There is limited overall deprivation in the region - 6% (nine data zones) are in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.
- The most-deprived data zone in Scottish Borders is S01012287, Central Langlee in Galashiels with an overall multiple deprivation rank of 264.

- Scottish Borders' most-deprived neighbourhoods have changed little, or even become slightly worse, since the 2016 SIMD.
- The region, however, has a relatively high level of "geographic access to services" deprivation - 32% (46 data zones) are in the 20% most geographically access deprived.