



# School Swimming Phase 1 Pilots in Scotland: Evaluation

**Final report for  
sportscotland and Scottish Swimming**  
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# Summary

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This summary provides an overview of the main findings and recommendations of an evaluation of four school swimming pilots that took place in Dundee, East Lothian, North Lanarkshire, and Scottish Borders.

Most, but not all pilots, delivered the school swimming provision in line with the Scottish Swimming draft school swimming framework - this is part of a wider holistic approach whereby Scottish Swimming can engage with delivery partners at a local level to help plan, organise and prioritise how they are going to deliver school swimming.

## Findings

Each pilot adopted a different approach to delivery in their local authority area. This recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach to delivery may not be appropriate.

The pilots differed in terms of: the number of weekly sessions; the time poolside; whether there was dry-side activity with a purpose; whether there was a broader focus than swimming ability and water confidence and safety (for example, deprivation, employability); and who was targeted (for example, all children in a year group or class regardless of swimming ability or non-swimmers). The pilots spanned urban and rural geographies, and delivery was tailored accordingly.

Each pilot has its unique strengths and lessons learned, and all experienced some challenges along the way.

It was not possible to provide an aggregated assessment of the impact on the participants for the four pilots as a whole. Some high level findings and observations include that:

- Some pilots have small sample sizes and, in some cases, partial monitoring data was provided. The findings on progression in swimming ability and water confidence and safety are, however, encouraging - but do need to be viewed within this wider context.
- A relatively large proportion of children who participated start from a low level of swimming ability. The exception was the Scottish Borders pilot, however, the data for this pilot is potentially skewed (that is, no data was provided for two of the three schools).
- Some swimming outcomes (or skills) are more difficult for children to master than others and possibly require additional time on task. For example, the deep water test and distance-related skills.

- A relatively small proportion of children could be classed as confident, safe, and competent swimmers by the end of the block of school swimming provision. Again, the exception being the Scottish Borders.

## Recommendations

**sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming should:

- Disseminate the findings of this evaluation to stakeholders, including to local authorities. While outcomes are mixed, the findings in relation to improvements in swimming ability and water confidence and safety (and wider health and wellbeing outcomes) are encouraging. Sharing the findings may also encourage local authorities that do not provide school swimming to make a case for future provision.
- Share the findings with the Scottish Government as part of the evidence base to make a case for the longer-term sustainable funding for school swimming. This would also help to overcome the barriers to participation faced by schools.
- Take the necessary steps to finalise the school swimming framework for wider use at a local level. Swimming outcomes should be reviewed to ensure they are clearly and sufficiently defined and to support a consistent approach to monitoring.
- Clarify whether school swimming provision should have a particular focus on deprivation. Most, but not all, pilots addressed deprivation in some way (albeit to varying degrees). This may look different in, for example, urban compared to rural areas.
- Develop resource packs to support school swimming provision at a local level. These could then be used by local delivery partner(s) to engage with and secure buy in from key stakeholders, including schools.
- Prepare detailed guidance to inform the monitoring of school swimming provision and provide training. This will help ensure a shared understanding as well as standardisation and consistency in data collection and reporting. Monitoring should be proportionate, and an external evaluation should also be factored into future plans.
- Continue to raise awareness of the physical and wider benefits of being able to swim and going swimming out with the school day to reinforce learning, and to address the barriers that may prevent some children from participation. The pilots confirm that school swimming provision on its own is not likely to make most children confident, safe, and competent swimmers.

# 1 Introduction

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**sport**scotland and Scottish Swimming supported four School Swimming Pilots during 2023. These took place in Dundee, 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 Pilots were part-funded by the Scottish Government, and the overall project was managed by **sport**scotland. Scottish Swimming supported implementation of the pilots at a local level.

EKOS Ltd and Integratis Consulting were commissioned by **sport**scotland and Scottish Swimming to undertake an independent evaluation of the pilots. The research was undertaken between March 2023 and August 2023.

This report presents the overall evaluation findings and sits alongside separate summary reports for each pilot, and a standalone executive summary.

## 1.1 Context

Scene setting and context for the pilot projects is provided in **Appendix A** and is summarised below.

The strategic rationale for the School Swimming Pilots in Scotland is clear and strong. The pilots align strongly with a range of national and local policy priorities including health and wellbeing, active lives, and drowning prevention.

[Scottish Swimming report](#) that around one in four children cannot swim a length of a pool by the time they leave primary school. School swimming provision is not a statutory requirement in Scotland (unlike in England) – as such provision varies from one local authority area to another. While the benefits of being able to swim (and swimming as a physical activity) are well understood, not all local authorities in Scotland provide school swimming.

Scottish Swimming is committed to providing improved opportunities and access for children and young people to learn to swim, and to become confident, safer, and competent swimmers. In support of this ambition, a holistic approach has been developed by Scottish Swimming. This includes a package of support to help local authorities and their partners with the planning, development, and delivery of school swimming during curriculum time.

As part of this holistic approach, Scottish Swimming and partners have developed a draft school swimming framework to support delivery of effective school swimming provision at a local level. The draft framework is not meant to be prescriptive - rather it provides a set of guiding principles. This recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach to delivery may not be appropriate for local authority areas or schools. Scottish Swimming can support delivery partners at a local level to plan, organise, and prioritise how they are going to deliver school swimming.

It is, however, important to acknowledge the recent and current challenging financial and operating environment, as this may have implications for the future planning and delivery of school swimming. Points to note include that:

- Local authorities in Scotland require to make significant efficiency and cost savings. Sport and leisure provision is not a statutory service and continue to face reductions in budget.
- Financial constraints and transport costs are identified by local authorities in Scotland as the main factors why they do not deliver school swimming.
- The pandemic has had a negative impact on school swimming, and the effects are still being felt. Many children missed out on learning a vital life skill. Even when schools were 'open', public swimming pools across the country were shut and opened at different times, meaning that school swimming provision was not able to take place.
- Other external pressures such as the cost of living crisis and inflationary pressures are making the situation more challenging.
- Many swimming pool operators face increased cost pressures. It is becoming more expensive to run, maintain, and refurbish swimming pools due to rising energy costs. In Scotland, a few pools have already closed, and others are scheduled to close (or are under review) in several local authority areas. This includes pools in Aberdeen, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Perth, and West Lothian.

Scottish Swimming continues to call for the Scottish Government to provide additional investment to prevent this crisis from worsening. Scottish Swimming emphasise the following points in support of this:

- Scotland has the highest drowning rates and the lowest life expectancy of all UK nations.
- Scotland has 30,000 inland waters and 6,000 miles of coastline. This is more than twice that of England.
- Water safety and learning to swim is an essential part of every child's education.
- Community pools host vital, potentially 'life saving' swimming provision for children across Scotland. This provides benefits around health and wellbeing, socialising, fun and enjoyment.

## 1.2 Evaluation objectives

The objectives of the evaluation of the School Swimming Pilots were to:

- Identify key learning for each model or pilot project.
- Report on the number and diversity of participants.
- Provide evidence on the experience of and impact on participants.

The findings of the evaluation will be used by **sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming to finalise the school swimming framework and to inform the future development of school swimming in Scotland.

## 1.3 Study method

The evaluation was overseen by a steering group which comprised representation from **sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming.

The study method comprised the following elements:

- A review and synthesis of background information and monitoring data on the pilots as well as previous research into school swimming provision and scene setting on the financial and operating landscape.
- Consultation with the main stakeholders involved in each pilot. This typically involved representatives from the council, leisure trust, and schools.



## 2 School swimming pilots

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### 2.1 Introduction

This section provides a summary of the four pilots supported by **sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming, and about the schools and children and young people who took part.

### 2.2 The pilots

**Table 2.1**, over, provides a high-level overview of the four pilots. Each pilot adopted a different approach to delivery in their local authority area.

#### Universal approach

**North Lanarkshire** - a cluster of primary schools 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' school swimming 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' school swimming provision during the school day.

#### Holistic approach

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

## Rural approach

**Scottish Borders** - 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 pilot. 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 for 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).

**Table 2.1: The pilots**

	Dundee	East Lothian	North Lanarkshire	Scottish Borders
<b>Approach</b>	<b>Holistic</b>	<b>Targeted</b>	<b>Universal</b>	<b>Rural</b>
Main partner	Baldrigon Academy	East Lothian Council	North Lanarkshire Council	Live Borders
Other partners	Leisure and Culture Dundee Active Schools Scottish Swimming Primary school	Enjoy Leisure SwimWell Scotland Ltd Primary schools	Primary schools	Scottish Borders Council Primary schools
Number of weekly sessions	Between 8 and 12 weeks planned 12 weeks actual	8 weeks	12 weeks	6 weeks planned Actual - 4 or 5 weeks
Wet-side session	30 mins	40 mins	45 mins	30 mins
Dry-side activities	-	-	45 mins	15 min (two schools)
Number of primary schools involved in pilot	1	19	5	3
Primary year group(s)	P4	P5	P5-P7	Whole school (2 schools), and P4 (one school)
Number of pupils involved in pilot	30	1,238 assessed of which 216 identified as non-swimmers	134	86
Pools used	1	5	4	2
Number of swim teachers involved	2	3	7	8

Source: Pilot lead partners. Note: East Lothian - this is for a block of schools. More children were assessed, and more non-swimmers were supported with school swimming as part of wider approach.

Some points to note about the pilots include that:

- All pilots, with the exception of East Lothian, incorporated a 'universal' element to delivery - that is, a whole year group or class or whole school were involved in the pilot regardless of swim ability at the initial assessment (baseline) stage.
- A range of lead partners were involved. This included local authorities, a leisure, sport and cultural trust, and a secondary school.
- Delivery for all pilots was during curriculum time to encourage take up and attendance.
- Similar to a finding of the Swimming Top Up evaluation, partnership working was viewed as a critical factor which contributed to the success of the pilots.
- The average number of sessions delivered ranged from four to 12 sessions (average of nine sessions).
- Time in the pool varied across the pilots - this ranged from 30 minutes to 45 minutes (average 36 minutes).
- Two pilots utilised and maximised the best use of space and time at the venue and incorporated dry-side activities. One provided a range of PE activities and the other focussed on complementary water safety activities.

## 2.3 Schools and pupils involved

### Overview

Schools are a key partner in the pilots. The number of schools and pupils involved varied across the pilots, and the totals are outlined below.

**Figure 2.1: Schools and pupils involved in the pilot**



Source: Pilot projects monitoring data.

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. Research, including that commissioned by **sportscotland** and the Scottish Government, continues to show that those who live in the 20% most deprived areas are significantly less likely to participate in physical activity than those who live in the least deprived areas.

While impact is considered in more detail in **Section 3**, we consider engagement in the pilot from a deprivation and wider demographics perspective below. We have used published datasets and information provided by the pilots (where available). A summary is provided, and the detailed tables are presented in **Appendix B**.

## Deprivation

Monitoring data on the home postcode of participants was not provided by any of the pilots. We have adopted a 'best fit' approach and used published datasets. This provides an assessment at a school and school pupil population level. That is, all pupils - not just those pupils who took part.

### Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

To get a sense of the extent to which the pilots supported children and young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland, we have sought to understand:

- Whether the primary schools involved in the pilots are located in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Quintile 1. That is, the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.
- The proportion of the school roll who live in SIMD Quintile 1.

The 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 includes 30 indicators of deprivation which have been grouped together into seven domains. This comprises income, employment, health, education, housing, crime, access to services. The latest data was updated in June 2020.

Points to note from our analysis of SIMD data for the pilots (**Table 2.2**) include that:

- Almost all the primary schools involved in the North Lanarkshire pilot were in SIMD Quintile 1 - the Council adopted a targeted approach to select schools in the most deprived areas as this was an aim of the Scottish Government funding.
- Across the other three pilots, no schools were in the 20% most deprived data zones. However, Scottish Borders has a relatively high level of "geographic access to services" deprivation, and the East Lothian pilot was based on swimming ability (that is, non-swimmers) rather than SIMD.

**Table 2.2: Primary schools involved in the pilot by SIMD Quintile 1**

Pilot	Number of primary schools involved in the pilots	Number of primary schools involved in the pilots located in SIMD Quintile 1	% of primary schools involved in the pilots located in SIMD Quintile 1
Dundee	1	0	0%
East Lothian	19	0	0%
North Lanarkshire	5	4	80%
Scottish Borders	3	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14%</b>

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

Targeting of primary schools in the most deprived data zones in Scotland was partially achieved. This, however, does not mean that some pupils at the schools (and by association children and young people who took part in the pilots) do not live in SIMD Quintile 1 areas.

We also analysed published datasets to provide an overview of the proportion of all pupils at primary schools that took part in the pilots who live in SIMD Quintile 1, **Table 2.3**.

**Table 2.3: Primary schools involved in the pilot - school roll and the proportion of pupils who live in SIMD Quintile 1**

Pilot	Number of primary schools involved	Total school roll of the primary schools involved	Proportion of pupils at primary schools involved who live in SIMD Quintile 1
Dundee*	1	194	81%
East Lothian	19	6,216	3%
North Lanarkshire	5	988	59%
Scottish Borders	3	284	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>7,682</b>	<b>12%</b>

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

Note: \* Baldrigon Academy - The school is located in SIMD Quintile 2 - the surrounding area is SIMD Quintile 1; almost half of pupils (47%) live in SIMD Quintile 1; and almost one-third of pupils (32%) are registered for free school meals.

As above, a fair assessment is the extent to which the pilots likely supported children and young people who live in SIMD Quintile 1 was partially achieved. Points to note include that:

- The Dundee pilot, followed by the North Lanarkshire pilot, were more targeted based on this measure than the other pilots.
- The Scottish Borders and East Lothian pilots were less likely to reach children and young people who live in a 20% most deprived data zone (for the reasons outlined above).

- A point to note for East Lothian is that all Primary 5 children are assessed for swimming ability during the second week of the new school term and only non-swimmers are supported with school swimming. This represents a considerable number of children assessed overall. In the case of this pilot, a total of 1,238 Primary 5 children were assessed and 216 were identified as non-swimmers and supported with school swimming provision. Children who live in SIMD Quintile 1 were involved in the pilot but were simply not assessed as non-swimmers. Primary 5 children assessed as not requiring school swimming also received vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools.

## Free school meals

We analysed existing published datasets in relation to free school meals. [Eligibility](#) for free school meals in Scotland used to be based on receipt of benefits (for example, Universal Credit). In Scotland:

- Children at local council schools can get free school meals during term-time in Primary 1 to Primary 5<sup>1</sup>.
- The Scottish Government has made a 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 from our analysis, presented in **Table 2.4**, include that:

- All Primary 1 to Primary 4 pupils are registered for free school meals.
- On average across all of the pilots, the participating primary school in Dundee has the highest proportion of Primary 5 to Primary 7 pupils registered for free school meals.
- The proportion of Primary 5 to Primary 7 pupils registered for free school meals varies at an individual participating school level. For example:
  - East Lothian - this ranged from data suppressed (that is, low numbers) to 34%.
  - North Lanarkshire - this ranged from 10% to 63%.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

**Table 2.4: 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**

Pilot	Proportion of pupils at primary schools involved in the pilots registered for free school meals - Primary 1 to Primary 4	Proportion of pupils at primary schools involved in the pilots registered for free school meals - Primary 5 to Primary 7
Dundee	100%	39%
East Lothian	100%	11%
North Lanarkshire	100%	14%
Scottish Borders	100%	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12%</b>

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

Note 1 : Data for one Scottish Borders school was suppressed and the other two schools were 0%.

Note 2: For the Primary 5 to Primary 7 column, data on the proportion of pupils registered for free school meals has been manually calculated using the total number of children registered for free school meals, against the total pupil roll for these primary year groups.

## Wider demographics

From the monitoring data provided by the pilots, the following points can be noted:

- There was a relatively equal split by gender.
- Where data was provided on disability this would require to be suppressed.
- The primary year group was provided, and this gives a sense of the age range of participants.

## 3 Experience and impact

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### 3.1 Introduction

This section considers the experience and impact of the School Swimming Pilots on the children and young people involved.

### 3.2 Measuring experience and impact

As noted in **Section 1**, 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. In developing the framework Scottish Swimming sensibly did not try to reinvent the wheel. Rather they sought to build on approaches currently used by local authorities and leisure trusts for their existing school swimming programmes.

The monitoring framework for the evaluation of the School Swimming Pilots comprised three elements:

- **Assessment of swimming ability** against the draft school swimming framework (and more specifically the three stages and associated swimming and wider outcomes) - **Appendix C**:
  - 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".
- Participants were to be assessed on swimming ability at the baseline (beginning), mid-point (optional), and end of pilot project stages. The East Lothian pilot used its own existing school swimming framework rather than the draft Scottish Swimming framework as the pilot started prior to the development of this.
- Capturing the views of participants on **statements about the school swimming provision and about swimming more generally** (for example, "I enjoy my school swimming lessons", "I would like to go swimming again", "I feel safe in the water") - again, the intention was for pilots to capture feedback from the children on each statement at the baseline stage, mid-point (optional), and then at the end of the pilot.



- As the pilots were to have a focus on supporting children in deprived areas and as an evaluation objective was to report on the number and diversity of participants, it was also important to try and capture **demographic and equalities information** (see **Section 2**).

### 3.3 Monitoring data challenges and wider issues

Delays in confirming Scottish Government funding for the pilots had a chain of knock-on impacts, including on implementing, monitoring and evaluation. This resulted in communication, information and templates being drip-fed to the pilots. This made project planning, delivery, and monitoring more challenging. It also resulted in templates being populated in different ways and to varying degrees of completeness.

The evaluation steering group recognised that there may also be hesitation expressed by primary schools around the requirement to provide specific information on participants. To help the pilots overcome data protection and GDPR concerns, cover emails/letters were prepared by Scottish Swimming, including the following:

- Scottish Swimming issued a letter to local authority Directors of Education.
- Scottish Swimming provided pilots with a cover email/letter that could be issued to parents/guardians.

These emails/letters provided information on: the scope of the evaluation; how the evaluation report would be used; the primary research with participants; information that would be captured; and how the information would be stored, protected, reported on, and deleted on completion.

Monitoring data on gender, age, home postcode, disability of participants was patchy and, in some cases, not provided at all. Timing of the data request was possibly a factor. The pilots had already started and there were challenges for the teams to approach schools to provide this information retrospectively. Some schools were simply not content to provide this information.

In sufficient advance of the pilots commencing, the ideal scenario would have been for Scottish Swimming and the consultants to have had a detailed briefing session with each pilot to take them through the templates, show examples of how they should be populated, and to answer any questions or concerns they may have. A wider point is that it was not the main contacts at a local level who completed the monitoring templates, rather it was swimming teachers (technical ability) and school teachers (wider impact). These individuals also need to have a clear and shared understanding of the project and its monitoring requirements.

While Scottish Swimming and the consultants did have conversations with the pilot leads about monitoring – there are lessons to be learned around:

- The timing of such conversations.
- Who needs to be involved.
- Whether more information (for example, resource packs) could have been helpful for the pilot leads to use for communication and engagement with schools, parents, and swim teachers.

Another factor that impacted on the quality and completeness of monitoring data was that some pilots were negatively impacted by industrial action and/or the closure of swimming pools for maintenance. Some, but not all pilots, were able to extend delivery to make up for any weekly sessions missed as a result.

## 3.4 Assessment of impact

### Summary findings

It was not possible to provide an aggregated assessment of the impact on the participants for the four pilots as a whole. Some high level findings and observations include that:

- Some pilots have small sample sizes and, in some cases, partial data was provided. The findings on progression in swimming ability and water confidence and safety are, however, encouraging – but do need to be viewed within this wider context.
- A relatively large proportion of children who participated start from a low level of swimming ability. The exception was the Scottish Borders pilot, however, the data for this pilot is potentially skewed (that is, no data was provided for two of the three schools).
- Some swimming outcomes are more difficult for children to master than others and possibly require additional time on task. For example, those outcomes which are distance-related (among others, for example, the deep water test).
- A relatively small proportion of children could be classed as confident, safe, and competent swimmers by the end of the block of school swimming provision. Again, the exception being the Scottish Borders.

Some swimming outcomes may also be open to interpretation by swim teachers. A good example would be the Stage 1 swimming outcome “experience deep water”.

While Scottish Swimming consider this to mean that the children are simply taken to the deep end of the pool and asked to look down into the pool to see how deep the water is, some pilots and swim teachers interpreted and assessed this as the children physically being in the deep end of the pool – hence the zero or low completion rate for this outcome at the start of some pilots.

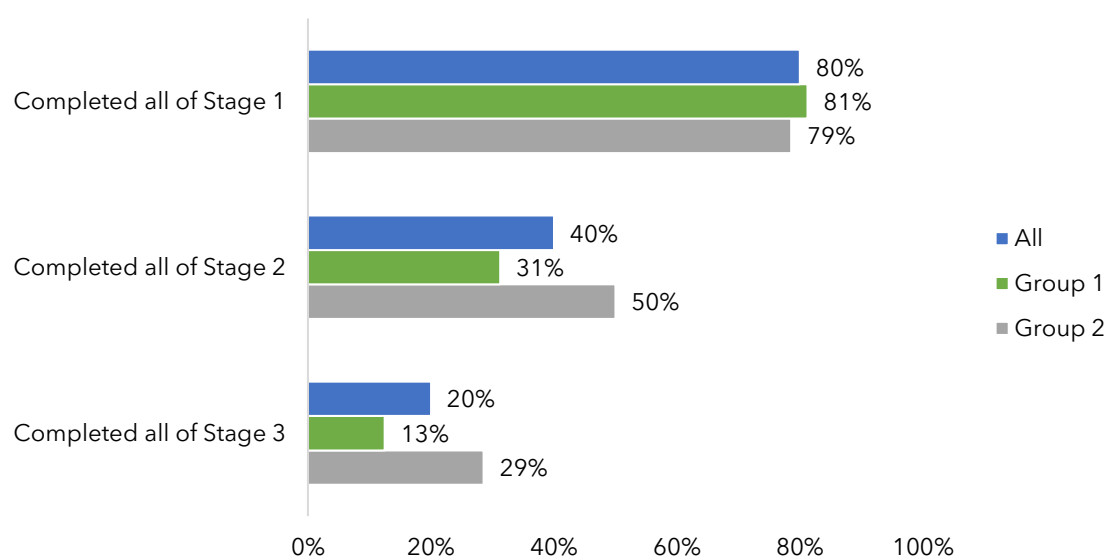
“Enter deep water” (that is, physically being in deep water) is a swimming outcome within Stage 2 of the framework (see **Section 3.4**). The feedback from pilots is that pool design can affect children’s perception of different depths when not in the pool, and that it is easier to understand this when the children are physically in the swimming pool.

We provide a short summary on impact for each pilot. More detail on impact is presented in the standalone summary reports for each of the pilot projects.

## Dundee (holistic approach)

**Figure 3.1** shows the proportion of children who completed (or passed) each stage of the draft school swimming framework in the Dundee pilot by the end of the 12-week block.

**Figure 3.1: Dundee - proportion of children completing each stage by week 12 (all and by group)**



Source: EKOS analysis of Leisure and Culture Dundee pilot monitoring data.

Note: The children that participated in the Dundee pilot were split into two groups (relatively equal numbers) based on an initial assessment of swimming ability at the start of the pilot: Group 1 included children who could not swim and who lacked confidence in the water; and Group 2 included children with more confidence in the water but varying levels of swim ability. N=30 (Group 1 - 16, Group 2 - 14).

In terms of impact, the data shows a mixed picture.

While progress was evident, the proportion of children who completed each stage of the framework declines as the stage becomes more technical:

- Overall, the vast majority of children completed Stage 1 (80%).
- This declined to 40% for Stage 2 and to 20% for Stage 3 by the end of week 12.
- The vast majority of children did not complete the three stages of the draft school swimming framework.

The Dundee pilot had a wider skills development focus with a view to improving the employability prospects of participating Baldrigon Academy pupils. Nine senior phase pupils at Baldrigon Academy and one support teacher volunteered at the outset of the pilot to support delivery and undertake the SSTQ. Key outcomes include that:

- Four participants started and completed the SSTQ qualification.
- Some of the other participants may still undertake the training on a future course.
- One participant achieved the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification (NPLQ).

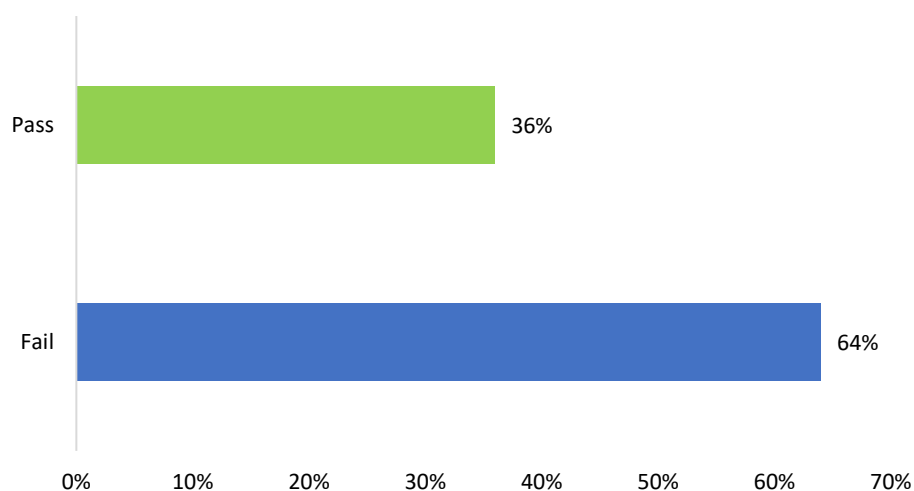
## East Lothian (targeted approach)

In East Lothian all Primary 5 children in participating schools were assessed on swimming ability through a swimming assessment based on the council's own criteria. All participants in the East Lothian pilot were assessed as non-swimmers at the start of the pilot. The assessment was not based on a self-referral or a questionnaire, and ensured everyone was a complete non-swimmer regardless of their background.

The monitoring data at the end of the pilot shows a mixed picture:

- A majority of children (64%) were not able to complete the four skills tests ("deep water", "swim across the pool", "float", and "submerge" tests) at the end of the block, **Figure 3.2**.
- The remainder of participating children did complete these skills tests (36%). This demonstrates a notable improvement in their water safety knowledge and swimming ability.
- Results, however, may be skewed. A sizable proportion of children (52 or 24% of the total number of participants) did not attend the final assessment, either due to absence or pool closures. The data below is for children with a baseline and end of pilot assessment only.

**Figure 3.2: East Lothian End of pilot - pass and fail rates**

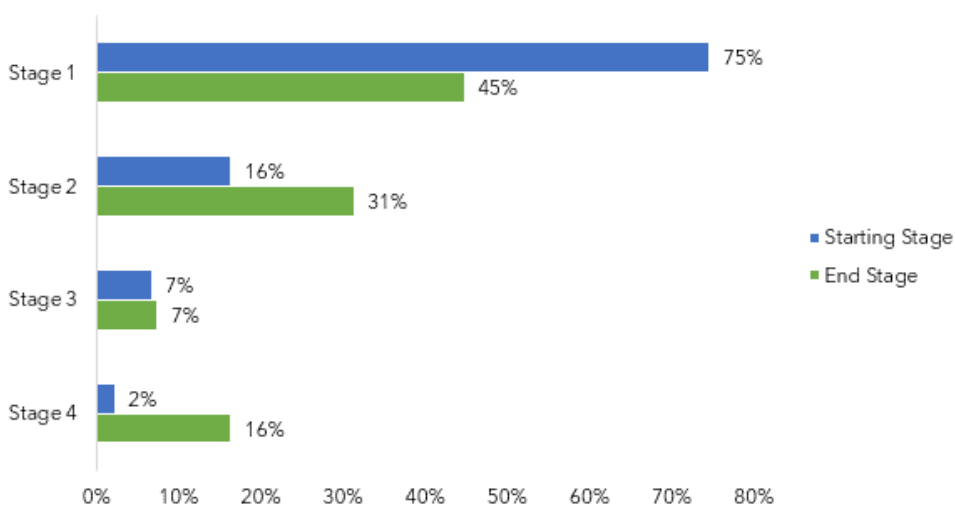


Source: EKOS analysis of East Lothian Council pilot monitoring data. N=164.

### North Lanarkshire (universal approach)

**Figure 3.3** shows the proportion of children who completed each stage of the draft school swimming framework in the North Lanarkshire pilot by the end of the 12-week block.

**Figure 3.3: North Lanarkshire - assessment of children by the draft School Swimming Framework (baseline and end of project)**



Source: EKOS analysis of North Lanarkshire Council pilot monitoring data. N=134

Note: North Lanarkshire captured data against a Stage 4 - this is "Aquatics for life".

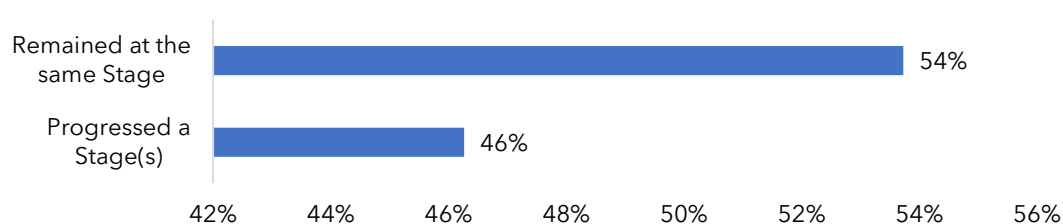
Key points to note include that:

- The vast majority of children (91%) who took part in the North Lanarkshire pilot lacked swimming ability and/or confidence at the start (that is, children assessed as Stage 1 or Stage 2).
- Some progress is evident by the end of the pilot - there was a reduction in the proportion of children assessed as at Stage 1 by the end of the pilot and increases in children assessed as Stage 3 or Stage 4 ("Aquatics for life").
- 16% of children completed the three stages of the framework. However, the vast majority of children did not.

Looking at the findings in another way, progress was more mixed. **Figure 3.4** shows that:

- Over half of children (54%) remained at the same stage they were assessed as at baseline
- Almost half (46%) progressed one or more stages - these children improved their swim ability and confidence by the end of the pilot.

**Figure 3.4: North Lanarkshire - progression of children against the draft School Swimming Framework (at the end of project)**



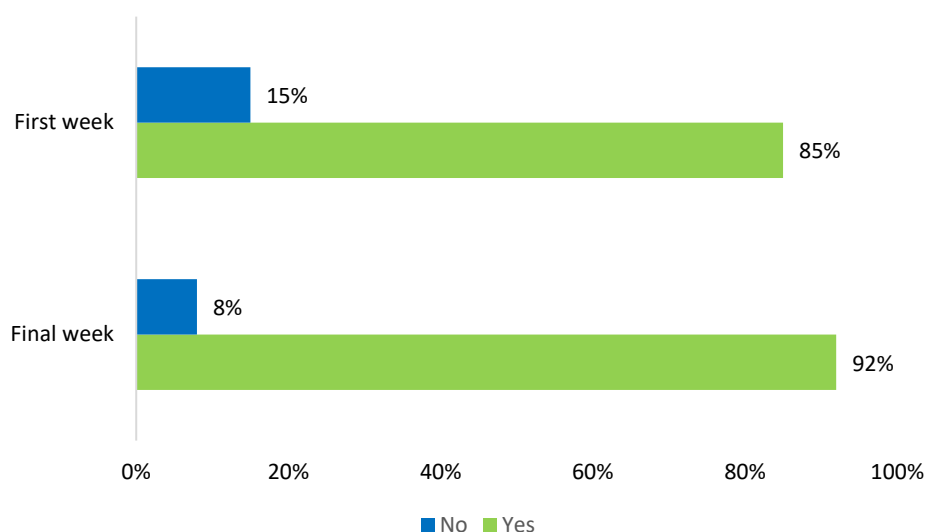
Source: EKOS analysis of North Lanarkshire Council data  
N=134

## Scottish Borders (rural approach)

For the Scottish Borders pilot data was provided for one of the three schools that participated. That is, data was provided for 28 children out of a total of 86 who took part.

The data for this schools shows that most children who took part had some level of swimming ability at the start. **Figure 3.5** shows that a vast majority of children could complete the three stages of the framework at the baseline stage (85%). There has, however, been an increase by the end of the pilot (up seven percentage points) - this suggests that some children with less swimming ability and confidence at the start made progress because of the pilot.

**Figure 3.5: Scottish Borders - completed all stages of the draft school swimming framework (one school)**



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

The data presented above is for a school in a more accessible rural area and larger in size than the other two schools that participated in the Scottish Borders pilot. This school involved its Primary 4 pupils. The other two schools involved in the Scottish Borders pilot were smaller and more rural and the whole school was involved in the pilot (that is all Primary 1 to Primary 7 pupils). As such, the findings reported for the Scottish Borders pilot may not be representative of the wider results and may be skewed in some way.

**Advantages** which are unique to an individual pilot are presented in **Table 3.1**.

The advantages listed below (or things that worked well) are relevant to all pilots are:

- An efficient and well-structured team in place to manage and deliver a targeted school swimming programme.
- The school swimming framework places equal importance on water safety and improving swimming ability.
- The technical assessment and groupings of children worked well in practice.
- The commitment from schools and teachers who view school swimming as an integral part of their pupils' day-to-day activities.

**Table 3.1: What worked well with the pilots**

Dundee	East Lothian	North Lanarkshire	Scottish Borders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership approach, including Active Schools and strengthening connections between a cluster primary and secondary school.</li> <li>• Strong focus on deprivation.</li> <li>• No transport cost barriers to participation. The primary school is in close proximity to the secondary school pool.</li> <li>• A strong focus on employability of young people.</li> <li>• In-built flexibility to extend delivery to address challenges related to industrial action within schools and pool closures, and to provide senior pupils with more time to support delivery and to complete their qualification.</li> <li>• Leisure and Culture Dundee has an Aquatic Mentor to deliver future SSTQ courses.</li> <li>• Primary School teacher undertook an exercise with children during the school day to capture wider qualitative feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Primary 5 children are assessed for swimming ability – non-swimmers then receive school swimming provision.</li> <li>• Dedicated swimming teacher resources focussed on school swimming delivery.</li> <li>• Effective partnership with a private sector company that provides additional swim teacher capacity when required.</li> <li>• School swimming transport is coordinated by the Council's transport dept.</li> <li>• Effective partnership and contract in place with Sports and Leisure Trust who operate pools where school lessons are delivered.</li> <li>• Supplementary features:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P5 children assessed as not requiring school swimming receive eight free swimming sessions at local pools.</li> <li>○ Children assessed as non-swimmers also receive follow-on support on completion of their block of school swimming.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong focus on deprivation.</li> <li>• Inclusion of dry-side activities with a purpose.</li> <li>• 12-week block includes 45-minutes poolside and 45-minutes dry-side PE activity. Attractive to schools as longer session contributes towards requirement to deliver at least two hours of PE for all pupils.</li> <li>• Some schools share the cost of transport where they are in close proximity.</li> <li>• In-built flexibility to extend delivery to address challenges related to industrial action within schools and pool closures.</li> <li>• The sessions are (in some cases) delivered to two schools at a time to maximise swim teacher and participant ratios, and to maximise the use of time and spaces available.</li> <li>• Each child receives some formal recognition of participation and achievement (that is, a school swimming report card).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An established framework for school swimming that is aligned to the curriculum for excellence.</li> <li>• The sessions are (in some cases) delivered to two schools at a time to maximise swim teacher and participant ratios, and to maximise the use of time and spaces available.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• The inclusion of dry-side activities with a purpose.</li> <li>• A focus on addressing geographic access to services deprivation.</li> </ul>



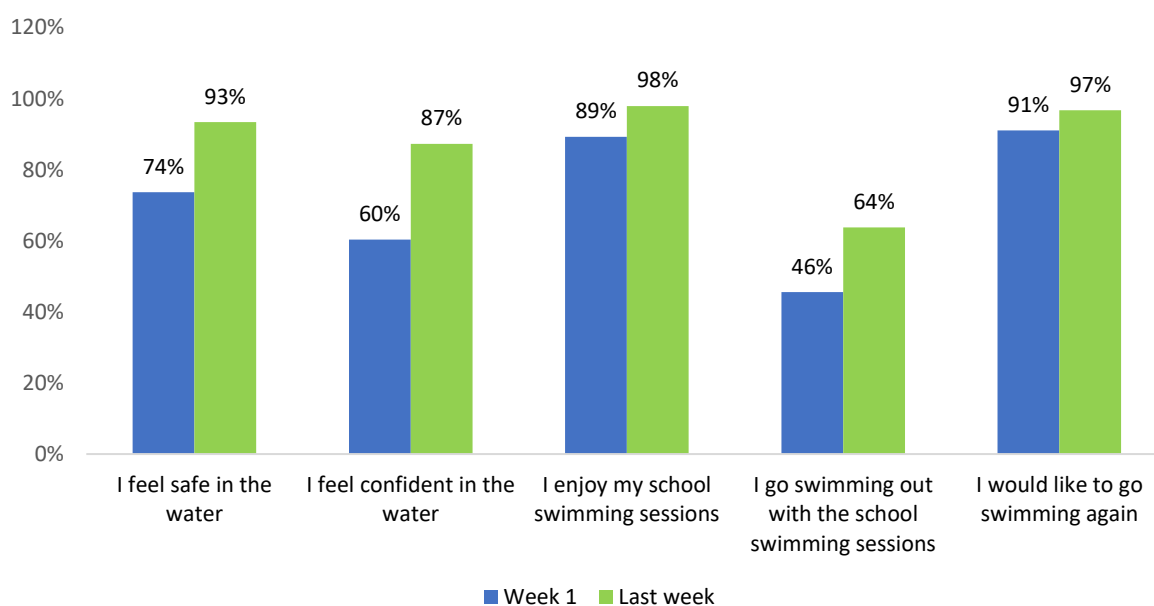
## 3.5 Assessment of participants experience

The following assessment of children's experience of the school swimming provision and swimming more generally (at the baseline stage and end of pilot) is based on responses from the East Lothian and North Lanarkshire pilots only. No data was provided for the Scottish Borders pilot, and the Dundee pilot provided the end of project assessment only (that is, no baseline position from which to measure change).

For each statement, children and young people were asked to select either "Yes", "No" or "Unsure". Points to note from **Figure 3.6** include that:

- There was an increase in the proportion of children and young people reporting "Yes" to each statement from the baseline to end of pilot stage - this is a positive finding in and of itself.
- The biggest change is for the statements "I feel safe in the water" and "I feel confident in the water" (up 20 and 27 percentage points respectively from baseline) - these are key aims of the pilot projects.
- Interestingly, while almost all children and young people (97%) report that they would like to go swimming again following involvement in the pilot, fewer report that they do go swimming out with the school swimming provision (64%).
- While there has been an increase in the proportion of children and young people who now go swimming out with the school swimming provision, the findings do suggest that there may be barriers at play that prevent or make it difficult for some children and young people to do so. For example: cost; transport; some children may not go to a swimming pool with their friends or family as a recreational activity; and parents/guardians may lack confidence in the water and/or swimming ability.

**Figure 3.6: Childrens' views on the school swimming provision and going swimming - East Lothian and North Lanarkshire pilots (selected - those reporting "Yes")**



Sources: EKOS analysis of North Lanarkshire Council and East Lothian Council monitoring data. N=270 (131 - North Lanarkshire - three responses were excluded as a few children did not provide an end of pilot assessment; and 139 - East Lothian).

## 3.6 Wider impact of the pilots

From the consultations undertaken, the pilots are considered to have a wider positive impact for participants. It was reported that learning to be a confident, safe, and competent swimmer at a young age provides a wider range of benefits, including that:

- It is a fun and enjoyable activity.
- It leads to various physical and mental health benefits (for example, full body workout, de-stresses and relaxes, lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease).
- Children who participate in sport and physical activity are more likely to see physical activity as an everyday part of life and continue to have an active lifestyle into adulthood.
- It opens up opportunities to access other water-based activities, for example, kayaking and canoeing.
- It is an accessible sport and children of any age or ability can take part.
- It is a lifelong activity (from "cradle to the grave").

Further, it provides opportunities for children to gain experience (in a safe environment) of: using transport; learning how to access public services; and wider life skills such as changing their clothing.

## 4 Critical success factors, challenges, and learning points

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### 4.1 Introduction

This section considers what worked well across the pilots, challenges encountered, and lessons learned. We focus here on points which relate to all of the pilot projects. **Chapter 3** touches on this, and the summary reports for each pilot contains additional points which are unique to individual pilots.

### 4.2 Critical success factors

Factors which are considered important to ensure the smooth planning and delivery of the School Swimming Phase 1 projects include:

- A school swimming framework that places equal importance on water safety and improving swimming ability.
- High levels of partner engagement and collaboration.
- Availability and affordability of transport or close proximity between schools and pools.
- Availability of swimming pools and pool access.
- Availability of qualified swimming teachers.
- Access to CPD and continuous lifelong learning opportunities for swim teachers and, where appropriate PE/teachers in schools to ensure that skills remain relevant and up-to-date.
- Support to help schools overcome barriers to participation (for example, transport, equipment).

### 4.3 Challenges

The main challenges can be categorised as follows.

## External factors

- Delays in confirming the provision of Scottish Government funding for the pilots had a chain of knock-on impacts, including on implementing the pilots, communication, partnership working, monitoring, and commissioning the independent evaluation.
- Industrial action in schools and the closure of facilities and venues had a negative impact on the consistency and continuity of project delivery, on the experience and progress of participants, and on project monitoring.

## Process

- The delayed start to the overall School Swimming project and piecemeal or drip-feeding of information on the pilot and on monitoring and evaluation meant that there was lack of clarity at the outset, as well as challenges in data collection which resulted in data gaps. This also made securing buy-in and engagement from primary schools more difficult, and with regards to approaches made to the schools for demographic information on participants.
- The pilot included a requirement for additional monitoring information than would typically be collected as part of lead partners' existing school learn to swim provision (for example, demographics). This posed additional administrative burden for swim teachers and schools. Data protection concerns were also a factor.

## Logistics

- Transport costs are a significant challenge for primary schools that are not within walking distance of a local swimming pool and acts as a barrier to participation.
- Time away from the school day can also be challenging for schools, not least as many schools are catching up for lost time post COVID-19. School swimming provision may be considered less of a priority within this context.

## Operational

- Swimming pool depth and width are important considerations for delivery – as this can limit the number of children that can be accommodated at any one time in the pool.
- It is important that there are not too many adults poolside at any one time – this can cause confusion and a lack of clarity around who is doing what (that is, resources not utilised to best effect).
- Availability of qualified swim teachers can be challenging at times. For example, where swim teachers are at university and their availability on certain days/times is constrained. The small shift allocation can also pose challenges.

- The time poolside is important. As most children did not complete the three stages of the framework by the end of the pilots (except for the Scottish Borders pilot - albeit data may be skewed), this suggests that longer sessions (duration and/or blocks) may be needed as well as for more children and young people to go swimming out with the school sessions to reinforce learning. In particular, as many children started from a low level of swimming ability. There are cost, scheduling, and time implications associated with all of this - and any school swimming provision should be encouraged. As the pilots show, progress in swimming ability and confidence was evident for children who took part.
- A stigma or embarrassment for some children who could not swim.

## 4.4 Lessons learned

The main lessons learned from the design and delivery of the pilots are summarised below:

- The school swimming provision provides additional benefits to participants, over and above water safety and confidence and improved swimming ability. For example, health and wellbeing benefits, using school transport, learning how to access public services, socialising, and wider life skills such as changing their clothing.
- There needs to be a shared clarity and understanding of the purpose of the overall project - among funders, those involved in management and delivery, swim teachers, schools, and parents/guardians. This will help ensure wider buy-in, commitment, and engagement at a local level.
- Where different partners are involved in project management and delivery, there should be involvement of all key organisations and individuals from the outset (that is, at the planning stage. As well as clarity on the roles and responsibilities. Effective partnership working is viewed as a central catalyst for successful project delivery.
- It is essential to undertake the initial assessment of children's baseline swimming competency in Week 1 in order to ensure children are streamed into the correct group based on their ability.
- Some swimming outcomes within the draft School Swimming Framework may be open to interpretation by swimming teachers.

- Given the number of children that can be involved in each session, it makes sense to split children into a wet-site group and a dry-side group – this can be an efficient use of both time and spaces available.
- Dry-side activity works best if it has a purpose. For example, one pilot (Scottish Borders) allocated time for water safety education and CPR, while another pilot (North Lanarkshire) included 45 minutes of PE activities. The latter approach may be attractive to schools – for example, teachers who are concerned about time away from the school day may find this approach more appealing as it contributes towards the school’s requirement to deliver two hours of PE to pupils. However, not all venues may have suitable (available) space for such activity.
- Each child should receive some formal recognition of participation and achievement (that is, a school swimming report card).

# 5 Recommendations

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## 5.1 Introduction

It is important to recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach to school swimming delivery may not be appropriate for local authority areas or schools. School swimming should be actively promoted and encouraged - and any provision is better than none.

**sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming should:

- Disseminate the findings of this evaluation to stakeholders, including to local authorities. While outcomes are mixed, the findings in relation to improvements in swimming ability and water confidence and safety (and wider health and wellbeing outcomes) are encouraging. Sharing the findings may also encourage local authorities that do not provide school swimming to make a case for future provision.
- Share the findings with the Scottish Government as part of the evidence base to make a case for the longer-term sustainable funding for school swimming. This would also help to overcome the barriers to participation faced by schools.
- Take the necessary steps to finalise the school swimming framework for wider use at a local level. Swimming outcomes should be reviewed to ensure they are clearly and sufficiently defined and to support a consistent approach to monitoring.
- Clarify whether school swimming provision should have a particular focus on deprivation. Most, but not all, pilots addressed deprivation in some way (albeit to varying degrees). This may look different in, for example, urban compared to rural areas.
- Develop resource packs to support school swimming provision at a local level. These could then be used by local delivery partner(s) to engage with and secure buy in from key stakeholders, including schools.
- Prepare detailed guidance to inform the monitoring of school swimming provision and provide training. This will help ensure a shared understanding as well as standardisation and consistency in data collection and reporting. Monitoring should be proportionate, and an external evaluation should also be factored into future plans.
- Continue to raise awareness of the physical and wider benefits of being able to swim and going swimming out with the school day to reinforce learning, and to address the barriers that may prevent some children from participation. The pilots confirm that school swimming provision on its own is not likely to make most children confident, safe, and competent swimmers.

# Appendix A: Scene setting

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## Strategic rationale

Water Safety Scotland's [Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy 2021-2026](#) sets out the stark facts that:

- On average, there are 50 accidental drownings in Scotland each year.
- The geography of Scotland means that there are many opportunities for access to water (for example, coastal communities and lochs) - the majority of Scotland's accidental drownings happen at the coast.
- Scotland's drowning rate is almost double that of the UK (0.93 and 0.52 respectively).

One of the Strategy's two targets is relevant within the context of the School Swimming Pilots - "to reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026 and reduce risk among the highest-risk populations, groups and communities".

Following a number of drowning incidents in Scotland's waterways during the summer of 2021, the Scottish Government brought together a range of stakeholders, including those with a role in relation to water safety, to discuss continued efforts to work together to help to prevent drownings in Scotland and to agree on broad themes of work and an action plan. The 'skills training' theme includes actions that focus on the 'promotion of quality learn to swim programmes', and 'school swimming provision'. Partners identified to take forward these two actions include Scottish Swimming, **sportscotland**, Scottish Water, and local authorities.

The resulting Scottish Government [Water Safety Stakeholder Group: action plan](#) (2022) made a commitment to provide extra funding, improved signs and lesson plans for pupils and continued development of the National Learn to Swim Framework delivered with local authorities.

The School Swimming Phase 1 Pilots also fit with and contribute towards the policy priorities of **sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming who play a key role in managing and supporting project delivery.

**sportscotland**'s vision, as set out in its corporate strategy [Sport for Life](#) (2019) is "An active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport". This aligns closely with the Scottish Government's:

- [Active Scotland Outcomes Framework](#) which articulates a vision of "A Scotland where more people are more active, more often" - and which recognises that being physically active contributes to personal, community and national wellbeing.



- [National Performance Framework](#) which includes a Health outcome - “We are healthy and active”.

[Scottish Swimming’s vision](#) is that “Everyone can swim”, and its strategic objectives are to:

- Increase the number of people of all ages and abilities participating in swimming for health, fitness and fun.
- Support and develop stronger, sustainable clubs that will provide increased and quality opportunities for people to participate at all levels.
- Enhance the aquatic pathway, ensuring high performance results through effective athlete development and quality coaching.

Providing better access and prospects to learn to swim for all is a strategic priority for Scottish Swimming - the aspiration is that every child should be given the opportunity to become a confident, safer, and competent swimmer. School swimming in curriculum time therefore remains an essential focus to increase the number of children of all ages and abilities learning to swim as a life skill for safety, health, and enjoyment.

## A challenging financial climate

While the many and varied benefits of being able to swim (and swimming more generally as a physical activity) are well documented and understood, not all local authorities in Scotland provide school swimming provision. Financial constraints are identified by these local authorities as the main factor.

Local government has faced financial pressures for the last decade or so - largely driven by reductions in budgets coupled with increasing demand for services. Today, councils and ALEOs are facing a perfect storm and unprecedented financial pressures - not least as a result of the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the cost of living crisis, and increased inflation.

The wider public sector (including schools) are also facing financial constraints. Feedback from some of the pilots involved in this evaluation report that primary school involvement in their existing school swimming programmes has declined - cost is said to be the main factor (for example, transport), alongside time away from the school day. For example, North Lanarkshire Council used to support 60 primary schools in its school swimming programme in a typical academic year - this has reduced to between 20 and 30 primary schools.

The following research and reports highlight the scale of the challenge facing local government.

[UK-wide research](#) (2022) published by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) found that 78% of council leaders and senior managers surveyed expected major budget deficits in 2023-2024. Notably, environmental services (75%) and sectors like libraries, leisure, and tourism (67%) were identified as potential areas for budget cuts.

In Scotland, the Improvement Service [National Benchmarking Overview Report 2021-2022](#) revealed a 24% real-term reduction in spending on culture and leisure over the decade to 2021-2022. Given the tough financial decisions at hand, non-mandatory services such as culture and leisure often bear the brunt of budget reductions compared to mandatory services like health, social care, and education.

Audit Scotland's most recent [overview of local government](#) (2023) also acknowledges the heavy toll the pandemic has taken on culture and leisure services in Scotland. This was primarily due to the forced closures of facilities and venues during periods of restrictions, including swimming pools. As the economy reopened indoor facilities like swimming pools were slower to open. Even after a partial recovery in 2021-2022, leisure services still face ongoing funding cuts.

Moreover, the [Community Leisure UK report](#) (2023) highlights that certain leisure venues in Scotland did not reopen after the pandemic due to lack of demand and the need for extensive refurbishments. The report also warns of an imminent risk of closures of leisure services in Scotland, driven by the immense financial pressures and insufficient local authority spending.

## Other external factors

The impacts of the pandemic are still being felt in the sport and leisure sector, and other external pressures such as the cost of living crisis and inflationary pressures are making the situation more challenging.

Many swimming pool operators are facing increased cost pressures. It is becoming more and more expensive to run, maintain and refurbish swimming pools due to rising energy costs. This is compounded as many facilities are not energy efficient. Some swimming pool facilities and venues will be more vulnerable than others. For example, some will be more likely to face potential closure or service reduction due to increased cost pressures.

On the one hand, demand for opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity has and continues to increase (not least given its links to improvements in physical and mental health and wellbeing).

Indeed, swimming continues to be among the most common type of physical activity undertaken by adults in Scotland according to the Scottish Government [Annual Household Survey \(2021\)](#).

There is no information within the [Active Schools National Report](#) (latest 2021-2022) on the type of physical activity undertaken by children and young people to provide wider insights on this population group.

On the other hand, local government and the wider public sector will continue to face tough decisions regarding how to achieve best value with ever reducing resources – there is a continued requirement to make significant costs savings.

While the following research report relates to England - [Impact of Coronavirus on school swimming and water safety](#) (2021) - the findings will resonate within a Scotland context. This research concluded that:

- School swimming provision was massively affected during the pandemic – over one million primary school age children missed out on school swimming during the pandemic, and therefore missed out on learning a vital life skill.
- Even when schools were ‘open’, public swimming pools across the country were shut, meaning that for schools without their own pool, it was not possible for school swimming provision to take place.
- There is a real danger that there is a lost generation of swimmers.
- COVID-19 increased existing inequalities in school swimming and water safety attainment levels.

Another insights report from Swim England (August 2023) - [Cost comparisons find swimming as one of most affordable activities for families](#) – found that:

- Swimming as a family was on average 28% cheaper than bowling, 35% cheaper than cinema tickets, and 35% cheaper than crazy golf, amongst other comparisons. These comparisons do not include any of the additional costs of food or drink associated with many of the activities that can increase overall expenditure for families.
- Swimming remains a good bonding opportunity for families, with clear benefits to the happiness levels of both parents and children. Around 70% of families who swim with their children weekly rank it as the best time they have spent together.

Within a Scottish context, the challenges outlined above (for example, COVID-19, spiralling energy costs) are already being felt in relation to swimming pool provision across the country.

Scottish Swimming's news article - [Sink or Swim? The stark choice facing Scotland's pools](#) (May 2023) - shines a light on swimming pools in Scotland which have already closed or those which are scheduled to close (or are under review) in a number of local authority areas. This includes pools in Aberdeen, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Perth, and West Lothian.

Scottish Swimming continues to call for the Scottish Government to provide additional investment to prevent this from beginning a crisis. Scottish Swimming emphasise the following points in support of this:

- Scotland has the highest drowning rates and the lowest life expectancy of all UK nations.
- Scotland has 30,000 inland waters and 6000 miles of coastline (more than twice that of England) - water safety and learning to swim in community pools must be a national priority (learning to swim is an essential part of every child's education).
- Community pools host vital, potentially 'life saving' swimming provision for children across Scotland, and provide wider benefits around health and wellbeing, socialising, fun and enjoyment.

The UK Government announced [£63 million specifically to support swimming pools in England](#) (March 2023). Scottish Swimming note that there is cross-party political backing for swimming pools in Scotland and a sway of public support to keep pools open. The hope is that this translates into an equivalent fund for swimming pools in Scotland, for example, through Barnett consequential funding to devolved nations.

## Swimming Top Up

The Scottish Government funded Swimming Top Up (STU) programme ran from September 2010 to December 2011. Funding of £800,000 was managed by **sportscotland** and supported by Scottish Swimming. The STU programme aimed to:

- Support the improved delivery of school swimming provision for primary school children across Scotland.
- Increase the number of children able to swim by the time they leave primary school.

All of Scotland's 32 local authorities participated and were encouraged to try new approaches and work with different partners. The approaches adopted (or combination of approaches) were categorised as follows:

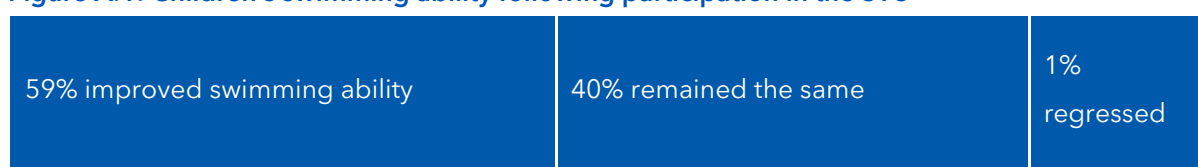
- Increasing the number of teachers to current provision.
- Increasing the number of lessons to current provision through school programmes.
- Increasing the number of lessons to current provision through Learn to Swim programmes.
- Targeted lessons for identified children.

- Intensive lesson blocks targeted at specific children for a short period of time.
- Investment in minor infrastructure upgrades.
- Continuous professional development (CPD) activity for swimming teachers.

Some findings from the [evaluation of the STU programme](#) (August 2012) are outlined below.

Swimming levels were assessed at the start and at the end of the STU programme using the Scottish Swimming National School Swimming Award standard. **Outcomes were mixed, Figure A.1.** While a majority of children supported improved their swimming ability (59%), a relatively large proportion of children’s swimming ability remained unchanged (40%).

**Figure A.1: Children’s swimming ability following participation in the STU**



Note: Based on completed monitoring returns for 10,000 primary school children across 18 local authorities.

The evaluation also found that:

- Higher levels of improvement were experienced among children that started from a lower level. Four-fifths (80%) of children who began at non-swimmer level improved their swimming ability. This compares to 38% of children who were assessed at a ‘developer’ level.
- It was easier to improve children’s confidence in the water than their swimming ability.
- The biggest improvements were seen in children aged 8 and above (that is, Primary 5 and above), with improvement increasing as age increased. Younger children did not improve in their swimming ability on the whole.
- Only a small proportion of those taking part had disabilities – however, this group were more likely to improve in their swimming ability (75% compared to the overall rate of 59%).

Several **barriers** encountered through the delivery of the STU programme resulted in a lack of take-up of school swimming provision and underspends were reported by several local authorities. The main issues identified by local authorities were:

- The STU programme was delayed, and local authorities then missed the start of the school term (that is, knock on delays to delivery at a local level).
- Transport costs were not eligible for funding, and this posed a particular issue for rural areas or where the nearest swimming pool was some distance away.

- Attendance by children outside curriculum time – although some sessions 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.
- A stigma or embarrassment for some children who could not swim. This was particularly relevant where children were older and often put in groups with much younger children.

**Critical success factors** were identified as follows:

- Commitment to the programme - staff commitment to the programme was viewed as critical to the success of the programme.
- Improved quality of delivery - 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 CPD opportunities.
- Partnership working - between local authority, leisure trusts and schools was a central catalyst for the success of the programme.
- Local relevance - the funding allowed local authorities to create a programme that would work for their local area as there was no prescribed elements.
- Cost issues and the elimination of risk - the programme allowed sessions to be provided at low or no cost to the children which eliminated any additional costs to parents or schools.
- Targeting children/management information systems - some local systematically identified children with the greatest need and then prioritised resources accordingly. This allowed a much more targeted approach and provided good information for future planning.
- 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.

The main **learning points** identified through the STU programme evaluation were reported as:

- Co-operation across education, Active Schools and sports development is essential at the planning stage.
- A multi-agency approach is effective in identifying children that would benefit from programmes.
- Important to get staff commitment to the programme – staff need to be engaged in the process to drive it forward.
- 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.

- Learn to Swim programme engagement was more likely in curriculum time - there were issues around take up of the programme outside curriculum time.

## Primary school swimming in Scotland

More recent research on school swimming provision was undertaken by **sportscotland** (2022) following the COVID-19 pandemic and provides a useful snapshot of provision across Scotland.

All 32 local authorities responded to the survey - while a majority provide school swimming provision for primary school children (75%), a relatively large proportion do not (25%).

Where school swimming is provided by local authorities in Scotland, this is aimed at Primary 4 to Primary 7 pupils. Provision is most likely to be targeted at pupils in Primary 4 and Primary 5. Two local authorities offer school swimming for the whole school (Primary 1 to Primary 7), and this likely reflects provision in more rural local authority areas.

The most common approach to delivery is universal (88%) - that is, school swimming provision is offered to all children within a specified age group or year group. The remainder typically adopt a targeted approach - that is, a focus on pupils who are unable to swim or those from disadvantaged areas.

Who delivers the school swimming provision varies. The most common responses are:

- Swimming teachers via the local authority (30%).
- Swimming teachers via a leisure trust (also 30%).
- Local authority Physical Education (PE) specialists (19%).

What is delivered in practice in local authority areas also varies considerably, for example:

- The number of sessions provided to pupils ranges from four to 20. The average number of lessons provided is 11.
- The duration of each lesson ranges from 30 minutes to one hour. The average duration is 41 minutes.

All but one local authority that provides school swimming provision (96%) report that children are assessed on their swimming ability. Responses included that this involves:

- Learn to Swim Framework.
- Local Authority Framework.
- Observation of core competencies.
- Swimming distance based assessment.
- Initial assessment on first lesson and monitor weekly progress.

The main challenge reported by local authorities who do not currently provide school swimming is ‘financial restrictions’. This is followed, but to a lesser extent, by ‘transport costs’ (which in reality is captured within financial restrictions).

All local authorities report that they support the development of a national school swimming framework which has since been undertaken by Scottish Swimming and is currently in draft format. In thinking about the future of school swimming provision, the following factors or considerations are considered important by local authorities, **Figure A.2**.

**Figure A.2: Further support required to support school swimming provision**



Source: **sportscotland**, Primary school swimming survey, 2022.



## Appendix B: Schools and pupil data

Table B.1: Primary schools and pupils - SIMD Quintile 1

	Is the school located in SIMD Quintile 1	Proportion of pupils at school who live in SIMD Quintile 1	Proportion of Primary 1 - Primary 4 pupils receiving free school meals	Proportion of Primary 5 - Primary 7 pupils receiving free school meals
<b>Dundee</b>				
Sidlaw View Primary School	Yes	81%	100%	39%
<b>East Lothian</b>				
Athelstaneford Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Campie Primary School	No	3%	100%	10%
Cockenzie Primary School	No	3%	100%	15%
Dirleton Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Dunbar Primary School	No	-	100%	9%
Elphinstone Primary School	No	-	100%	20%
Gullane Primary School	No	0%	100%	9%
Haddington Primary School	No	0%	100%	11%
Innerwick Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Law Primary School	No	0%	100%	4%
Letham Mains Primary School	No	0%	100%	19%
Longniddry Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Pinkie Primary School	No	-	100%	34%
Preston Tower Primary School	No	18%	100%	15%
St Mary's Primary School	No	0%	100%	12%
Stoneyhil Primary School	No	3%	100%	-
West Barns Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Windygoul Primary School	No	7%	100%	14%
Yester Primary School	No	0%	100%	8%
<b>North Lanarkshire</b>				
Berryhill Primary School	Yes	93%	100%	63%
Carbrain Primary School	Yes	68%	100%	30%
Plains Primary School	Yes	70%	100%	30%

**Table B.1: Primary schools and pupils (cont'd)**

	Is the school located in SIMD Quintile 1	Proportion of pupils at school who live in SIMD Quintile 1	Proportion of Primary 1 – Primary 4 pupils receiving free school meals	Proportion of Primary 5 – Primary 7 pupils receiving free school meals
St. Helen's Primary School	No	16%	100%	10%
St. Thomas' Primary School	Yes	72%	100%	28%
<b>Scottish Borders</b>				
Kirkhope Primary School	No	-	100%	0%
Lauder Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Yarrow Primary School	No	0%	100%	0%

Sources: The Scottish Government, Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland (2021) and The Scottish Government, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

**Table B.2: Primary school pupils involved in the pilot by gender (number)**

	Year group	Male	Female	Missing data	Total
Dundee	Primary 4	11	19	-	30
East Lothian	Primary 5	106	110	-	216
North Lanarkshire	Primary 5-7	67	67	-	134
Scottish Borders*	Primary 1-7	14	6	8	28
Total		198	202	8	408
Percentage		48%	50%	2%	100%

Source: Pilots monitoring data.

Note: \* Only one of three schools who participated in the Scottish Borders pilot provided any monitoring data. A total of 86 children took part in the Scottish Borders - the table in the data is for the one school.

**Table B.3: Primary school pupils involved in the pilot by gender (percentage)**

	Male	Female	Missing data	Total
Dundee	37%	63%	-	100%
East Lothian	49%	51%	-	100%
North Lanarkshire	50%	50%	-	100%
Scottish Borders	50%	21%	29%	100%

Source: Pilots monitoring data.

Note: \* Only one of three schools who participated in the Scottish Borders pilot provided any monitoring data. A total of 86 children took part - the table in the data is for the one school.

# Appendix C: Scottish Swimming draft school swimming framework

The draft school swimming framework is part of a wider holistic approach whereby Scottish Swimming can engage with delivery partners at a local level to help plan, organise and prioritise how they are going to deliver school swimming.

**Table C.1: Draft Scottish Swimming school swimming aims, objectives, and swimming outcomes**

Stage	Aims	Objectives	Swimming outcomes
Stage 1	Develop confidence in the water and introduce basic aquatic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce non-swimmers to the aquatic environment and establish an understanding of safety in and around the water</li> <li>Develop water confidence</li> <li>Develop balance, buoyancy and early propulsion through a variety of activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enter and exit the pool safely without assistance</li> <li>Demonstrate movements across shallow water</li> <li>Display aquatic breathing with full submersion (blow bubbles)</li> <li>Demonstrate flotation with an aid</li> <li>Kick on front OR back aided for 10 metres</li> <li>Experience deep water</li> </ul>
Stage 2	Increase competency of basic aquatic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress water confidence and ability perform basic aquatic skills unaided</li> <li>Have a clear understanding of safety in and around the water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jump into shallow water with full submersion</li> <li>Demonstrate flotation without an aid</li> <li>Kick on front OR back unaided for 10 metres</li> <li>Swim 10 metres</li> <li>Enter deep water</li> </ul>
Stage 3	Utilise basic aquatic skills to produce safer pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop awareness and feel for the water through a variety of basic aquatics skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jump into deep water / Fall in entry and recover to surface</li> <li>Float on back for a minimum of 10 seconds</li> <li>Rotate to vertical and tread water for up to 20 seconds, occasionally waving hand</li> <li>Rotate to horizontal and swim 15 metres</li> </ul>
<b>Aquatics for life</b>			

Note: The table above only shows swimming outcomes only. The draft framework contains more detail relating to health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes.