



TESTING THE WATERS: THE SPORT OF SWIMMING

Government Response
to the Second Report from the
Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee
Session 2001-2002

*Presented to Parliament by the
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
By Command of Her Majesty
March 2002*

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**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
TO THE SECOND REPORT
FROM THE CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT
COMMITTEE, SESSION 2001-2002**

The Government welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Committee's report on swimming.

The health benefits of physical exercise in general, and swimming in particular, were made clear in the Report and its appendices. The Government is aware both of these and of increasing evidence showing that high quality physical education also contributes towards:

- better management of behaviour, the ability to work in a team with others, and greater social interaction;
- higher standards across the curriculum;
- enhanced creativity and an increased ability to solve problems;
- a more developed sense of responsibility and leadership, in accordance with the citizenship curriculum.

There can be no danger, then, of the Government underestimating the importance of physical education and swimming in the wider development of children and young adults. This is why physical education has been statutory within National Curriculum since it was introduced in 1988, and why swimming - renamed swimming activities and water safety in the 2000 version of the National Curriculum so as to emphasise its vital contribution to safety - is one of the six activity areas specified.

The Memorandum submitted to the Committee by the Government (DfES and DTLR, as well as DCMS), contained details of how the development of Specialist Sports Colleges and School Sport Coordinator Partnerships is helping to develop expertise in, and increase opportunities for young people to take part in, sport. Since the publication of the report, another 40 Specialist School Colleges have been designated bringing the total to 141, and the Government is now more than half way towards its target of 1000 School Sport Coordinators by 2004, with 506 designated. It is expected that more will be announced before September.

This response represents the Government's current thinking on the conclusions and recommendations listed in the Report, but the Government remains in contact with all

of the bodies mentioned, and policy continues to evolve. The Swimming Advisory Group, mentioned in the Report, is due to report to Ministers shortly, and issues and lessons arising from that will also contribute towards improvements.

The Government's response to the main recommendations and conclusions are set out below.

- (a) **Sport in general has been recognised as beneficial to the nation's well being and health. Swimming is uniquely beneficial across the whole of society, and as the country's most popular sporting activity it merits appropriate investment (paragraph 13):**

The Government recognises the importance that swimming plays in the lives of people of all ages and abilities, and the contribution it can make to their health. It also recognises that both adults and children are currently failing to meet the recommended levels of physical activity, and that action is required to promote greater participation, including through swimming, across all groups.

PE has been a compulsory part of the National Curriculum since it was introduced in 1988, and swimming one of the six areas of activity specified. Indeed, it remained in the Curriculum even when programmes of study for the non-core subjects were temporarily suspended to allow for the establishment of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies between September 1998 and July 2000. All children between the ages of 5 and 16 have a statutory entitlement to physical education within the National Curriculum. The new National Curriculum, in place from September 2000, also included for the first time an aspiration that all pupils should spend two hours a week on physical activity. The Government has since published a commitment to all pupils having an entitlement to a minimum of two hours high quality physical education and school sport per week within and beyond the school day.

The Government acknowledges the Committee's recommendation that swimming merits appropriate investment, but at the same time has to ensure that any investment is focused, meets the needs of local communities and our elite swimmers, and is - above all - sustainable in the long term. That said, the Sport England Lottery Fund has played its part in funding swimming projects, investing £220 million of Lottery money into community swimming facilities, and almost £3 million into the funding of elite swimmers. This makes swimming the largest single benefactor of Sport England Lottery Funding to date, and represents one-sixth of funding given to all sports over the lifetime of the Lottery so far.

- (b) **The Government should recognise the unique society-wide benefits of swimming and reflect this in its sporting strategies. Reference to swimming within an overall plan for sport is no substitute for a specific strategy on swimming. It would be of little value for the Government to welcome this Report while failing to back up encouraging noises with specific action such as dedicated funding being made available to local authorities for their swimming pools (paragraph 17):**

The Swimming Advisory Group was formed in January 2001 following the publication of the Ofsted report *Swimming In Key Stage 2 An Inspection Report on Standards and Provision* in November 2000.

The Government welcomed the generally positive report, which showed that in the schools inspected in November 1999 four out of five children are able to swim 25 metres at the end of Key Stage 2. However, the OFSTED report, and other recent surveys, touched on several areas of concern, and highlighted some serious factors affecting the number of children who can swim at the end of Key Stage 2. Although the Key Issues for Action in the report were directed at schools and indirectly to LEAs, Ministers responded immediately to set up the Swimming Advisory Group to take the views of all those associated with school swimming, in acknowledgment that more needs to be done to support those who cannot swim 25 metres unaided by Key Stage 2.

The Group first met in January and comprised representatives from DfES, Royal Life Saving Association (RLSA), Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), OFSTED, DCMS, English Schools Swimming Association, PEA UK, British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in PE (BAALPE), Youth Sport Trust (YST), Sport England and the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management (ISRM).

The Government is committed to encouraging sports providers, particularly local authorities, to recognise the valuable role that all sports can offer to all sections of society in tackling problems such as poor health, social exclusion, improving local economies and regenerating local communities. Although a non-statutory service, the majority of local authorities continue to recognise the good value for money represented by spending on sport and recreation for people of all ages in the communities they serve and the Government is very keen to ensure that the existing funds available to them are used to plan sensibly and strategically.

Given that swimming pools are notoriously expensive to build and maintain, and can place an undue burden on local authority expenditure at the expense of other perhaps more essential local services, the Government would reject the Committee's recommendation that dedicated funding should be made available to local authorities for their swimming pools. There is an option, however, for NOF to fund swimming under its New Opportunities for PE and Sport programme. This initiative has allocated £581.25 million to bring about a 'step change' in the provision of sporting opportunities for young people in England. Funds may be accessed for modernising existing as well as building new facilities and to promote wider community access to facilities. All LEAs have been allocated funds and as such will take the lead with constructing application portfolios. This fund also covers revenue costs for the promotion and development of activities.

- (c) **This policy, while rewarding success at international competitions, ignores the possibility that low levels of achievement might be best**

tackled by long-term investment rather than punitive cuts (paragraph 20).

UK Sport distributes Lottery and Exchequer funds according to a consistent and transparent framework which is understood by the governing bodies of sport. Award decisions are made on the basis of criteria focused on medal potential, proven track record, evidence of a performance system that should continue to produce a high number of talented athletes and the significance of the sport in the eyes of the public.

The amendment from priority 1 to priority 2 status for swimming was in relation to UK Sport's prioritisation review process for Lottery funding in support of the World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) which was introduced as part of the Pre and Post Sydney review. The criteria were shared with the sports and generally accepted in principle. Swimming was moved from priority 1 to priority 2 status following the sport's failure to win a medal in Sydney which had not happened at an Olympics since 1936. The priority status does not affect funding from Sport England's Potential and Start Programmes.

UK Sport have awarded a four year payment of £4.92 million with an additional £3 million to disabled swimmers. This represents a reduction of £50,000 a year from their previous annual award. However, the number of swimmers on the WCPP has also been reduced from 51 to 32. The governing body has also saved funds following a commitment by the United Kingdom Sports Institute offer to pick up the costs of the Athlete Medical Scheme and by the English Institute of Sport's (EIS) offer to contribute 50% towards the cost of facility hire for EIS sites. In addition Sport England have awarded £3 million to October 2002 through their Start and Potential Programmes with additional awards through to 2005 to be agreed to ensure the sport's long-term investment.

- (d) Duncan Goodhew told us that Learn to Swim schemes often had a "tick box" attitude, with contractors having no financial incentive to achieve more than the bare minimum of 25 metres swum by each child. He suggested that the definition of "being able to swim" needed reconsideration. We agree and consider that teaching children to swim, but only just, may in fact create a hazardous false confidence (paragraph 24):**

The Government agrees that there is a significant difference between being able to swim 25 metres in a supervised heated and indoor pool, and being able to preserve life in difficulties in cold exposed and hazardous conditions. The issue then is not only the 25 metre benchmark, but one of standards of water safety education and risk assessment.

A water safety website, closely linked to the QCA PE and School Sport Website, is in the process of development and will provide a framework and teaching resources for delivering water safety both at the pool side and in the classroom.

- (e) **As Sharron Davies told the Committee, “it is terribly important that all children learn to swim in schools; therefore they can then be encouraged to go to the clubs ... to bring them through to be elite athletes or just maintain them as regular competing youngsters who want to be with other athletes”. The pressures on schools in urban areas to provide funding for transport to suitable facilities has led to a failure of some schools to meet National Curriculum requirements on swimming and water safety (paragraph 27).**

The Government is looking at how to disseminate exemplars and examples of good practice. A number of Local Authorities have adopted innovative approaches towards the funding and delivery of swimming in schools and to young people. Similarly, studies from other countries could be incorporated into these exemplar studies. The Government would anticipate exemplars of good practice including some of the authorities that offer free swimming policy for all children under the age of 16 and others that grant free or greatly subsidised swimming use for children who achieve the Key Stage 2 requirement.

The Government acknowledges what the Report says about funding for transport to suitable facilities. The fact remains, however, that schools maintained by the local education authority cannot charge for education - including books, equipment or school trips - that takes place wholly or mainly during school hours. In addition, parents can only be charged for activities that happen outside school hours when these activities are not a necessary part of the National Curriculum or religious education. In these cases, parents and others may still be invited to make voluntary contributions to make school funds go further, but all requests to parents for voluntary contributions must make it quite clear that such contributions are just that.

- (f) **Evidence from the historic pools campaigns confirms that closures of community-based pools have led to swimming being taken off the curriculum altogether in some cases. With the current rate of drowning increasing among the under-14s, water safety and the ability to swim should be considered more important than ever. We believe that it should be a key point of Government policy on sport and education that every child should have the opportunity, and access to facilities, to learn to swim (paragraph 28):**

The Government agrees wholeheartedly with the Committee that every child should have the opportunity to learn to swim. Hence swimming remains clearly in the National Curriculum. In the revised National Curriculum 2000:

- the programme for swimming was renamed swimming activities and water safety to emphasise its vital contribution to safety;
- the non-statutory programme was included in key stage 1 in addition to the revised statutory programme in Key Stage 2;

- the revised programme built on and enhanced the original programme set out in the previous National Curriculum for PE.

The current programmes of study state that by the end of Key Stage 2, children should have been taught to:

- pace themselves in floating and swimming challenges related to speed, distance and personal survival;
- swim unaided for a sustained period of time over a distance of at least 25 metres;
- use recognised arm and leg actions, lying on their front and back;
- use a range of recognised strokes and personal survival skills.

Detailed schemes of work for teachers including swimming have been produced by QCA to ensure consistency of teaching. Other organisations have produced support material and teaching schemes. The new National Curriculum also included for the first time an aspiration that all pupils should spend two hours a week on physical activity. The DfES White Paper “Achieving Success”, published in September 2001, included a commitment to an entitlement to two hours physical education and school sport per week within and beyond the school day.

- (g) **Unless existing community pools are refurbished and the facilities improved, more affluent swimmers will be drawn away to private leisure pools and take with them valuable revenue. More local authorities need to develop strategies to enable them to make efficient assessments of the needs of their facilities, and should work with the regional directors of ASA funded for this purpose. Local authority swimming pool managers should concentrate on drawing up successful programming of facilities to enable the whole community to swim, rather than being forced to give priority to funding issues. Sport England should be provided with more funding to enable local authorities to fulfil their strategies for the modernisation of their neglected pools (paragraph 37):**

The Government recognises the great importance of community sports facilities. Local authorities are the primary deliverers of local sporting opportunities and the Government supports the Committee’s recommendation that local authorities need to develop strategies to enable them to make efficient assessments of their sports facilities.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Region’s revision of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17 for Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation, together with planning expertise from Sport England will help communities plan more

effectively for both indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, based on local assessments of need. DTLR are seeking to publish the revised PPG in the spring of 2002. Sport England's own Facilities Planning Model provides a useful planning tool for local authorities to assess the need for sports facilities at the community level. The Model is sensitive to local variations in geography and demography, and enables the demand for facilities based on sports participation rates to be compared with the supply of facilities, to identify shortfalls or spare capacity. Regional analysis has been completed for sports halls and swimming pools, and Sport England is now working with local authorities to carry out local assessments. The Amateur Swimming Association's National Facilities Strategy is also nearing completion, which will better inform the national requirements for swimming facilities.

The Government continues to encourage local authorities to produce cultural strategies, and Sport England to produce sports strategies, as part of the Lottery funding process. This includes an appropriate programming of facilities that ensures that any new or improves facilities gained through Lottery grants are sustainable and meet the needs of local communities. Funding is available through the Lottery Sports Fund and to date swimming projects have received over £220 million in awards which is more than any other single sport. However, to refurbish existing pools across the country would cost £2-3 billion. There are inevitably competing demands for both Lottery and Exchequer funding and greater priorities have been identified for the available resources.

(h) Pools are an amenity which are used by young, old, disabled and ethnic minorities alike who would be discouraged from swimming by travelling further afield to modern facilities (paragraph 42):

The Government appreciates that sport, including swimming, has a major part to play in promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of communities, and that the provision of swimming and other sporting facilities can engage members of the community that might otherwise be tempted to experiment with crime and drugs. The Government also recognises that historic pools have an important role to play in providing swimming opportunities for ethnic minorities and other groups like younger and older people. It encourages local authorities to recognise the needs of the whole communities when considering the creation of new and improved sports facilities, and to be mindful of the need to plan these facilities sympathetically to ensure that no barriers to participation exist for religious or other cultural reasons when considering new designs for pools.

That said, travel to pools - both in terms of time spent travelling and the costs of travel - is an issue which has been identified by schools as a major disincentive to the delivery of swimming in schools. The Government acknowledges that, at present, rural schools perform better because they already have a well developed transport infrastructure which does not generally exist in urban areas.

(i) Historic pools represent a valuable part of the UK's heritage. The priority afforded to them needs to be assessed sensitively and

carefully within the context of total provision across the relevant community (including transport issues, potential usage, importance in terms of social history and architectural quality). We cannot ignore the realities of budgetary constraints, but imaginative and creative funding solutions should be sought in consultation with the local community. Currently, English Heritage cannot afford to help significantly with the funding of the refurbishment of historic pools. The Committee believes there is a case for more resources from the Heritage Lottery Fund being made available to historic pools for this purpose. Historic pools should also be looked at from the point of view of social regeneration or preventing social degeneration. The Government should reconsider how such facilities can be developed to support deprived areas. It should also take steps to seek to relieve them of the burden of VAT on repair and renovation (paragraph 51)

The Government agrees that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is well placed to support projects which combine the preservation of the historic fabric with increased public access and enjoyment. Historic pools can provide a double dividend of heritage and community benefits, accessible to the broadest audience. Support for historic pools can make a valuable contribution to work in socially and economically deprived areas. The HLF is happy to support projects for historic swimming pools where they meet its published assessment criteria, and would be prepared to entertain applications for an historic pool as long as they demonstrate the importance of the project to the heritage (whether at a local, regional or national level), show conservation benefits, and demonstrate access and other benefits for the public. It should not be expected, however, to fund routine repairs or maintenance work or to contribute towards upgrading or changes that would damage the historic character and interest of the pool.

The HLF does not envisage identifying a separate funding stream for historic pools. It is confident that there is ample scope within its current programmes for the funding of pools and lidos and it is happy to continue to do so. With a few exceptions, the HLF also prefers to avoid grant programmes that allocate fixed sums to specific categories of building or heritage. This helps it to encourage the broadest constituency of applicants, and facilitates a creative and multi-disciplinary approach to developing projects which make use of heritage assets to deliver the widest range of benefits. Responses to the thorough consultation that it undertook last year as part of the development of its new Strategic Plan supported this view and the approach is consistent with its treatment of other elements of local authority, and other local, provisions.

To date HLF has funded only a handful of applications for historic pools, but it sees no reason why it should not fund more if good applications are forthcoming. A strong theme arising from its Strategic Plan consultation was the need to give greater value and support to a wider perception of what people consider to be “their” heritage. If local interest, coupled with our encouragement of projects that deliver a range of

community and public benefits, generates new applications for historic pools, it will seek to respond to that demand. The HLF will shortly be opening new offices in the English regions and resourcing all of its regional and country offices to engage more actively in development activity to generate broader interest in applying for Lottery funding.

The Government also notes the recommendation that VAT relief on repairs and renovation be permitted and will take this recommendation into account carefully when considering the future VAT treatment of building work. We should make it clear, however, that the inference in the Report that churches recently received an equivalent relief is not quite accurate; listed Places of Worship are not yet receiving VAT relief on repairs and maintenance at source as this has to be agreed by the EC, and will be considered when the VAT directive is reviewed in 2003. In the meantime DCMS has introduced an interim grant scheme which has the same effect - returning the difference between 5% and the actual amount spent on VAT on eligible repairs.

- (j) **Whilst existing 25 metre pools need to be modernised, there appears to be a case for investing in 50 metre pools which can be used by a whole county for swimming. With efficient programming and the use of moveable floors and bulkheads, pools can be altered during a day to serve the whole community. New 50 metre pools and refurbishment of existing pools need investment, but whilst the structure of the sport remains based on swimming clubs and associations feeding through future medalists they need to have water space and the time to train. We cannot complain when swimming prowess becomes scarce and stars like Sharron Davies, Duncan Goodhew and Anita Lonsbrough arise despite the system rather than because of it. Anita Lonsbrough told the Committee “Sport is not as we knew it ... It is now a business; and we have not invested enough in our business.” (paragraph 57):**

The Government agrees that there is a need both for existing 25 metre pools to be modernised as well as investment to be made in 50 metre pools in appropriate locations, and is fully aware that access to training pools at a reasonable time and cost is important if we are to produce future medalists. The Sport England Lottery Fund, in partnership with the University and Local Government sectors, has already made significant investment in the construction of 50 metre pools as part of the English Institute of Sport to provide elite athletes with ‘quality’ training time. In addition Sport England have identified the need to financially support the construction of eight 50 metre pools throughout England over the coming years where the facility is deemed beneficial to the local community. However, the Government believes that in making decisions about new investment there is a need to distinguish between more costly national and international standard competition pools and venues which would serve mainly for training and local community needs.

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