



Swim Wales  
Wales National Pool  
International Sports Village  
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Our Ref: WGIquiry/March2022

18 March 2022

## **Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas - Inquiry Response**

### **Specific Response to Inquiry Questions:**

- **What are the main barriers to participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?**
  - Cost of swimming lessons
    - Households with multiple children will have a further challenge in financing swimming lessons.
  - Access to swimming lessons
    - There is currently reduced capacity for lessons due to workforce shortage as an impact of the pandemic.
    - Access in relation to travelling to venues, especially in rural areas and for those who are reliant on public transportation
    - Access in relation to timetabling of lessons – for those responsible adults who work, the traditional timetabling of after school and weekend mornings can be restrictive
    - Perception that swimming lessons will be an activity that will be provided by schools
  - According to the WHO, the risk of drowning is higher amongst minority ethnic communities. 80% of black children do not swim in England, this figure is likely to be similar in Wales. Historic and engrained perceptions of swimming and aquatic activities are reported as barriers to participation in some BAME communities.
  - Households with multiple children struggle with entry policies in some facilities so are restricted in their ability to participate.
  - Community education barriers as to why swimming and skills of water competence are so important and the impact of them throughout someone's lifespan.
  
- **How clear a picture do we have of current participation levels in disadvantaged areas? Does the current data enable policy interventions to be effective?**
  - GDPR regulations have caused challenges in the data that Swim Wales is able to collect from Learn to Swim providers.
  - Providers collect 'address' as a standard data field when enrolling customers so it would be possible for insight to be manipulated in relation to where participants are coming from.
  - Swim Wales is planning a 'Customer Impact Survey' to establish participation insight.



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- **How should public funding be used to increase participation in disadvantaged areas?**
  - The Free Swimming Initiative provides accessible opportunities for participants in disadvantaged areas and insight has already been proven to demonstrate this.
  - Utilise mechanisms to ensure access for all, such as through Educational provision, specifically in relation to swimming lessons.
  - Targeted approach directly to disadvantaged areas in collaboration with specific organisations to directly reach the target audiences, such as Flying Start.
  - 'Free' activities are not the solution as the value placed on them is minimal and also when the free period ends; so does participation. Subsidised activities have shown more effective at sustaining activity.
  - Upskilling Community Champions to deliver and drive these programmes.
  
- **How effective are current interventions at increasing participation in disadvantaged areas?**
  - The Free Swimming Initiative enables participants in disadvantaged areas to access both free splash and targeted structured activities.
  - Local Authorities are no longer asked to report specific usage figures in relation to this intervention as a more holistic approach is encouraged.
  - The success of the priority for the 16 and under disadvantaged cohort still cannot be fully assessed. A supplementary assessment/evaluation in summer 2022 should capture that, as was originally planned for summer 2021.
  
- **Has the pandemic caused any persistent changes to participation levels in disadvantaged areas?**
  - Increased challenge in accessing swimming pools with booking procedures (including challenges with access to the internet) and reduced capacities at suitable times.
  - Price increases for participation have meant that participation is now out of budget for some cohorts in our communities.
  - Public confidence and perception of using public transport and using public facilities has influenced population behaviour.
  - Facilities being closed for such an extended period and then re-opening with strict procedures influenced the offer for the public to access and also impacted on the customer usage experience.
  
- **How effectively do different sectors (e.g. education and health) collaborate to improve participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?**



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- Variably across Wales in Swim Wales' experience. Collaboration is influenced by the people who are in place to facilities collaboration and complimentary action.
  - Establishing contact and awareness of people in various sectors and organisations can be challenging.
  - Communication between sectors varies across Wales influencing opportunities for collaboration and awareness.
- **Are there examples of best practice, both within Wales and internationally, that Wales should learn from to increase participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?**
    - Utilising the StreetGames approach across more activities to directly work with target audiences.
    - Review and updating transportation provision to maximise effectiveness and reduce costs and environmental impact – this has been carried out effectively in Rhondda Cynon Taff with collaboration between the School Swimming timetable and the school transport department.
    - Additional physical activity in collaboration with Education to extend beyond the school timetabled day.
    - Social prescription advocacy from Health and Government to promote the use of physical activity for physical and mental wellbeing.

Swim Wales promotes the introduction of all children to the aquatic environment. The introduction of children to the aquatic environment should be safe, positive, fun and progressive to promote a lifelong love of the water. Being confident in and around water from a young age, not only has significant developmental benefits it also establishes water safety awareness which ultimately has an influence on the wider safety of the population of Wales. Learning to swim can mean far more than just improving the physical health of an individual, it can also mean the difference between life and death.

Majority of responsible adults of children in state education provision in Wales expect their child to attend school swimming at some point in Key Stage 2. However, it depends on the provision offered by the Local Authority and priority given to school swimming by the individual schools as to when and how often the child will swim. This opportunity will be impacted by the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales from September 2022 where Headteachers will be designing their curriculum locally. Headteachers may take a minimum recommendation or less in provision of 'experience in, on and around water' due to budget, timetable and resource constraints. The cost of transportation is also



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a major challenge and is it possible for headteachers to have a specific budget for activities with an associated cost.

Some children may not meet the recognised 'standard' of the Achievement Outcomes in relation to water competence. However, they may be able to evidence of 'experience in, on and around water' but not developed the recommended skills which would have an impact on their future safety.

In the worst case scenario, this means that children miss out on the opportunity to swim altogether. More commonly, it means that responsible adults are required to subsidise lessons, which especially for lower income families are expensive and out of budget.

Social patterns are evident among swimming participation, with children from lower socioeconomic class less likely than those from higher socioeconomic class to engage in swimming (Audrey, Wheeler et al. 2012). This is supported by recent data showing that across the Swim Wales network the average cost of a swimming lesson is approximately £6.50; and with low income families spending just £3.21 per week on 'active sport' this shows that socioeconomic class is a serious consideration in relation to access to extra-curricular lessons.

Poverty is on the rise in Wales; 197,000 young people are currently living in poverty which is envisaged to rise to 250,000 by 2021 (StreetGames, 2019). This highlights that for a significant percentage of the population experience in school may be the only experience. If the opportunity to develop skills of water competence is not specifically included in the curriculum more children and young people will miss out on learning these potentially lifesaving skills.

Swimming is a key component of a person's physical literacy journey and recent data suggests that 52% of Key Stage 2 children (aged 7-11) attending School Swimming in 2017/18 in Wales cannot swim 25 metres unaided as assessed by the National Curriculum Assessment (Free Swimming Data Collection, 2018). This figure is even higher in deprived areas. With the reduction of Free Swimming Initiative funding to leisure providers, curriculum opportunities to develop skills of water competence and 'experience of water' are even more integral to ensuring that the whole population can access aquatic education, experience and opportunities.

- Schools provide the main opportunities for children to get active, normally through timetabled 'PE' sessions, which included swimming. (StreetGames, 2019)
- After school clubs are not an easy option for most families due to cost and logistics of getting to-and-from the activity, which is even harder if there are multiple children. (StreetGames, 2019)



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The United Nations – Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child should be protected from circumstances that are harmful to the child’s physical or mental development. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) ‘requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change’.

Ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity to learn skills of water competence and have extensive ‘experience of water’ specifically links to the goals of A More Equal Wales, A Healthier Wales and A Globally Responsible Wales. In addition to this the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy (2016, p.17) and the Wales Drowning Prevention Strategy (2020, p.25) set out to ‘promote and develop learning to swim and water safety education’ and ensure that ‘every child should have the opportunity to learn to swim and receive water safety education at primary school and where required at Key Stage 3’.

**Swim Wales and our collaborative partners wish to highlight the importance of learning to swim and developing water competence skills, not just for the associated health and wellbeing benefits but specifically for the potential to prevent drownings and save lives.**

Yours sincerely,

Hanna Guise  
National Learn to Swim Manager  
Swim Wales