

## Safe Supervision for Teaching and Coaching Swimming

### Definition of Supervision

#### *SUPERVISION*

ASA regulations state that a Level 1 (Assistant) Teacher should teach/coach under the supervision of a Level 2 (Teacher) or above. The supervisory aspect relates to two main areas, i.e. safe practise and best practise and provides the opportunity for the Level 1 teacher to be mentored by the supervisory teacher.

The degree of supervision and support required will vary and should reflect a risk assessment carried out by the supervisory teacher/coach. The risk assessment will take into account a range of factors including:-

- Competence and experience of the Level 1 teacher
- Lifeguard provision – is the supervising teacher carrying out a dual role of teacher and lifeguard; does the teacher being supervised hold an appropriate lifeguard qualification
- Design of the pool where the teacher is taking place
- Ability of pupils being taught by the assistant and the supervising teacher

Ultimately, the responsibility for the group being taught by the Level 1 teacher rests with the supervising teacher. It is essential, therefore, that the supervising teacher is positioned close enough to the Level 1 teacher to be able to observe the teaching that is taking place and to intervene if this considered necessary. It is essential, however, that any intervention required does not jeopardise the safety of the group being taught by the supervising teacher.

The role being carried out by the supervising teacher will impact upon the number of teachers/coaches being supervised at any one time. If the supervising teacher is not directly responsible for a group of swimmers she/he may supervise a maximum of 6 assistant teachers (subject to the risk assessment referred to above). However, if the supervising teacher is directly responsible for teaching a group then it is recommended that their supervision of other assistants be limited to a maximum of 2 and that the function of the lifeguard be carried out by a person not included in the teaching process.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This guidance is aimed at the owners and operators of all swimming pools where teaching or coaching takes place, and at those who undertake such activities. Safe Supervision is produced and endorsed by the Amateur Swimming Association, the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management, *Lifesavers* (The Royal Life Saving Society UK) and the Institute of Swimming. It deals with risk assessment, safety supervision and the safe ratios of pupils to teachers and coaches. This is the second edition of Safe Supervision and supersedes all previous guidance.

### **2. THE LEGAL BACKGROUND**

Owners, operators and occupiers of swimming pools must follow the general duties and responsibilities in the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety in the Work Place Regulations 1992. They are obliged to take all reasonable and practicable measures to ensure teaching and coaching activities are conducted safely. They have the overall responsibility for every person on the premises.

### **3. PROGRAMMED AND UNPROGRAMMED ACTIVITIES**

This publication is about programmed activities – those with a formal structure: disciplined, supervised or controlled and continuously monitored from the poolside.

This includes swimming lessons, coaching sessions and other tuition such as diving, water aerobics, synchronised swimming, water polo and teaching water activities to people with learning difficulties or



physical disabilities. Teachers and coaches of these and similar activities should hold appropriate, recognised teaching/coaching qualifications.

*Managing Health & Safety in Swimming Pools*, a guidance document from the Health and Safety Commission and Sport England, indicates that programmed sessions, under certain circumstances, may have fewer lifeguards than unprogrammed sessions.

#### 4. SAFE SUPERVISION

*Managing Health & Safety in Swimming Pools* recommends that everybody providing lifeguard functions – whether lifeguards or teachers and coaches – should hold an appropriate lifesaving award or qualification. A lifeguard may not be required in programmed sessions when the teaching and coaching of swimming is taking place. In these situations, where the risk is limited due to the nature of the activity and the degree of control exercised, the teacher or coach may provide the safety cover. However they should have the appropriate lifesaving competencies, which include rescue skills, Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and have knowledge of relevant aspects of the Pool Safety Operating Procedures (PSOP).

Where teachers are directly responsible for supervising the swimming pool, performing the role of lifeguards in an unprogrammed pool session, they too should have the competencies and skills required of a lifeguard in those circumstances.

Where *programmed sessions* are the only activity in the pool, teachers or coaches may provide the safety cover providing they hold an appropriate ASA swimming teaching/coaching qualification or equivalent plus:

- A current *Lifesavers* National Pool Lifeguard qualification, any equivalent award, or
- The National Rescue Award for Swimming Teachers and coaches, or
- The Rescue Test for Swimming Teachers and Coaches

The National Rescue Award for Swimming Teachers and Coaches is jointly recognised by the Amateur Swimming Association, *Lifesavers*, the Institute of Swimming and the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management as being appropriate for programmed activities.

Where the pool is in *shared use* and clearly divided between *programmed and unprogrammed* swimming activities, suitably qualified teachers and coaches may take responsibility (both for lifeguard cover and teaching and coaching) – but only for the programmed area of the pool and within the agreed ratio of pupils to teacher and coach.

Where the *shared use is not clearly defined* between programmed and unprogrammed activities supervision must be provided in accordance with the pool's normal operating procedures.

Helpers and support teachers who are not qualified can play a valuable role in supporting qualified staff responsible for the safe delivery of programmed pool activities.

#### 5. THE ROLE OF RISK ASSESSMENT

The circumstances and design of swimming pools vary greatly: a standard solution to cover every pool is not practicable, so risk assessment is the essential first step – for any pool, and certainly when setting up teaching or coaching. Risk assessment must:

- Identify hazards
- Assess risks
- Indicate, as far as is practicable, the measures required to control these hazards and risks.

These control measures should then be incorporated in written pool safety operating procedures



(PSOP) which consists of a normal operating plan (NOP) and an emergency action plan (EAP). When preparing these, management should consult fully with swimming teachers, coaches, schoolteachers and others who bring groups to the pool.

The PSOP must clearly state the safety and supervisory requirements for all activities in the pool. Coaches and teachers must be familiar with and practised in the relevant aspects of the PSOP. This helps to ensure the consistency of standards.

## 6. SAFETY FACTORS IN RISK ASSESSMENT

Each pool will have unique features that make particular demands on safety. This section highlights six important factors.

### ***Pool design***

The suitability of the general design of the pool area for teaching and coaching includes:

- Shape and blind spots
- Special water features such as sprays, inlets and wave machines
- Blind spots resulting from the position of features or equipment
- Glare, reflection, lighting and noise

### ***Depth***

Its importance in relation to the ability and height of the pupils include:

- The depth and extent of shallow water areas
- The extent of deep water areas
- The pool floor profile, in particular sudden changes in depth
- The possibility of being able to segregate the shallow water area (e.g. roping off and using a boom)

### ***Water quality***

Two factors need to be considered:

- The temperature of the pool water (and the air) in respect of comfort – bearing in mind pupils' size, age and physical ability
- Clarity of the pool water

### ***Pool organisation***

The arrangements of the lesson must be considered:-

- Who has the responsibility for the pool
- Is there exclusivity of use?
- Is there shared use with other activities?
- If use is shared what are the implications? (e.g. lifeguarding responsibilities)

### ***Staffing***

The skills and experience of staff and the ratio of pupils to teachers/coaches are important; consideration needs to be given to:

- The qualification and number of teachers, coaches and lifeguards required
- The skill of teachers, coaches and lifeguards
- The degree of support and help provided by appropriate helpers, including parents, school assistants and auxiliaries

### ***Pupils and ability***

The factors to be considered include:

- The age of pupils



- The range of their swimming ability. This should be known by the teacher or coach and each new pupil should be checked at the first lesson, in shallow water
- The use of flotation aids
- The ability of pupils to comprehend instructions including their command of the language in which the lesson is taught
- Any physical disabilities or learning difficulties

## 7. TEACHING FROM THE POOLSIDE

In the situation where the teacher has responsibility for groups comprising more than two pupils the recommended teaching position is from the side of the pool as this provides the best position to oversee the whole group in terms of safety and to provide appropriate feedback on the performance of each person in the group.

This does not preclude a teacher being in the water to assist pupils either on a 1:1 or 1:2 basis or as an assistant to the class teacher. In fact for groups of more than two pupils a fully qualified teacher on the poolside supported by an assistant in the water may be ideal.

It is recognised, however, that in some circumstances the teacher will have assessed the risk and may feel it is more appropriate to teach from within the water. For groups of more than two pupils this should only be considered after carrying out a risk assessment giving careful consideration of all the potential factors.

Factors to take into account include those identified above particularly pool depth, ability of pupils and the use of flotation aids. At all times the teacher must be able to clearly see all pupils and be close enough to provide physical support should this be required. In this way it may be practicable to supervise up to four pupils, ratios greater than this should not be considered unless additional helpers are available in the water.

## 8. PUPIL TEACHER RATIOS

It is recommended that in the vast majority of cases encountered, pupil: teacher ratios should not exceed 20:1 – and in some cases should be less than that. These ratios are based upon safety requirements and not the criteria for teaching. The paragraph given later headed *Exceptions* deals with those routine circumstances in which the 20:1 ratio can be exceeded.

Having taken into account the safety and other guidelines already dealt with, the recommendations here should be helpful in determining actual ratios for programmes swimming activities. The ratios given are for pupils in the water. Where the teacher is also responsible for pupils not in the water but on the poolside, then the ratios may need to be smaller or appropriate action taken as indicated in the paragraph given later headed *Exceptions*.

### The ratios – not to be exceeded

#### Adult and Child classes 12:1

That is, up to twelve pairs (one adult and one child) to each teacher. For the purposes of this document the term child refers to – a child, less than 5 years of age

#### Non-swimmers and beginners 12:1

Young children, normally of primary school age or adults being introduced to swimming. If more than this number is being taught, other adults may be used to help the teacher/coach – see later paragraph headed *Exceptions*.

#### Improving swimmers 20:1

Swimmers of similar ability to each other who can swim at least 10 metres competently and unaided



on their front and back. It is recommended that the lesson be confined to an area of the pool where pupils are not out of their depth.

### **Mixed ability groups 20:1**

Pupils with a range of ability (from improver standard to competent swimmers) but where the least able and least confident are working well within their depth. Swimmers technique, stamina and deep water experience should be considered.

### **Competent swimmers 20:1**

Those swimmers who can swim at least 25 metres competently and unaided on front and back, and can tread water for two minutes.

### **Competitive swimmers 30:1**

Training only, with very competent swimmers

### **Synchronised swimming 20:1**

In water over 1.8m deep the ratio should be considered in relation to swimming competence and the activity taking place. The teacher or coach must be able to rescue from the deepest part of the pool floor or be accompanied by a suitably qualified pool lifeguard.

### **Water Polo 20:1**

Training only

### **Aerobics in deep water 20:1**

Pupils must be water confident and either wear an appropriate buoyancy aid or be competent swimming in deep water

### **Aerobics in shallow water 30:1**

Pupils must be restricted to water within which they can safely stand and all must be able to stand up from lying in the water on their front or back

### **Diving – beginners and improver divers 12:1**

Divers of similar ability who are comfortable and confident in deep water

### **Diving – competitive divers 15:1**

This refers to the training of competent divers. A competent diver is one who is able to swim competently and is able to perform a safe forward dive and backward dive from the poolside, demonstrating control and awareness of both themselves and other users. The same applies from whichever diving board they choose to use

### **Swimmers with disabilities 8:1**

(With an appropriate number of helpers). Each situation must be considered independently as people with disabilities do not form a homogenous group. Care must be taken to ensure that there are sufficient helpers in the water to provide a 1:1 ratio for those needing constant support and a sufficient number of other helpers to provide the degree of support demanded by the range of disabilities within the group. There are national organisations for specific disabilities from whom further guidance may be obtained.

### **Exceptions**

Organisational demands will sometimes make a teaching ratio within 20:1 virtually impossible. In these circumstances a qualified and skilled teacher can adopt a number of strategies to help with the management of the group. For example, another responsible person on the poolside, who is competent to recognise and respond to a pupil in difficulty, may provide the necessary supervision. In a school this could be an interested parent, a teaching auxiliary or a sixth form student training for a



sport leader or similar award. They must always work under the supervision of the teacher and be absolutely clear on the nature and extent of their role.

Alternatively, pupils can be taught to work in pairs, immediately having the number in the water at any one time. The teacher instructs the resting pupils, who must be out of the water, to constantly observe their partners and to bring any concern to the immediate attention of the teacher.

Teachers can adopt these measures only where they are included in the pool's normal operating procedures, and not where there is:

- A wide variation in the swimming ability of the pupils
- Language or learning difficulties
- A large water area (more than 250sq metres)
- Deep water areas into which poor ability swimmers could stray and be out of their depth
- Difficulty in seeing beneath the water surface due to glare or reflection

## **9. TEACHERS' RESPONSIBILITIES**

Teachers and coaches must be trained, and able to carry out their role, in the pool's emergency action plan. They must ensure that:

- The pupils understand and regularly practise their response in an emergency
- The emergency procedures to evacuate the water and summon assistant are practised regularly in accordance with the requirements of the emergency action plan.

Safety considerations must always be paramount. If an employer or organiser insists on a pupil:teacher ratio considered by the teacher involved to be inappropriate and potentially unsafe, then the teacher should express that concern:

- Verbally to the appropriate supervisor and/or employer at the time
- In writing, passed to the appropriate supervisor and/or employer
- In extreme circumstances a teacher or coach may have to consider whether it is safe to continue with a swimming lesson

## **10. FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE**

Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), Harold Fern House, Derby Square, Loughborough, LE11 5AL  
Tel: 01509 618700, Website: <http://www.britishswimming.org>

Institute of Swimming (IOS)  
Harold Fern House, Derby Square, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 5AL  
Tel: 01509 618746, email: [ios@swimming.org](mailto:ios@swimming.org)

Institute of Sport and Recreation Management (ISRM)  
Sir John Beckwith Centre, Loughborough University, LE11 3TU  
Tel: 01509 226474, email: [enquiries@ism.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@ism.co.uk), website: <http://www.isrm.co.uk>

Lifesavers, The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK)  
River House, High Street, Broom, Warks, B50 4HN  
Tel: 01789 773994, email: [lifesavers@rlss.org.uk](mailto:lifesavers@rlss.org.uk), website: <http://www.lifesavers.org.uk>

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National Swimming Academy, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA  
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