



# A Lifetime of Swimming for Every Child

Joint Response on a  
National Swimming Strategy as Part of  
the National Sports Policy Framework  
Public Consultation Paper

submitted to



**An Roinn Iompair  
Turasóireachta agus Spóirt**

Department of Transport,  
Tourism and Sport

## 1.1 Swim Ireland

Swim Ireland is the National Governing Body for swimming, water-polo, diving and associated aquatic disciplines in Ireland. The organisation was formed in 1893 and adopted the trading name of Swim Ireland in 1998. It has over 16,000 members and over 150 Affiliated Clubs. Membership is comprised of 56% female and 65% children (two main target groups for participation)

Encompassing the four provinces of Ireland, Swim Ireland is operated by a voluntary board of Directors who are democratically elected by the club members making nominations to and voting on the candidates at the Swim Ireland Annual General Meeting. Swim Ireland was the first sporting governing body to adopt the Voluntary Code of Governance and for the first time in 2016 Independent Directors now form part of the Swim Ireland Board.

Strategic direction and leadership comes from the Swim Ireland board and the operational side is managed by the CEO in conjunction with the 25 members of staff. Committees of volunteers are also established to assist in the running of the organisation.

Volunteers and paid staff are considered as partners in implementing the mission and programmes of Swim Ireland with each having an equal but complimentary role to play.

***Swim Ireland considers itself an agent in the delivery of the government strategy on sport, safety in the water and physical activity in Ireland***

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## 1.2 Ireland Active

Ireland Active is a not for profit representative body for the leisure and fitness sector in Ireland with over 200 members. The organisation was originally established as the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM) in 1998 and was rebranded as Ireland Active in 2013. Our membership is comprised of public and private sector leisure facilities, gyms, education providers, outdoor recreation providers and swimming pools in every community in Ireland.

Our standards programme includes the White Flag National Quality Standards and the Register of Exercise Professionals for the fitness industry in Ireland. We advocate on behalf of our members and provide training, events and awards programmes for the leisure and fitness sector in Ireland as well as running a Garda Vetting service for the sector.

The Board of Directors is democratically elected from our membership each year at our AGM and is currently comprised of 12 directors who lead the strategy for the organisation. Gender balance and term limits are provided for in our Constitution and our team in the office is led by our CEO with voluntary committees supporting the operation of the organisation.

***Ireland Active delivers on government policy in the areas of sport, health, physical activity, social cohesion and water safety through our network of leisure and fitness facilities***

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## 2 Introduction

Swimming is an integral part of Irish society, its impact reaching beyond the sport itself as indicated in our graphic below. The Healthy Ireland (HI) Obesity Policy and Action Plan takes a life-course, evidence based approach to tackling obesity and overweight and there is a strong body of research supporting the importance of swimming as a life-long activity. Swim Ireland and Ireland Active believe that teaching our children to swim should be a clear focus area of National Sports Policy. We have a very clear outcome in mind, namely that:

***Every child in Ireland will be able to swim 25m unaided before they leave primary school within the lifetime of the National Sport Policy***

**Health**

A myriad of unique health benefits are associated with swimming

- Significantly reduced risk reduction for all-cause mortality (28%) and cardiovascular disease (41%) respectively
- Low load-bearing sporting activity has particular appeal for those with a long-term illness / disability who might otherwise not engage in sport or physical activity. 8.4% of active swimmers have a long term illness / disability, the highest percentage of any sport.

**Economic Impact**

Swimming forms a critical part of the €230m sport and fitness industry in Ireland

- Swimming operates within a €230m industry which employs 9,500 people across the country
- In the UK, expenditure on swimming is significant and shows the potential for the industry in Ireland:

*'Every new swimmer represents an estimated £83.35 to swimming's economy. Learn-to-swim schemes are worth an estimated £190m in public and £63m in private pools while water based exercise schemes are fast closing the gap on learn-to-swim income. The likely value of these schemes is of the order of £164.6m.'*

**Life-Long Participation**

Swimming in childhood results in a higher retention rate than any other sport through adulthood

- Swimming sustains participation rates better than other popular participation sports. It is truly a lifelong sporting activity. This is particularly important in the context of Ireland's ageing demography. CSO forecasts suggest that the population of 65+ year olds will account for over 16% of the total population by 2026 compared to the current 13%.
- It is the most popular activity among older adults, an attribute that will be particularly important given Ireland's ageing demographic
- Mothers are more likely to exercise with their children in sports such as swimming

**Facilities**

There are an estimated 450 swimming pools operating in Ireland

- An estimated 450 swimming pools are operational in Ireland (EHAI, 2016) with one-third operated by local authorities and the remainder by the private sector.
- Over 60% of adults who reported belonging to a swimming club in 2015 also reported taking part in at least one swimming session per week. Thus swimming club membership encourages both social and active participation in sport which government policy is seeking to encourage

**Social**

The potential for raising standards is considerable with all the follow-on benefits outlined above

- Data from the CSPPA Study (2010) suggests that between 20-25% of primary and post-primary school children are either non-swimmers or are at best 'beginners'.
- Significant improvement is required in these figures from a safety perspective and as an enabler of life-long engagement in swimming and other aquatic activities.

**Ireland active**

**Swim Ireland**

Data from the Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA 2009) suggests that between 20%-25% of primary and post-primary school children are either non-swimmers or are at best “beginners”. **Significant improvement is required in these figures from a safety perspective and as an enabler of life-long engagement in swimming and other aquatic activities.**

In order to deliver on our vision of every child being able to swim, we believe that a number of steps need to be taken.

- ❖ At high level a cabinet committee should be established covering the areas of Health, Education and Sport.
- ❖ A senior officials group should then be established to examine the current structure of the school curriculum and how the school and sport sectors can best work together in delivering a swimming strategy.
- ❖ Under the National Sports Policy we believe that a working group should be established to deliver on the vision of [every child being able to swim](#) and deliver a **National Swimming Strategy** which would sit within the framework of a National Sports Policy

### 3 National Swimming Strategy as part of the National Sports Policy

It is vitally important that children learn to swim for all of the reasons outlined in the above graphic. The research in relation to lifelong participation is particularly compelling. The red line in Figure 1 below indicates how swimming retains participation rates over the course of a life cycle, better than any other popular sport.

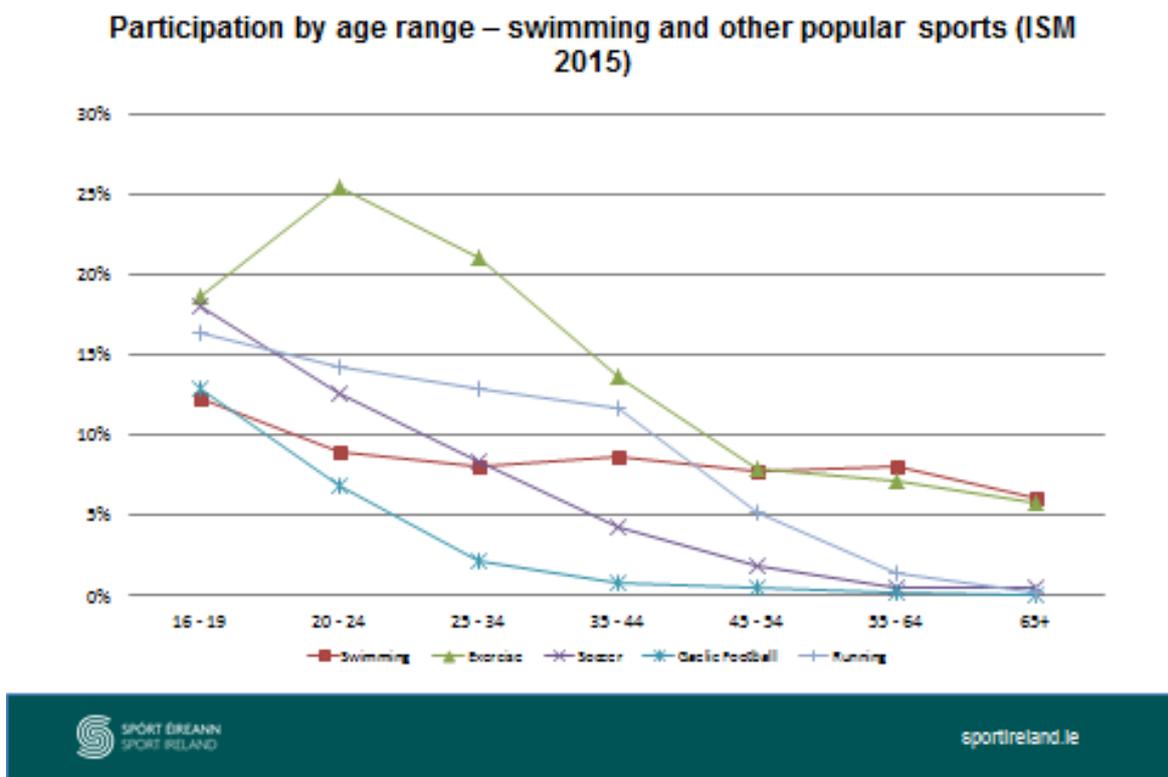


Figure 1 Participation in popular sports over the life cycle

CSO forecasts suggest that the population of 65+ year olds will account for over 16% of the total population by 2026 compared to the current 13%. Our ageing population demographic suggests that the National Sports Policy should prioritise sports that will best facilitate physical activity among older adults. Research in Ireland and internationally consistently points to the popularity of swimming. It is the most popular activity among older adults and has consistently been among the top 3 most popular activities along with exercise and running. In 2015, the Irish Sports Monitor reported that over 8% of adults aged 16+ participated at least once a week. This is equivalent to almost 290,000 adults regularly swimming.

The CSPPA Study (2009) indicated that 19% of primary school children and 23% of post primary children are beginner level or non-swimmers. Only 29% of those swimming learn to do so after the age of 25. However once children participate in swimming the research shows that they are likely to continue swimming as an adult. There are obvious benefits to teaching children to swim at a young age as learning in a different medium is easier at a younger age.

To maximise the potential of Irish swimming (and the necessary facilities to support this) we need a coherent and strategic approach to swimming in this country through the development of a **National Swimming Strategy**.

## 4 National Swimming Strategy

As part of this strategy we would see joined up thinking and a partnership approach between all stakeholders in the NGB, Public & Private Sector leisure providers, Irish Water Safety and the number of government agencies where swimming is directed at policy level. The key elements of the strategy would be;

- ❖ *A National 'Get Ireland Swimming' initiative with supporting communications campaign and information portal*
- ❖ *Partnership approach by Local Authority and Private sector swimming pools and local swimming clubs*
- ❖ *Review and subsequent implementation of the primary school aquatics curriculum to include a schools specific 'Learn to Swim' programme*
- ❖ *Standardisation of swimming accreditation and programmes to be delivered in all pools in Ireland*
- ❖ *Targeted funded programmes to increase participation; in particular to get inactive people participating in swimming*
- ❖ *Investment in facilities reviewed and a plan prepared; as the LASPP has been closed since 2000 with the last review having been conducted in 2006*
- ❖ *Explore the role of the private sector in helping deliver on the strategy*
- ❖ *Increase investment in swimming and extend existing tax measures to increase participation*
- ❖ *Hosting of international events every decade on a strategic basis*

We believe that a National Swimming Strategy should sit within the framework of the new National Sports Policy. Swimming needs a specific strategy because, unlike other sports it operates within a commercial industry and this presents particular challenges in coordinating all the parties that make swimming happen. This includes public and private swimming pools, schools, teachers, coaches and voluntary clubs.

We believe that Swim Ireland and Ireland Active are uniquely placed to enable this strategy to be developed and implemented.

The National Physical Activity Plan also calls for a new National Swimming for Health initiative '*Get Ireland Swimming*' which we believe is integral to the delivery of a National Swimming Strategy. As part of the swimming strategy we believe there should be a 'call to arms' around swimming in Ireland in the form of an initiative or campaign similar to other countries such as Canada '*Canada's Swim Team*'<sup>1</sup> and USA's '*SwimToday*'<sup>2</sup> initiative whose aim is to '*Create an industry-wide marketing campaign to increase swimming participation.*' These initiatives involve social marketing, data collection, and practical information and location tools for clubs and facilities.

## **5 Conclusion**

As the NGB for swimming in Ireland, Swim Ireland does not own or run any swimming pool or facility. Ireland Active members operate public and private swimming pools and are therefore ideally placed to help support the sport of swimming in Ireland through a partnership approach. Appendix A provides detailed answers to each of the themes in the NSP Consultation document that are relevant to this joint submission. Swim Ireland are submitting a separate document providing further detail for consideration in relation to themes that are specific to Swim Ireland as an NGB. Both organisations are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the discourse and believe that a National Swimming Strategy under the framework of the National Sports Policy is required to draw together all the stakeholders to deliver on the potential of swimming in Ireland and our overall vision that:

***Every child in Ireland will be able to swim 25m unaided before they leave primary school within the lifetime of the National Sport Policy***

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<sup>1</sup> <http://getswimming.ca/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.swimtoday.org/>

## 6 Appendix A- answers to each theme in the NSP consultation document

### 6.1 Contribution of Sport- Swimming

Swimming both as a sport and as a physical activity contributes to a better nation as indicated by the research carried out in Ireland and abroad which provides as follows:

- Of all sporting activities, swimming is the best able to retain and attract participants<sup>3</sup>
- Swimming is the third most participated sport for adults in Ireland (almost 300,000 adults swimming weekly)<sup>4</sup>
- It is in the top 5 for children<sup>5</sup>
- It is the most popular sport taken up as an adult
- The least drop off of any sport in the volatile early adult years happens from swimming<sup>6</sup>
- Swimming has specific health benefits such as helping people with chronic illnesses such as arthritis, improving mental health and for health in older people<sup>7</sup>
- It is in the top 3 sports that girls and women have said they want to participate in<sup>8</sup>
- It is widely recommended for women pre and post-natal<sup>9</sup>
- 65% of all female swimmers take part in no other sport, making it their only engagement in health enhancing physical activity (excluding recreational walking)
- For adults with a limiting illness or disability, a greater proportion partake in swimming than all team sports combined

Swimming is an integral part of Irish life and operates as a gateway to many other opportunities for a better quality of life for Irish citizens as follows:

- Being able to swim allows transition to other sports such as sea swimming, surfing, triathlon, rowing, kayaking, canoeing, to name a few
- Transition from other sports and physical activities to swimming at different stages of the life cycle (pregnancy, injury, physical wear and tear). Many team sports have a shorter participation cycle and swimming would be a natural sport to transition to
- Swimming is particularly appropriate as the body bears the scars of wear and tear as it can be gentle on the joints whilst giving the heart and mind a good workout

The economic benefit of swimming is significant with research<sup>10</sup> carried out by the ASA (British Swimming) in the UK showing that the part that swimming plays in reducing health costs is noteworthy with:

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<sup>3</sup> Irish Sports Monitor, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Irish Sports Monitor, 2013

<sup>5</sup> CSPPA Study, 2009

<sup>6</sup> Keeping them in the game, 2013

<sup>7</sup> CDC [http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/health\\_benefits\\_water\\_exercise.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/health_benefits_water_exercise.html)

<sup>8</sup> Irish Sports Monitor, 2013

<sup>9</sup> British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2003 <http://bjsm.bmj.com/content/37/1/6.full>

<sup>10</sup> The economy of swimming, 2012

*'...an estimated cost per quality of life adjusted year of £12,000 for every member of the public regularly swimming in a public swimming pool.'*

In the same report the return on investment from public pools to the health system is estimated to be £1.50 for every £1 invested.

## **6.2 Participation- Swimming**

The Irish Sports Monitor has indicated that there is significant participation in swimming (8% of adults weekly) however only 32% of people are meeting the national physical activity guidelines; therefore there is huge potential for swimming to meet the demand, if supported correctly.

***Swimming pools have capacity during off-peak times to accommodate increased use if innovative participation programmes were supported by government***

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The National Physical Activity Plan (launched in January 2016) has been developed on a cross departmental basis led by the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport and the Department of Health under the HI Framework. One of the actions (Action 45) is the *development of physical activity for health culture in Ireland through the development of a new... 'Get Ireland Swimming' initiative.* The key agencies for delivering this are Swim Ireland and Ireland Active. We believe this is urgently needed to deliver on government policy and to improve the health, and wellbeing of the nation.

Some of the main National Physical Activity Plan Actions which Ireland Active and Swim Ireland are involved in implementing (in relation to swimming) are-

- Action 6- Conduct an annual National Week of Physical Activity and Sport to link in with the European Week of Sport
- Action 9- Extend the Active School Flag programme to 500 further schools
- Action 11- Fully implement the Physical Education curriculum for all Primary and post-primary pupils to meet Department of Education and Skills guidelines
- Action 37- Explore opportunities to maximise physical activity and recreation amenities in the natural environment
- Action 41- Continue to support the Community Sport and Physical Activity Hubs in disadvantaged areas
- Action 45- Develop a physical activity for health culture in Ireland through the development of new Get Ireland Running, Get Ireland Cycling, Get Ireland Swimming initiatives
- Action 47- Continue to support the work of the National Governing Bodies of sport in implementing programmes to promote physical activity

## **6.3 Children and the school curriculum**

Swimming is on the national curriculum for primary schools however its delivery is not meeting the requirements of government education policy. Action 11 of the National Physical Activity Plan commits to:

***'Fully implement the Physical Education curriculum for all primary and post-primary schools to meet Department of Education and Skills Guidelines'***

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The plan seeks to implement this action by 2020 and therefore it is essential that we urgently review the current curriculum to examine why half of school children are not participating in the swimming stream.

***‘Physical Education activities were found to comprise mainly a small range of traditional team games, and activities such as dance or swimming were either not taught or provided infrequently’<sup>11</sup>***

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Perhaps there are learnings to be gained from abroad. Australia has recently launched a (\$100m funded) Sporting Schools<sup>12</sup> initiative. As part of the initiative, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has partnered with more than 30 national sporting organisations (NGBs) to deliver sport before, during and after school hours, via their network of aligned organisations, coaches and teachers. The Sporting Schools programme is a key part of the Australian Government’s plan to encourage children to form a lifelong interest in sport. Each year more than 5,700 schools will be funded through Sporting Schools for practical delivery of sports activities that suits their local needs. The Sporting Schools website provides a central resource for teachers, parents and children to access information and create links between schools, sport and community. The CEO of Swimming Australia, Mark Anderson, stated that:

***“Sporting Schools allows us to promote fun and flexible swimming and water safety programmes to primary school children to enhance their water confidence and skills. The programme also allows us to share information with children and their parents about opportunities to encourage continued involvement in swimming at local swim schools and clubs”***

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Ireland Active and Swim Ireland believe that a coordinated approach needs to be taken by government to address the deficiency in delivering the PE curriculum. Ireland Active already work with schools in providing access to member facilities however there is a challenge in rural areas in accessing swimming pools. Transport costs are often a barrier to introducing a schools swim programme. We believe that any swimming strategy needs to examine how we increase opportunities for children to access swimming during and after school.

The UK Sports Strategy (2015)<sup>13</sup> (acknowledging that 45% of 7-11 year olds cannot swim 25m) has outlined a specific action around swimming-

*Government will establish a working group to advise on how to ensure no child leaves school unable to meet a minimum standard of capability and confidence in swimming, including disabled young people and those with Special Educational Needs. The group will consider what confidence and capability really mean in swimming, what challenges*

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<sup>11</sup> CSSPA Study, 2009

<sup>12</sup> Sporting Schools <https://sportingschools.gov.au/sports/swimming-australia>

<sup>13</sup> Sporting Future, A new Strategy for an Active Nation 2015

*schools face in providing quality swimming tuition, how swimming is delivered in a way that caters for all children, and what government and others can do to tackle these issues.*

In addition, they have ensured that key performance indicators are achieved-

*KPI 5 – Increase in the percentage of children achieving swimming proficiency...Levels 1-3*

We believe that the development of the National Sports Policy should establish a working group to develop a strategy to ensure that every child leaving primary school can swim:

***A working group should be established under the NSP to ensure that all Irish school children are competent and confident to swim***

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In Ireland, 87% of swim programmes in schools are being delivered off-site<sup>14</sup> and so it is essential that those people who are delivering the programmes are adequately trained and are delivering a quality programme. To ensure the quality of lessons being delivered to children, it is necessary for all swimming teachers to be delivering a standard programme, as has been already developed by Swim Ireland.

***We believe that the 'Learn to Swim' programme should be an integral part of the review of the primary school PE curriculum.***

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## **6.4 Participation programmes**

Since 2013 Swim Ireland has successfully run the Swim for a Mile programme with Ireland Active member swimming pools. The programme provides a free 8-12 week training programme to encourage people back into the swimming pool by posing a challenge to 'Swim for a Mile'. To date 10,000 people have signed up for the training programme.

This programme has shown what can be achieved when funding is directed at a specific target group and enables participants to acquire skills for lifelong participation in sport, thus delivering on health and wellbeing objectives of government.

In the UK, the This Girl Can Swim pilot initiative was funded by Sport England and was aimed at females over the age over 14 to swim in a non-competitive fun environment across 52 centres in England.

We believe that Swim Ireland and Ireland Active can deliver on increasing participation as part of the new National Sport Policy by delivering targeted programmes. Sustainable funding to ensure their long-term success will be required, however it will have a long-term effect as swimming is a sport for life.

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<sup>14</sup> CSSPA Study, 2009

*Targeted structured programmes should be included and funded under the National Physical Activity Plan to deliver on the Get Ireland Swimming action in the plan stemming from the overall National Sports Strategy*

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## 6.5 Local and Regional Facilities

**How future capital investment in sports facilities can best support both increased participation in sport and physical activity and support for elite athletes.**

Provision of facilities is not considered the main barrier to participation in sport in general in Ireland<sup>15</sup> however access can sometimes be a difficulty due to distance or cost. Swimming is one such sport which has this difficulty, as for many rural areas and schools access to a swimming pool can be a problem. It is not however possible to provide a swimming pool in every parish and therefore we need a comprehensive study of facility provision and a review of the LASPP to determine which areas are in most in need of facilities or upgrading of existing pools.

It may be worth considering investing in transport in certain areas rather than facilities as a more prudent course of action. Swimming pool provision in Ireland is approximately 1/10,500 of population and 1/31,000 for local authority pools only.

In Scotland for example '79% of the population are within a 20 minute drive to a 25m, 6 lane pool. Further, 45% of the population are within a 30 minute drive to a 50m pool' according to the Scottish Swimming Facilities Strategy 2009-2014. We need to carry out a similar facilities strategy in Ireland to determine whether further pool provision is adequate.

In terms of 50m pools we now have 3 public pools (NAC, UCD, UL) and one private pool (Westwood, Clontarf) which is 1 pool for every 1,175,000 population. This is comparable to our neighbours in Scotland and the Netherlands who both have good high performance systems. Taken together with the 50m pool in Northern Ireland and given swimming is an all island sport it is not considered that an additional 50m is required at this time.

**Table 1 Population per 50m swimming pool (Ref: LEN European Market Review, 2007)**

Rank	Country	Population per 50m pool
1	Sweden	602,733
2	France	672,178
3	Scotland	1,273,700
4	Netherlands	1,481,727
5	Britain	2,841,33
n/a	Ireland	1,148,750

As detailed above, a facilities strategy is required to assess what provision exists before further large scale investment in public facilities. The provision of pools on an ad hoc

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<sup>15</sup> Sport for Older People, 2011 & CSPPA, 2009

basis can often distort a local market where private pools with public access may exist, many offering 'pay as you go' options.

#### **6.5.1 Maximising the use of facilities;**

Many swimming pools have capacity to deliver programmes during the off-peak time during the day Monday-Friday. This is an ideal time to link in with schools, pre-school, mothers and babies, unemployed and older adults. We believe that a review of the school PE curriculum together with programmes targeted at the socially disadvantaged would maximise use of facilities. Swim Ireland is currently piloting a number of learn to swim programmes aimed at disadvantaged areas which are both school and community based. Funding for these programmes was received under the Dormant Accounts Grant Scheme. We believe that government policy should support the provision of support to NGBs who have the capacity to deliver focused programmes in this manner.

#### **6.5.2 Addressing barriers to facility use and accessibility;**

Barriers to public facility use is in many cases distance and this can only be addressed by additional provision of facilities or by improving provision of transport links to rural areas and schools. In addition, access for people with a disability can be an issue and further investment in upgrading facilities to enable access should be maintained. The development of a facilities strategy is key to addressing issues of barriers to access.

#### **6.5.3 The balance of funding between local and regional facilities;**

Again, until a full review of current facilities is carried out it is not possible to submit meaningfully on this. However, strategic investment in facilities should be part of the National Sports Policy rather than ad hoc investment.

#### **6.5.4 Better linking programme and capital investment in sports facilities**

The sports capital programme should be run on an annual basis on a strategic needs basis in close consultation with NGBs and facility operators. Distortion of local markets should be taken into consideration where private facilities exist which offer public access.

#### **6.5.5 Whether there is a need to subsidise the operation of certain publicly funded sports facilities.**

Certain publicly funded swimming pools will inevitably need to be subsidised. Pools in the major cities have access to greater population than rural pools and therefore the potential market is greatly reduced limiting commercial growth. However, local authorities should look at different models of operation to ensure that the tax payer is getting value for money.

#### **6.5.6 Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP)**

The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP) which delivers capital investment has decreased dramatically from €27.8m in 2007 to just €4.2m planned for 2017. Although the funding initially provided for new pools the money is now primarily for upgrade of existing pools. The scheme is in urgent need of review having been closed to new entries since 2000 and having last been reviewed in 2006. The operation of local authority facilities in Ireland are primarily delivered through 3 different models-

1. Direct local authority management and operation

2. Establishment of a private limited company (not for profit) within local authority ownership- any profits being re-invested in sport, leisure and recreation services (e.g. K-Leisure, Swan Leisure, DLR Leisure)
3. Outsourcing to a Private operating company (e.g. Aura, Coral Leisure, Kingfisher)

There are pros and cons for each model in terms of control, staffing, recruitment, cost efficiencies, expertise and knowledge sharing. In the UK, there has been a growth of the establishment of leisure trusts (similar to model 2 above) for the operation of public facilities with around one third of all facilities being operated this way. In Ireland, we have a very disparate leisure sector without a single dominant player in the market (which is not necessarily negative). It is worth examining whether different models could offer efficiencies and we suggest that:

- *A review of the LASPP needs to be undertaken*
- *As part of the review new models of operation need to be examined*

We believe that a new National Facilities Strategy is required to ensure capital investment is strategically provided for. €134m was allocated for sports capital programmes between 2011-2015 and a new SCP is provided for in 2017. Given the significant amounts of funding that need to be provided to build, maintain and operate local and regional sports facilities it is important that government examines the public and private sector to ensure that it understands where current and future demand is required. It is often the case that the private sector delivers public provision in certain areas (through pay as you go gym/swim or pitch rental) and the duplication of services simply distorts local markets and creates over supply.

- *A National Facilities Strategy is required to ensure capital funding under the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is invested strategically*
- *The Sports Capital programme should be allocated on an annual basis*

## 6.6 Sport in a cross-sectoral context

The fact that swimming in Ireland largely takes place in an indoor swimming pool, none of which are in the control of the Swim Ireland, requires many disparate organisations to work in partnership unlike most other sports. Given this special consideration, both Ireland Active and Swim Ireland believe that a dedicated strategy that brings together the various stakeholders to work in partnership to achieve common objectives is required.

One of the guiding principles of the Healthy Ireland Framework is Partnerships and Cross Sectoral Work and in order for us to deliver on government health objectives we believe that a partnership approach is required.

*'Healthy Ireland describes supportive mechanisms to ensure effective co-operation between the health sector and other areas of Government and public services concerned with social protection, children, industry, food safety, education, transport, housing, agriculture and the environment. It invites the private and voluntary sector to participate through well-supported and mutually beneficial partnerships.'* **Healthy Ireland Framework**<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/hieng.pdf>

A policy around swimming clubs and time in swimming facilities should be developed in partnership between operators and clubs locally as part of any swimming strategy and Ireland Active is committed to working towards this with Swim Ireland.

At government level the establishment of a cabinet committee on Health, Education and Sport would help greatly to ensure cross sectoral working at a high level in government.

### **6.6.1 Coaching- Standardisation of coaching accreditation and programme delivery in swimming**

One National Award for the teaching of swimming is required in Ireland. We currently have different state funded agencies offering different programmes and effectively being in competition with each other. Swimming is a very technical sport with huge safety considerations and one qualification for swim teachers as the industry standard which is wide enough to encompass swimming for safety, health and fitness and covering technical fundamentals so that someone with particular talent attains the correct basics is not just something that we can make happen but something that we must.

Whilst stating the obvious it is important to recognise that water is a different medium and that fear can sometimes impact on people learning to swim particularly if they start at an older age. In our view, concentrating on getting children swimming at a young age is key to keeping the barriers low and encouraging and enabling lifelong participation in the sport. In addition to good swimming teachers, a national curriculum for swimming lessons is required (already referenced above).

Swimming lessons are the principal revenue generator for many swimming pools and we need to ensure that participants learn to swim to an appropriate standard out of these lessons. To ensure quality of programme delivered across the industry we need the-

#### ***Standardisation of swimming accreditation and programmes being delivered in all pools in Ireland***

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## **6.7 Financing Irish Sport**

Investment in sport is vital to the continued operation, management, administration, delivery and development of swimming in Ireland. Since 2008 current spending on Irish sport by government, as distributed through the Irish Sports Council (now Sport Ireland) dropped by 26% (€15m) and thankfully investment in 2016 and 2017 has levelled off with some small gains.

The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP) which delivers capital investment has decreased dramatically from €27.8m in 2007 to just €4.2m planned for 2017, as outlined above.

Swim Ireland have made their own efforts to reduce dependency on state funding, with over 50% of its income now coming from other sources. To continue to deliver a healthy population, to compete on the world stage and to develop the sport of swimming Swim Ireland need continued investment in the sport of swimming. There is indeed much that can be done utilising partnerships and maximising existing resources if a co-ordinated approach is taken under the 'Get Ireland Swimming' banner/initiative.

Ireland Active does not receive annual funding by any state agency despite delivering on several objectives and supporting many government initiatives. Our income is derived

from membership income, events and programmes. We were happy to receive support for the European Week of Sport from both the Department of Health and Sport Ireland in 2016 and look forward to developing that relationship further in 2017.

As we have outlined above, swimming impacts upon many areas of government policy, the economy and society (sport, education, health, tourism etc.). Therefore we believe that alternative income streams and supports for swimming should be explored from other government departments, the tax system, private and philanthropic sources.

The UK Sports Strategy looks at the tax system as a way of supporting sport and physical activity:

- *The government will launch a consultation at Budget 2016 on how to expand support that can be given to grassroots sport through the corporation tax system.*
- *Alongside the Treasury's planned consultation on expanding the support that can be given to grassroots sport through the Corporation Tax system, government will undertake a cost/benefit analysis for some of the tax proposals suggested.*

We are delivering on the education curriculum and improving the health of the nation for example and other sources of income such as the Healthy Ireland Framework and other government policy initiatives should be explored as part of an overall National Sports Policy. We believe it would be beneficial if:

- Sport Ireland explored funding commercial staff/programmes in addition to development staff to contribute to the long-term sustainability and reduction of reliance on state funding
- Multi-annual funding should be provided to allow long-term planning for sporting bodies
- Philanthropic funding- a tax relief on current donations would help encourage support, targeted at specific programmes that deliver on government objectives- participation, health, education, HP sport
- The 9% VAT rate for the leisure sector should be retained and reduced- this applies to swimming pool admissions
- The VAT exemption on swimming lessons for children should be extended to adults

### **6.7.1 Safety in sport**

Safeguarding is of central importance to Swim Ireland with the National Children's Officer as a member of the senior management team. This unique position of the National Children's Officer means that this position has a direct link with the CEO, a major factor in maintaining the overarching priority of safeguarding young people. The Swim Ireland structure provides for an overall culture where safeguarding is paramount across all of the organisations activities and is something that should be considered in considering policy in relation to governance for sporting organisations

Swim Ireland is widely considered a leader in the field of safeguarding, with our National Children's Officer representing Swim Ireland within lead groups for both Sport Ireland and Sport NI, namely the Children in Sport Group and the Strategic Safeguarding

Children in Sport group. These groups work for the overall benefit of safeguarding in sport by working with the statutory bodies.

Swim Ireland provide training around safeguarding children and also vet all members working with children or vulnerable adults. Ireland Active operates a vetting facility for members for all staff working in leisure and fitness facilities. We believe that the implementation of Children First and the Vetting legislation will help keep sport safe.

### **6.7.2 Integrity of sport and international influence**

Swim Ireland fully support the Sport Ireland Anti-Doping Code and work diligently in educating our athletes around safe supplements and healthy eating. Ireland Active is working with Sport Ireland as part of the White Flag criteria to educate and raise standards in the leisure and fitness industry around safe supplement use.

Sport Ireland is at the forefront of leading the fight against doping in sport internationally and we believe that they need to be funded adequately to continue in their function.

### **6.7.3 Measuring the impact of sport**

Funding to sport, and in particular swimming, should be maintained and increased as it delivers on so many aspects of government policy- physical and mental health, education, international reputation and economy. Swimming is particularly effective at keeping people active during the life cycle and therefore contributes enormously to the reducing the impact on the health system.

Funding to swimming should be directed at participation programmes as part of the National Physical Activity Plan, as well as making the link between schools, the school curriculum and facilities more effective. The high-performance system needs to be invested in if Ireland is to enjoy international success and athletes are to deliver on their potential.

Swim Ireland self generates over 50% of its income through a number of sources, mainly through fee membership fees and education provision; however it is essential that government investment continues to help grow and sustain the sport. Commercial opportunities for certain sports such as swimming are lesser than those of the large field sports which tend to dominate the market.

The introduction of tax benefits for philanthropic funding to sport should be introduced to put sport on the same footing to the rest of the not for profit sector, as recommended by the Commission on Taxation, 2009. The distribution of Betting Tax receipts need to be widened beyond the horse and greyhound industries, given that betting on sport is not restricted to those traditional areas.

The lower VAT rates and exemptions that exist for swimming need to be maintained and expanded to support the sport of swimming (and government policy) and to avoid making sport costlier for lower socio-economic groups.

In summary, to enable the sector to deliver on the government objectives under the National Sports Policy we need a:

- *National Swimming Strategy*
- *National 'Get Ireland Swimming' initiative with supporting communications campaign and information portal*
- *Partnership approach by Local Authority and Private sector swimming pools and local swimming clubs*
- *Establishment of a cabinet sub-committee on Health, Education and Sport*
- *Review and subsequent implementation of the primary school aquatics curriculum to include the 'Learn to Swim' programme*
- *Standardisation of swimming accreditation and programmes to be delivered in all pools in Ireland*
- *Targeted funded programmes to increase participation; in particular to get inactive people participating in swimming*
- *Review of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme*
- *Explore the role of the private sector in helping deliver on the strategy*
- *Increase investment in swimming and extend existing tax measures to increase participation*
- *Hosting of international events every decade on a strategic basis*

Ireland Active and Swim Ireland are committed to working in partnership to ensure that Ireland becomes a more active nation with more people swimming more often. We see the National Sports Policy as a once in a generation opportunity to Get Ireland Swimming.