



Value of Swimming



FOREWORDS

Mike Farrar

This report is an important milestone in proving what those of us involved in swimming have known for a long time – that swimming is incredibly valuable.

Valuable for the individual who is healthier and happier, who feels more confident and more connected to their local community because of swimming. Valuable also to society, saving the NHS time and money and improving community cohesion.

This report demonstrates how swimming is part of the solution to many of the issues facing society. The obesity crisis, an ageing population with more people living longer with a health condition or disability and millions of people experiencing mental health issues each year. Being active and having fun in the water can help tackle these challenges.

I am proud that, as the national governing body, Swim England has led the way in undertaking such a rigorous investigation. It will be a firm foundation to build on in the years to come as we continue to make the case for the many incredible benefits swimming can provide.

Mike Farrar CBE

Chairperson – Swim England

Jane Nickerson

Swimming remains one of the most popular activities across the country. Every month, **4.7 million** people swim regularly¹. Yet one in three adults remain unable to swim².

At Swim England we are committed to getting a nation swimming, ensuring that everyone can enjoy the many benefits that being active in the water brings.

We have highlighted in the report some of the initiatives we have undertaken to ensure swimming is accessible to as many people as possible. However, we will only be able to maximise the benefits swimming can offer the nation by working in partnership with government, healthcare professionals and the wider swimming sector.

This report contains a number of practical recommendations and Swim England will continue to champion the benefits of swimming for everyone.

Jane M Nickerson

Chief Executive Officer – Swim England



¹ Active Lives 2019 (at least twice in the last 28 days)

² Swim England Tracker 2019

INTRODUCTION

Why are we doing this research?

As the national governing body for swimming, water polo, diving and synchronised swimming in England, Swim England is committed to championing the benefits of swimming.

Within this report, the term 'swimming' is inclusive of all activity in the water, unless stated otherwise.

Whilst the health and social benefits of sport and physical activity are widely recognised, there is a need to build a robust evidence base around the specific benefits of water-based activity. That is why we commissioned the most rigorous research of any sporting organisation to demonstrate the specific benefits of swimming, both to individuals and society as a whole.

The Government's 2016 *Sporting Future* strategy seeks to encourage greater levels of activity. It has a clear focus on five outcomes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.

Swimming positively contributes to all these indicators.

More details behind this report are available at
swimming.org/swimengland/value-of-swimming

Swimming in England

5,074
swimming pools
at **3,880** sites in England

Outdoor swimming continues to grow

7.5m
people 

swim in open water and in outdoor pools



4.7m adults

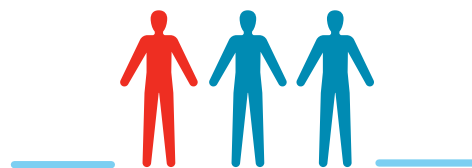
swim at least **twice a month**
(10.5% of the population)

In the last 12 months

14m adults

(31.3% of the nation) went swimming

7.8m women 6.2m men



14m adults

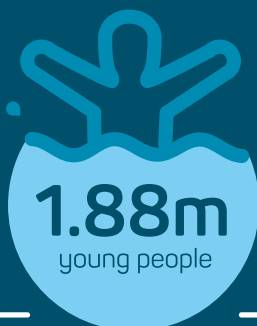
cannot swim 25m
(1 in 3 adults)

2.7m  women

swim at least **twice a month**
(11.7% of female population)

Almost **27%** of children
aged 7-16 years old
swam in the last week.

That's



188,500
club members

1,045
clubs

40,000
Just Swim members

35,000
volunteers

Around
138,000 children
leave primary school each year
unable to swim the statutory 25m



Health savings[†]



Economic development

The DataHub Social Value Calculator shows, in monetary terms, the value that swimming makes to the community.

Weekly swimming participation in England saves the NHS and our social care system more than **£357 million** a year.

This figure is an underestimate of the cost savings as there are additional health conditions that could be prevented or reduced that have not been included in this research.

These figures are based on those who participate four times or more in a month.



[†] Statistics provided by DataHub Social Value Calculator – for more information see page 23

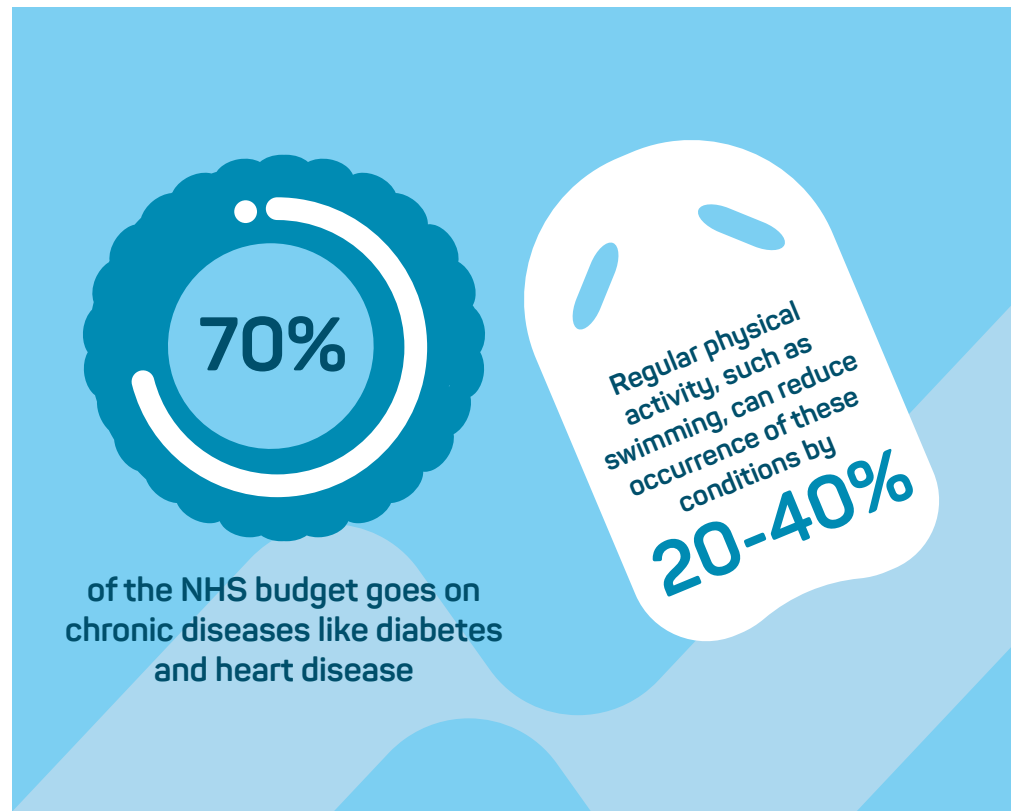
“Regular swimming can help to reduce long-term health conditions.”



With **70 per cent** of the NHS budget being spent on chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, regular physical activity like swimming can reduce occurrence of these conditions by **20-40 per cent**³.

One million people in the UK will have dementia by 2025, and this will increase to two million by 2050⁴, costing £26 billion a year in the UK.

Participants in Swim England's Dementia Friendly Swimming project identified improvements in their wellbeing, including pain reduction, balance, functional capability and fitness as well as improvements in their mental health, mood, confidence, ability to concentrate and reduced anxiety.



³ Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report 2017

⁴ Dementiastatistics.org

Benefits of swimming^{††}



Physical wellbeing

Swimmers
report feeling
on average **6.4%** healthier^{††}
than non-swimmers

this is comparable
to feeling

12
years
younger



^{††} Statistics relating to swimmers versus non-swimmers provided by Jump Projects – for more information see page 23

[§] <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/2017>

[¶] <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/obesity-weight-and-cancer>

There is a growing obesity crisis in England.

More than a quarter of adults in England are obese. A further third are overweight⁵. Being overweight or obese is the second most common cause of cancer⁶.

Swimming can play a key role in increasing daily energy expenditure. This can support the prevention of weight gain and help to reduce body fat and, when combined with dietary change, it can also support weight loss.

Physically, adult swimmers have a 1.4 per cent lower than average body mass index (BMI).

Projections show that **reducing BMI by 1 per cent** across the UK population (equivalent to roughly 1 kg weight loss) would have a substantial effect on consequent health burdens, **avoiding**:

between
179,000–202,000
incident cases of
type 2 diabetes

around
122,000 cases
of cardiovascular
diseases

up to
32,000–33,000
incident cases
of cancer

over a period of 20 years⁷.

Long-term health conditions

With people living longer, more than one in four (15m) people in England live with a long-term health condition, such as diabetes, cancer, arthritis and Parkinson's. This figure is set to rise to 18 million by 2025⁸.

New research shows that more than two-thirds (69 per cent) of people with long-term health conditions say they would like to be more active. Despite this, they are twice as likely to be inactive.⁹

Falls and fall-related injuries are another common and serious problem for older people. People aged 65 and older have the highest risk of falling, with 30 per cent of people older than 65 and 50 per cent of people older than 80 falling at least once a year.

The human cost of falling includes distress, pain, injury, loss of confidence, loss of independence and mortality. Falling also affects the family members and carers of people who fall¹⁰.

Due to the unique properties of water, swimming can help people with long-term health conditions to be more active. The buoyancy supports those with balance problems and helps to reduce the risk and fear of falling¹¹.



**two thirds
(10.3m)**
of people with
long-term health conditions
would like to be
more active

⁷ Wang et al, 2011

⁸ Department of Health (2012). Report: Long-term conditions compendium of Information: 3rd edition

⁹ Sport England Active Lives Survey 2019 (Nov 17-18) shows that 42 per cent of people with a long-term health condition are inactive, compared to 21 per cent of non-disabled people.

¹⁰ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg161/chapter/introduction>

¹¹ Page 9 of the Swim England response to the Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report 2017, <https://www.swimming.org/library/documents/2570/download>



CASE STUDY

Exercising in water

Water-based activity also places less stress on the joints and makes exercise more comfortable and practical than on dry land. This benefits people with musculoskeletal conditions such as osteoarthritis. Musculoskeletal conditions affected an estimated 18.8 million people across the UK in 2017 and accounted for more than 22 per cent of the total burden of ill health (morbidity) in the UK.¹²

The Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines highlighted the importance of daily, moderate-to-vigorous intensity activity, including strengthening activities, with additional requirements for balance and flexibility activities for older adults.

The Health Commission's *Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming* report also recognised the important role that water plays in providing an environment where these strengthening, flexibility and balance exercises can be undertaken.



Wanda's story

Wanda Stockdale, from Gateshead, said she felt like an 'old lady' after being diagnosed with osteoarthritis in her early 30s.

The condition, coupled with a serious back injury, meant she was told she would need to use a walking stick for the rest of her life.

Following a recommendation from her physio to go swimming, Wanda said she has now 'claimed her life back'.

"The benefits of swimming on my physical health have been absolutely life-changing," said Wanda.

"I felt like I was an old lady before I was even 40 and that my life had become planning around my health problems. Swimming has made me realise there is still lots I can do – it's given me purpose and the health benefits have been massive."

"I've totally claimed my life back from where I was four years ago and swimming has played a vital role."

¹² <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/data-and-statistics/state-of-musculoskeletal-health-2019/>

Mental wellbeing

1.4m
adults



feel swimming has significantly
reduced their anxiety or depression



Swim England research reveals that **1.4 million** adults in Britain felt that swimming had significantly reduced their symptoms of anxiety or depression¹³.

Swimming is also associated with improved sleep and improved quality of life in people with long-term conditions¹⁴.

The YouGov poll, commissioned by Swim England, reveals that as a direct result of swimming:

492,000 British adults with mental health conditions have reduced the number of visits to medical professionals regarding their mental health.

490,000 people have reduced or no longer take medication for their mental health.



CASE STUDY



Maria's story

Swimming helped Bournemouth-based Maria Parker-Harris when fertility treatment took its toll on her mental health.

"Swimming gives you the space to work through anything that's been bothering you. It gives you the time to lighten your load so when you leave the pool, you feel physically stronger and emotionally lighter."

¹³ YouGov 2018 – #LoveSwimming research

¹⁴ Page 10 of the Swim England response to the Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report 2017, <https://www.swimming.org/library/documents/2570/download>

"Open water swimming has made me stronger and fitter – mentally stronger too."

CASE STUDY



Suzie's story

Suzie Wheway, from the Peak District, is a full-time mum of two. She has mild asthma, developed post-natal depression and was also diagnosed with premenstrual dysphoric disorder. Needing some positive adult 'me-time', Suzie began open water swimming. Since completing her first 5km open water swim in 2016, Suzie has taken part in a number of open water challenges, organises regular open water swimming sessions at a local reservoir and travels the UK to find new places to swim.

"Open water swimming offers companionship, conversation and community, as I regularly swim with others. Most of all there's the exhilaration and the 'zing'. My self-esteem has built because it's given me a purpose again, both for me and to support others to swim at the open water venue I help to run. It's made me stronger as well as fitter, which in turn makes me feel mentally stronger too".

While **7.5 million** people swim outdoors, **2.1 million** prefer to swim in open water (lakes, lochs, rivers and seas), **3.15 million** choose to swim in outdoor pools and an additional **2.25 million** enjoy swimming both in open water and outdoor pools¹⁵.

SPOTLIGHT ON OUTDOOR SWIMMING



Swimming outdoors
generates more than
double
the happiness of swimming indoors

Compared to non-swimmers, open water swimmers say they feel **8.9% happier**, while indoor swimmers feel **4.3% happier**.

¹⁵ Active Lives, Nov 2017-18



Individual development

At a time of reports of increased feelings of depression, anxiety, poor body image and loneliness amongst children and teens, Swim England's research has revealed that seven to 16-year-olds who swim rated a higher feeling of life being worthwhile compared to those who don't.

With **1.88 million** young people swimming regularly¹⁶, it is clear swimming has a huge role to play in helping our young people feel happier, healthier and more self-confident as they grow up.


Girls who swim have considerably higher increases in wellbeing, health and self-confidence compared to boys.

Swimmers are, on average, 2.5 per cent more confident than non-swimmers.

A report by Professor Ian Cumming, Chief Executive of Health Education England, looking into the benefits of competitive swimming on adolescents, concluded that 'the overwhelming majority of the reviewed literature supports there being cognitive benefits accruing from competitive swimming training in adolescents. These exercise-cognition benefits are both short and long-term'¹⁷.

There are further indications that swimming may have a vital role to play in the healthy brain development of children and adolescents. An international study in 2013 reported that young people who swim achieved a range of developmental milestones much earlier than the wider population, regardless of socio-economic background or gender.

The study found that young people who had swimming lessons were between six and twelve months ahead of the norm in physical skills, cognitive skills, mathematics, language development, counting and the ability to follow instructions¹⁸.

1.88m young swimmers
feel **3.3% more**
confident 
that they will achieve their goals
than **non-swimmers**



Women and girls benefit the most –
swimming more than
doubles
their self confidence

¹⁶ Active Lives Children and Young People, 2018

¹⁷ <https://www.swimming.org/assets/Are-Adolescent-Swimmers-Cleverer.pdf>

¹⁸ Jorgensen, R (2013). Early years swimming – Adding capital to young Australians. <http://kidsalive.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2013-EYS-Final-Report-30-July-13-JM.pdf>



CASE STUDY



Elliot's story

Elliot McHugh, 18, from London, is a water polo player with Ealing Water Polo Club. He is also a member of the Swim England Youth Panel and has been named Youth Volunteer of the Year by the Swim England London region.

He said: "Sport is extremely valuable for young people, not only because of the physical benefits that it provides, but also because sporting activity can help in the classroom, helping students achieve academic success.

"Water polo made me feel more positive in day-to-day life and has supported both my physical and mental wellbeing. This is why I think volunteering is so valuable and why I want to encourage young people to get involved"

"Water polo helped me to focus in school because it promoted discipline and personal responsibility."

Swimming in schools

For some children, school is the only place they will have the opportunity to learn to swim.

Yet, despite swimming being on the national curriculum, too many children are being failed by the system with 23 per cent of children leaving primary school unable to swim the statutory 25 metres while one in five cannot self-rescue.

Swimming ability is affected by location. Only 45 per cent of children and young people going to school in the most deprived areas of the country can swim 25 metres, compared to 76 per cent in the least deprived areas¹⁹.

23%

of children leave
primary school
unable to swim
25m



¹⁹ Active Lives Children and Young People 2018



Social and community development

Social connections

The number of over-50s experiencing loneliness is set to reach two million by 2025-26 – a 49 per cent increase in 10 years²⁰. Also, up to 10 per cent of young people are considered “chronically lonely”, according to global statistics²¹.

All the datasets show swimmers to be more socially connected and engaged in their community compared to non-swimmers, even after controlling for demographic factors.

Swimmers are less likely to be lonely. They are **26.7 per cent** less likely to have no friends at all compared to non-swimmers. They are more likely to spend time with friends and family, have more close friends and meet with friends regularly.

People who swim also have higher levels of trust. They are more likely to trust their neighbours, people in their local area and people in general.



Swimmers are **more likely** to be
socially connected
and have **more friends**



Stan's story

Stanley Jones, 93, from Tunbridge Wells, originally started going to Aqua Fit three years ago as one of his friends wanted to increase the number of men attending his class.

“There are three of us that go each week and we share lifts. The instructor works us hard and we go to the café for a coffee and a catch up afterwards. I really enjoy going.”

²⁰ Age UK 2018, All The Lonely People

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-49597150>

Volunteering

Swimming clubs up and down the country rely on the tireless efforts of volunteers. Around **35,000** people volunteer at Swim England affiliated clubs across the country.

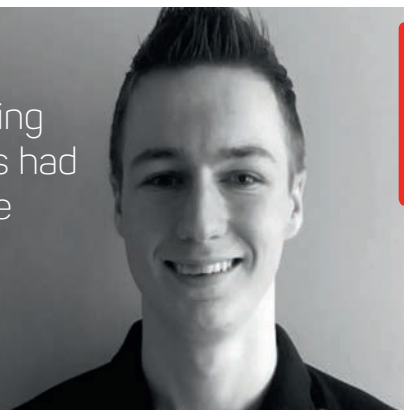
Swimmers of all ages volunteer more than non-swimmers, and volunteer more often.

Swimmers from lower socio-economic groups have a stronger correlation with volunteering.

As well as being incredibly important to the sport, volunteering contributes to, and supports, the individual's motivations and goals, as well as impacts on their social and community development.

- **90 per cent** of volunteers gain a sense of achievement when they volunteer.
- **84 per cent** volunteer to have fun²².

"The volunteering experience has had a really positive impact on my development."



CASE STUDY

Swimmers are

26.1%
 more likely to volunteer
 in general

Those who do
volunteer
 spend
 about **7.5%**
 more hours
 giving unpaid help



Charlie's story

A keen water polo player, Charlie Benny, from Brighton, has been volunteering with Swim England to give something back to the sport and to develop his skills and experience by commentating at National Water Polo Championship events.

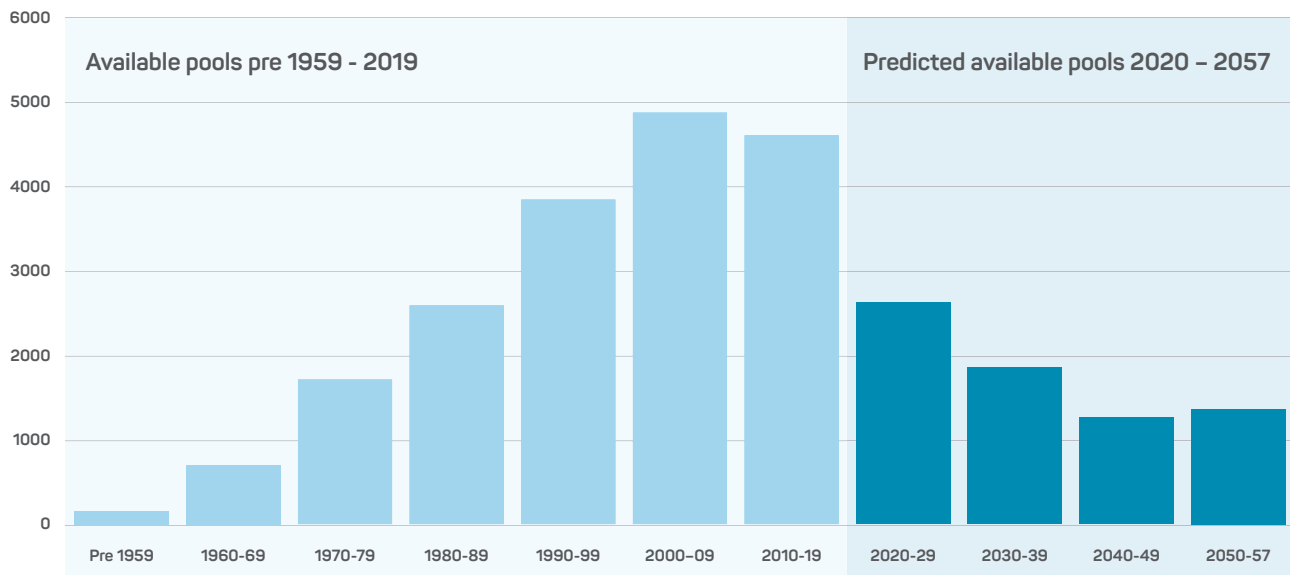
²²Swim England Volunteer research 2017

Facilities and the future

For everyone to be able to enjoy the benefits of swimming, it is absolutely vital that there are appropriate facilities in the right locations.

The 1960s onwards saw a huge increase in pools being built in England. However, many of these pools are now coming to the end of their lifespan or have closed. By looking at the average life expectancy of a pool, and the number of pools built by decade, it is clear to see that the number of pools in England is in decline. This, coupled with an increasing population, means that there is a continued need to invest in new facilities across England.

Number of pools available



Data to build chart taken from Active Places Power database, September 2019. Average life of a pool is calculated at 38 years, based on open and close dates of facilities over past decades. Prediction of future new builds is 45 per year. Calculation is based on new-build facilities opening over past five years.

What Swim England is doing

Water Wellbeing Programme

- Working with partners to develop an inclusive, attractive and supportive pool environment for people with health conditions.
- Using funding from the London Marathon Charitable Trust to install 'Pool Pod' entry systems to ensure safe and dignified transfers for people with impairments.
- Developing with partners an e-learning resource for health professionals to increase understanding of the unique benefits of being active in the water and to support signposting of patients to water-based exercise.



Water Wellbeing



#LoveSwimming

- Leading an industry-wide campaign getting the UK talking about swimming.
- Using powerful, emotive storytelling focusing on topical issues, such as physical and mental health.
- As a result of the campaign, 250,000 people say they will swim more, of which more than 40,000 were considered inactive. More than **one million** people have seen the campaign films.

250,000

people say they will swim more

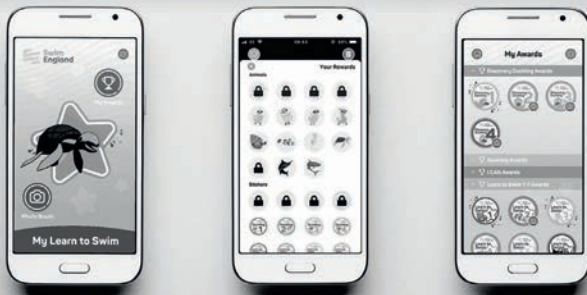
Swim England Learn to Swim Programme

More than
80% of swimming lesson programmes
use Swim England Learn to Swim
Programme content

- A total of **1.2 million** children learn to swim with Swim England's Learn to Swim Programme – the teaching syllabus for delivering safe, fun, inclusive and effective swimming lessons.
- The new 'My Learn to Swim' app adds an extra magical experience for children to incentivise them to continue on their swimming journey for longer.
- The Adult Swimming Framework is a tailored programme supporting beginner and improving swimmers to develop their skills.



Bring the fun of swimming lessons home with **My Learn to Swim**



Disney

Disney and Swim England deliver family fun



- Partnering with Disney to encourage more young people to get active in the water.
- The campaign features some of Disney's most-loved characters from Disney-Pixar's Toy Story 4, Disney's Mickey Mouse & Friends and Disney Frozen 2.



Already more than
37,000
people have taken part



School swimming

- Creating free curriculum swimming and water safety resource packs for schools and lesson providers to help them feel more confident in delivering school swimming.
- Schools can sign up to Swim England's School Swimming Charter to get additional resources and support.
- Swim England's annual Big School Swim event promotes the importance of school swimming and water safety lessons within PE.



The
**BIG SCHOOL
SWIM**



Just Swim membership

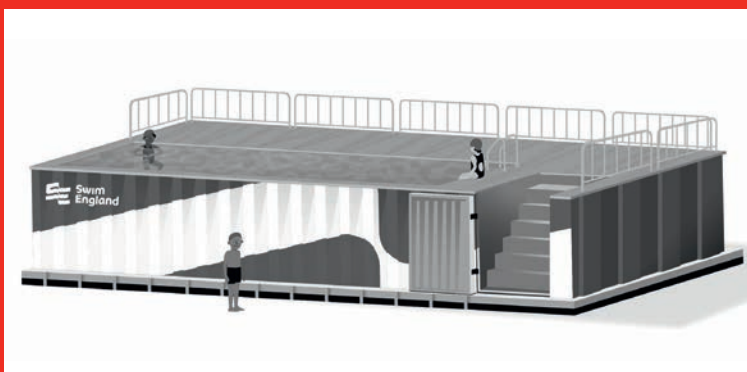
- A free online membership offering regular swimmers access to swimming stroke technique advice videos, downloadable training programmes and more.
- So far, 40,000 individuals have joined, with **70 per cent** telling us the technique videos have improved their stroke while **62 per cent** are encouraged to swim by the downloadable training plans.

40,000

individuals have joined so far

Increasing opportunities to swim

- Providing expert guidance on new and refurbished pool design, management and health and safety.
- Identifying areas of water deprivation in England, with the findings to be published in 2020.
- Developing innovative ideas to help increase the number of children accessing school swimming lessons, such as purchasing a shipping container which is to be transformed into a portable swimming pool.



Call to action

1

Invest in health-based interventions

The Government should fully recognise the role and benefits of water-based exercise through direct funding and support to scale up proven health-based interventions.

2

Support the Water Wellbeing Programme

Operators, local authorities and trusts should work with Swim England to offer the Water Wellbeing Programme to improve the social impact of their pool.

Promote social prescribing

Health professionals should signpost people to water-based activity as part of clinical pathways and social prescribing opportunities.

3

4

Champion school swimming

The Government, Ofsted and primary school leaders must ensure that every child leaving Year 6 is able to meet the three national curriculum requirements and that these attainment rates are published. Primary schools should demonstrate their commitment by signing up to the Swim England School Swimming Charter.

5

Develop facilities

Direct investment and support for swimming facilities is required to develop the next generation of pools. Swim England is committed to undertaking further research into this important area and will produce a report in 2020. Parties interested in renovating or building pools are invited to work with Swim England's facilities team to ensure they are sustainable and fit for purpose.

Conclusion

This report is just the beginning of a conversation. Only by working together with government, health professionals and the swimming sector can we realise the full value of swimming to the nation.

Swimming is important because it reaches so many people and can be enjoyed by people of all ages. It has the power to transform lives and tackle a number of the problems facing society in a way many other sports simply cannot.

The Value of Swimming report illustrates how society can benefit from swimming; but the benefits can only be realised if all partners play their part.

- Pool facilities will need continued investment to ensure people have the opportunity to enjoy the water in the way they choose.
- Health commissioners need to be confident commissioning water-based activity so that more people can take advantage of the physical and mental health benefits of participation.

Swim England is committed to getting a nation swimming and this report is an important demonstration of the benefits of getting active in the water. Swim England will continue to take action to reduce participation gaps where they exist, to increase diversity within swimming and ensure that everyone can truly enjoy the water.

This report proves what those involved with swimming have known for a long time. Swimming has the power to help people live longer, better, happier lives.

Now is the time to make that happen for everyone across the country.

Appendix

Definition of social value:

Social value is the value that people place on the changes they experience in their lives. Some, but not all of this value, is captured in market prices. It is important to consider and measure this social value from the perspective of those affected (source: Social Value UK).

Notes on methodology:

Swim England's insight team worked with a number of research partners in order to truly understand the social value of swimming to individuals and society. The research in this report is new analysis, which combines multiple sources of data.



The DataHub – Social Value Calculator (SVC) – combines leisure operator data (DataHub, administered by 4global) with academic research (Sheffield Hallam University) and sector wide benchmarks (Experian) to show, in monetary terms, the value that swimming makes to the community through savings in health and social care costs.

The SVC was developed in 2015. It is a standardised tool for measuring the social value of activities which take place in leisure facilities.

Data has been taken from 1,040 sites that generated social value from Aug 2018 to July 2019, and extrapolated to the total demand across England, using demand modelling and participants with required minimum frequency.

Social value is only generated by repeat behaviour, so swimmers contributing to the social value figures must participate in swimming four or more times in the month [proxy equivalent of once per week].



Jump Project's methods compared the main wellbeing and social outcomes, as well as the demographic composition of swimmers and non-swimmers in the following five datasets:

- Understanding Society (UK-wide)
- Taking Part (England)
- Active Lives (England)
- Understanding Society Youth (UK-wide)
- Active Lives Children and Young People (England).

Jump's regression analysis showed the positive association of swimming and these outcomes persist even after controlling for demographic factors, which are likely to be responsible for the selection of happier or more social people into swimming. Regression eliminates potential sources of omitted variable bias, making the results closer to indicating a causal effect.

Jump then performed disaggregated analysis which shows that patterns vary between the datasets, although some trends are more consistent. Disaggregated analysis explores whether the association between swimming and the social outcomes in question is stronger for particular groups of the population.

This means that we are not just reporting simple correlations between swimming and the outcomes. By controlling for other factors, this work goes one step further in establishing the direct benefit of swimming, and the impact that this has on the outcomes sought by the Government's 2016 *Sporting Future* strategy.

References

Swimming in England pages 4-5:

Adult participation (including women and outdoors)
– Active Lives 2019 (Nov 17-18)

Child participation (including girls), and children unable to swim

– Active Lives Children and Young People 2018

Number of swimming pools and sites
– taken from Active Places Power Sept 2019

Adults unable to swim
– Swim England Tracker 2019

Children learning to swim on Swim England Learn to Swim programme
– Swim England Swim Census 2018

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