

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 19  
January 2022

PE1891: Make swimming lessons a statutory  
requirement in the primary school curriculum

## Note by the Clerk

**Lodged:** 16 September 2021

**Petitioner** Lewis Alexander Condy

**Petition  
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that all children will have had the opportunity to learn to swim by making it a statutory requirement to provide lessons in the primary school curriculum.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1891>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [3 November 2021](#). At that meeting the Committee agreed to write to COSLA to seek data on how many schools provide swimming lessons as part of the curriculum. The Committee also agreed to write to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and Scottish Swimming.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and responses to information requests are provided for the Committee's consideration.

## Background Information

During its consideration of this petition, the Committee has received 6 submissions.

## Submission from Foysol Choudhury MSP

3. Foysol Choudhury MSP provided a written submission to the Committee, noting that 'my constituent makes the case well for a more consistent approach to ensuring all children are able to swim by the time they leave primary school.'
4. He goes on to state that he is 'strongly supportive of an approach which would make swimming lessons available to every child, not only to those whose parents could afford to pay.'
5. He also highlights a pre-Covid survey carried out by Sport England which showed that a lower proportion of Black and minority ethnic children than white children swam regularly. He notes that 'I am not aware of the figures for Scotland, but this could usefully be followed up, as universal access to swimming lessons across all primary schools could help to address any such inequalities.'
6. Mr Choudhury states that he previously lodged a written question to the Scottish Government in relation to which Local Authorities provide swimming lessons in their primary schools but was informed that this information is not held centrally.
7. He also wondered whether 'it is possible to contact each Local Authority seeking more detailed information about current provision, to seek to identify trends, and any equality impact assessments of the current approach.'

## Organisation Submissions

8. COSLA states in its submission that currently 'there are no local or national mechanisms in place across Scotland to collect data regarding school swimming lessons,' noting that the delivery of swimming lessons in individual areas can depend on a range of factors, including access to facilities, the cost of facilities/lesson providers, the delivery model used (e.g. leisure trusts, PE specialists and class teachers) and the cost/access to transport.
9. COSLA also highlights sportscotland's investment in the Active Schools Network, which is designed to provide 'more and higher quality opportunities for children and young people to take part in sport and physical activity before school, during lunchtime and after school'.
10. COSLA confirms that 'there are no curricular swimming lessons being delivered through the Active Schools programme, but that the latest figures they have

pre-pandemic (for 2018-2019) suggest that 21 Local Authorities were offering swimming activity through the Active Schools Network.

11. Scottish Swimming provided further information about The Learn to Swim Framework which 'aims to raise standards and achieve consistency in swimming programmes across Scotland,' noting that 'there were over 106,000 children enrolled in learn to swim programmes across the country prior to the pandemic.'
12. Scottish Swimming reiterates the petitioner's point that over 40% of children leave primary school unable to swim in Scotland, noting that a survey carried out in 2018 found that only 10.5% of children in community learn to swim classes come from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland, suggesting that 'there is a direct correlation between a child's socio-economic background and their opportunity to learn to swim.'
13. Scottish Swimming has submitted a proposal to the Scottish Government in support of a programme of school swimming and are currently involved in discussions with sportscotland over its potential development. Scottish Swimming states that 'we believe that any school swimming delivery should be part of the curriculum or at least delivered as part of the school day,' whilst recognising that 'in order to achieve this, it will need the support and be the responsibility of Scottish Government and Local Authorities.'
14. They go on to highlight broader work around water safety, including work with Education Scotland on an online school assembly initiative designed to promote safely messaging and increase awareness of the risks of cold-water shock and potential drowning.
15. Scottish Swimming also suggests that 'gathering data to accurately understand school swimming provision across the country by each Local Authority would be useful to inform any future approach, potential for support and design of any potential delivery model,' noting that Scottish Swimming and sportscotland are 'working together to gather information to gain a better understanding of current provision using existing partnerships.'
16. RoSPA notes that, on average 96 people drown in Scotland every year, highlighting that this is 'disproportionate to the population rate in comparison to both our UK and European neighbours.'
17. RoSPA states that 'swimming has been a statutory part of the national curriculum for physical education in England since 1994'. However, it notes that 'almost one in four children was unable to swim 25m when leaving primary school,' noting that this is due to 'family affluence and location'.

18. RoSPA echoes Scottish Swimming's point that water safety goes beyond the ability to swim and should include water safety lessons and rescue skills needed to help reduce drowning, noting that learning to swim in a swimming pool is 'not the same as swimming outdoors with the added hazards such as tides, currents and debris'.
19. RoSPA concludes by stating that it is 'happy to support swimming lessons in the curriculum with additional education on essential topics such as cold water shock and water rescue skills.'

## Petitioner Submission

20. The petitioner stresses in his response to the Scottish Government submission that his focus is on ensuring swimming lessons become mandatory in Scottish schools, as the evidence he has discovered suggests that when children are exposed to swimming lessons at an early age (i.e. through school) the chance of drowning decreases significantly.
21. The petitioner suggests that the current policy of allowing councils to choose whether to provide swimming lessons is unfair, leading to many children missing out or being forced to take private lessons, something which may be inaccessible to lower income families or those living in rural areas.
22. The petitioner believes that making swimming lessons in school a mandatory requirement will redress this inequality.
23. The petitioner points out that learning to swim is likely to benefit society, e.g. if someone can assist others if they get into difficulty in the water, as well as providing wider health benefits to individuals.

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

### **Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting –

- [PE1891/C: Foyso! Choudhury MSP submission of 4 November 2021](#)
- [PE1891/D: RoSPA submission of 7 December 2021](#)
- [PE1891/E: COSLA submission of 9 December 2021](#)
- [PE1891/F - Scottish Swimming submission of 9 December 2021](#)