

## Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1891: Make swimming lessons a statutory requirement in the primary school curriculum, lodged by Lewis Alexander Condy

### Background

#### Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure an adequate and efficient education for children of school-age in their area; what this education should entail is not set out in legislation. In fact, very little of the school curriculum is statutory.

To support the Curriculum for Excellence, Education Scotland sets out Experiences and Outcomes (“Es and Os”) and Benchmarks. Es and Os are statements about children's learning and progression and Benchmarks are intended to set out national standards expected within each curriculum area at each level. The Es and Os covering physical education are found in the [Health and Wellbeing](#) curriculum area. However, these are broadly drafted and there are no mentions of specific activities.

In addition to the curriculum guidance, the Scottish Government does have levers to encourage local authorities and schools to cover certain issues within the curriculum. Normally this is through bringing together stakeholders and potentially providing specific funding. Examples include the [1+2 Languages policy](#) and [LGBTI inclusive education](#).

#### OECD Review

The [OECD published a review of CfE on 21 June 2021](#). The OECD discussed the busy landscape of policy initiatives and the impact on the system as a whole. It said:

“While the policy environment is crowded with multiple initiatives, gaps and misalignments remain – such as that in assessment, for example – and where new policies are introduced (or old ones revisited), alignment and coherence is an issue.” (p107)

The OECD recommends that Scotland move to planned systematic curriculum reviews within a regular cycle. The rationale for having a regular review included:

- reducing reliance on external independent reviews when controversies arise
- building internal capacity for curriculum monitoring
- reducing the need for ongoing guidance and clarifications and give the system greater stability overall
- redirecting the energy of leaders to focus on the implementation of CfE in their schools rather than responding to the most recent update or clarification
- supporting coherence of CfE (p129)

The [Scottish Government accepted the recommendation](#). It noted that there are currently three reviews ongoing on topic-specific issues but that it would develop a new overarching review process in the longer term.

## Swimming and water safety

SPICe has contacted the Scottish Government on the provision of swimming lessons. Officials have responded—

“We do not hold the information on which Local Authorities provide swimming lessons to schools. We do know however, that eleven Local Authorities provide swimming opportunities through the Active Schools Programme, which is a partnership with sportscotland.

“Through sportscotland, we work with Scottish Swimming whose vision is ‘Every One Can Swim’. Ensuring every child learns to swim is a strategic priority for Scottish Swimming. There is no debate around the impact learning to swim has

on a young person or the physical and mental health benefits swimming provides throughout life. The Scottish Government are in discussions with Scottish Swimming on how to expand their programme.”

[Water Safety Scotland](#) has [developed a national Drowning Prevention Strategy](#). Water Safety Scotland was established in 2014 by ROSPA. Its website lists the partners involved in Water Safety Scotland, and these include the Scottish Government and a number of local authorities. Two of the strategy’s aims are:

- Promote and develop learning to swim, water safety education and initiatives within early years, primary and secondary schools
- Develop water safety across Scotland’s 32 local authority areas and promote the development of water safety policies

There was a [2-year review](#) on progress on the strategy published in 2020.

## Scottish Parliament action

On [2 September 2021, Clare Adamson MSP asked a general question on the Drowning Prevention Strategy](#). The Minister for Community Safety, Ash Denham MSP, said:

“The Scottish Government continues to provide funding, via the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, to support the operation of Water Safety Scotland. In addition, this year, the Scottish Government has worked with partners to support a number of water safety activities and campaigns.

“... On 11 August, I convened a meeting with a range of key stakeholders to drive further action around delivery of the drowning prevention strategy, and I will convene a follow-up meeting later this month.” (Cols 2-3)

The Minister said that there was more work to be done, particularly in the context of Article 24 of the UNCRC (in relation to health). She said:

“A lot of good work on education around risk assessment and accident prevention is already being undertaken. There is also the underlying contribution of the getting it right for

every child programme. We have a very good platform on which to build.” (Col 3)

## Key Organisations and relevant links

Scottish Government

COSLA

[Water Safety Scotland](#)

Sportscotland

Scottish Swimming

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