

Report on	Mid Ulster Swim Academy 2023 Review
Date of Meeting	15 th February 2024
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
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Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide an update on the Mid Ulster District Council swim lesson programme and to give due consideration to proposed enhancements of the current programme and investment in a be-spoke swim lesson online management module.
2.0	Background
2.1	Cookstown LC, Dungannon LC and Greenvale LC each deliver a wide range of leisure and sports programmes. The Health, Leisure & Wellbeing department within Council strive to ensure that the customer experience is of a high standard across all Mid Ulster District Council facilities and that the programme plans are similar in the various locations.
2.2	The delivery of swimming lessons is a core activity for each centre and generates high levels of participation within their respective catchment areas in addition to providing a modest income for the leisure service.
2.3	With the Covid Pandemic and ensuing restrictions that were placed upon the delivery of leisure services in March 2020, there was little or no swim lesson delivery during the 2020/2021 year and limited provision during the 2021/2022 year.
2.4	As the swim lesson programme within Council began to emerge from the covid pandemic restrictions, the demand for swim lessons far exceeded the supply available. Many local authorities found themselves in a similar situation and anecdotally, many have continued to experience similar challenges particularly with a limited supply of "new" entry spaces – ie. pre-pandemic, the trend usually consisted of the entry rates of those age-appropriate children joining at beginner level being on a par with those children at the intermediate/advanced levels traditionally departing the programme. However, with approx. 18 months of pandemic restrictions and the inability to consistently deliver a swim lesson programme during this period, this has meant children who would have ordinarily joined the programme during April 2020 – January 2022 now competing with the age-appropriate children who were traditionally ready to join the programme from January 2022 onwards and less children being ready to depart the programme. This coincided with the age profile of children in the intermediate/advanced levels of the programme increasing as they were

bidding to complete out the various levels of the swim lesson programme having being hampered/delayed by the pandemic restrictions.

2.5 Since emerging from the covid pandemic, the overall leisure industry has experienced a shortage of skilled swim teachers and with respect to Mid Ulster District Council, a number of publicly advertised teacher recruitment campaigns have been unsuccessful which has affected the overall number of lessons that each centre can provide.

Participation (approx. figures) April 2020 – March 2022 excluded due to covid pandemic:

Year	Cookstown LC	Dungannon LC	Greenvale LC
April 2019 – March 2020	750 attendees per week x 48 weeks	650 attendees per week x 48 weeks	1100 attendees per week x 48 weeks
April 2022 - March 2023	1018 attendees per week x 48 weeks	894 attendees per week x 48 weeks	806 attendees per week x 48 weeks
April 2023 - March 2024	973 attendees per week x 48 weeks	952 attendees per week x 48 weeks	952 attendees per week x 48 weeks

During the April 2022 – March 2023 year, it was estimated that the direct participants of the swim lesson programme across the three leisure centres accounted for approx. 21% of all leisure visits throughout that year and the April 2023 – March 2024 year is anticipated to account for a similar percentage of total visitors to the centres.

Income (approx. figures) April 2020 – March 2022 excluded due to covid pandemic:

Year	Cookstown LC	Dungannon LC	Greenvale LC
April 2019 – March 2020	£230,400	£199,680	£337,920
April 2022 – March 2023	£312,729	£274,636	£247,603
April 2023 – March 2024	£298,905	£292,454	£292,454

During the April 2022 – March 2023 year, it was estimated that the income generated from the swim lesson programme across the three leisure centres accounted for approx. 35% of all leisure income throughout that year and the April 2023 – March 2023 year is anticipated to account for similar levels.

2.6 In addition to the public swim lesson programme, there are approx. 105 schools that attend the three leisure centres on a weekly basis as part of their curriculum and these visits produce approx. 1600 participants in Councils school swim lesson programme on a weekly basis.

2.7 The leisure centres pool programming attempts to balance the needs of a various range of stakeholders such as those wishing to receive swim lessons on tuition, local schools, recreational swimmers, family swims, athletic training, health intervention programmes, disability clubs, swim clubs, triathlon clubs, sub-aqua clubs, Swim Ulster, swim clubs from outside the district, swimming galas, etc.

Whilst there is a demand to increase swim lessons further, the current pool programmes within the leisure centres are operating at full capacity in line with all of the above mentioned stakeholders therefore should further swim lessons be scheduled above and beyond current

2.8	<p>available spaces/times, it may be at the determinant of available pool space for one of the other stakeholders. This is addition to the ongoing staffing recruitment challenges.</p> <p>Previously in March 2018, Members at the Development Committee approved various changes to the swim programme to ensure that all three leisure centres adopted a consistent approach following the amalgamation of the three legacy councils in 2015. The purpose of this paper is to build upon those decisions taken in 2018 with the benefit of the experience that has resulted from the emergence from the covid pandemic.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Current Swim Lesson Pricing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ £6.25 per swim lesson (child) and £9.50 per swim lesson (adult) or ➤ £20.40 per month payable by monthly direct debit and a commitment of minimum of 12 months
3.2	<p>Current Swim Lesson Delivery Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Waiting Lists currently maintained by each leisure centre ➤ Once enrolled into the programme, participants remain in the program from Level 1 (beginner) to before existing upon completing Level 8 (advanced) – a small number of participants may leave the programme before completing and these spaces that are “freed up” are offered to the waiting list ➤ Each term, is generally 12 weeks and there is an assessment at week 9 (<i>determines if a participant can move on to the next level or remain at their current level for another term</i>) ➤ Upon conclusion of the assessments and participants moving levels and/or exiting the programme, every 12 weeks the available lesson spaces are populated with those on the waiting list ➤ Where the waiting list has been exhausted and there still is lesson spaces available, the spaces are advertised on a “first come first served” basis with waiting lists generated from enquiries who were unable to be placed on the programme
3.3	<p>Proposed changes to the swim lesson delivery process:</p> <p>Due to the ongoing demand/supply issues, during 2023 various stakeholders were engaged and an internal staff working group was established to attempt to achieve feasible and practical solutions to the issues highlighted earlier in this reporting whilst aiming no ensure no determinant to the level of customer experience or standard of tuition being delivered.</p> <p>It is recognised that the main driver for all enrolments at entry level of Council led swim programmes is for participants to achieve the basic level of swimming competence and water confidence/safety. It is recognised that Council has a key role to play in this basic attainment of these skills however the role of the local swim clubs is acknowledged along with the performance pathway with the governing body Swim Ulster for those participants that wish to progress in this area.</p> <p>In recent months, there has been evidence that the Council swim lesson programme has been beginning to deal more resolutely with the challenges as outlined earlier in this report.</p> <p>One of the awarding bodies for swim teacher qualifications and pupil swim lesson competency criteria is the Swimming Teachers Association (STA) and Mid Ulster District Council follows this pathway for both its swim teachers and participants of the swim lesson programme. Private and public swim lesson providers that adopt the STA approach can deliver the core swim lesson competencies in a variety of formats – ie. fixed blocks of lessons, continuous ongoing assessment or a mixture.</p>

3.4	<p>Therefore, it is proposed to move away from the traditional fixed “12 week term” format and move towards an “on-going assessment” approach.</p> <p>In simple terms, this means that if a participant is deemed ready to progress to the next level and there are spaces available in the next level, then swim teachers should have the ability to recommend moving participants accordingly and not just wait for participants to finish out the traditional fixed 12 weeks block at any one particular level. This would be in accordance with the swim lesson awarding body (STA) guidance and also through dialogue with the parent/guardian.</p> <p>As part of this approach, council officers have been researching IT systems that can aid this process and therefore recommend moving forward with the addition of a be-spoke swim lesson module to the current leisure IT system.</p> <p>This approach would also involve the ability for parents/guardians to be able to access the swim lesson system online and be able to manage the participant progress and transfers to alternate levels where possible. The proposed implementation of this additional “CourseHub” module aims to meet the needs for this on-going assessment approach and is hoped that it will improve the customer experience going forward.</p> <p><u>Summary of Amended Swim Lesson Delivery Proposal:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Subject to equality screening, move towards continual ongoing assessment of participants by teachers and the movement between swim lesson ability levels as appropriate. ➤ Transition to removal of waiting lists or enrolments only being available at a specific leisure centre location – transition towards making available swim lesson slots available via the online CourseHub module on an ongoing basis on a first come first served basis with ongoing promotion via Council social media pages and in centre advertisements
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: Additional IT module for a be-spoke swim lesson management portal – approx. £22,435 one off investment. Approx £620 monthly ongoing annual revenue costs for maintenance of the system and user licences. Leisure income has performed better than anticipated so far for the current financial year April 2023 – March 2023 therefore it is proposed to re-invest the additional income achieved to purchase this additional module prior to end of March 2024.</p> <p>The ongoing annual licence fees can be derived via existing revenue budgets and is anticipated to be cost neutral as proposed changes to the swim lesson delivery programme could yield modest additional income.</p> <p>Human: Ability to recruit and maintain staff continues to remain a problem however it is hoped that with the recent investment in teaching courses during 2023 with further planned teaching courses during 2024, it is hoped there is a more sustainable training model now in place for new and existing staff.</p> <p>Risk Management: Considered in line with relevant council policies and procedures.</p>

4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: Equality screening to be carried out should the recommendation proceed and assessment to be made prior to any implementation.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: None anticipated at this juncture</p>
5.0	<p>Recommendation(s)</p>
5.1	<p>To note the contents of the report and give approval for the direct award contract to the current provider of the leisure IT system for the be-spoke swim lesson management IT module.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>N/A</p>