

# Swimming together

*The Strategic Alliance for Swimming brings together the Amateur Swimming Association, Lifesavers and the ISRM to support the Swimming Charter for Schools. The alliance has significant challenges ahead*

The Government's latest proposals to boost sport and physical education in schools is set to be the first serious testing ground for the recently-formed Strategic Alliance for Swimming (SAS).

Combining the knowledge and expertise of the UK's three leading swimming organisations: the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), Lifesavers – the Royal Lifesaving Society (RLSS) UK, and the ISRM, the alliance is determined to make sure that the new Swimming Charter for Schools makes a real difference to the lives of the nation's young people.

At the heart of the challenge is the issue of converting government policy into grass roots delivery. That means making sure that principles decided in Whitehall become practice in

'We are the three leading organisations in swimming in the UK and, while we have worked together for a long time, there was an increasing belief that we were not making the most of our collective resources. By coming together as an alliance, I believe that we are creating an organisation that has status, assured quality and a depth that people who call on our services will be able to rely on. We each bring our own expertise and experience. For example, Lifesavers brings expertise in safety and medical matters, ASA brings expertise in teaching and competitive sport and we bring expertise in pool management. We will maintain our individual identities by concentrating on our individual specialities but become stronger by sharing.'

**Ralph Riley, chief executive, ISRM**



Whitechapel, Warrington, Walsall and, indeed, every local community in the country.

Swimming is the only sport singled out for specific action in the Government's £459m initiative to boost sporting opportunities for five- to 18-year-olds. The strategy aims to provide two hours of high-quality PE and school sport – including swimming – each week for at least 75 per cent of all pupils.

The Swimming Charter for Schools, published in January, gives practical advice to schools and local authorities on planning and organising swimming and water safety lessons, with guidance on encouraging more children to take part.

Swimming remains a compulsory part of the schools curriculum for five- to 11-year-olds, but the new charter stops short of imposing further compulsory requirements.

Instead, it seeks to encourage schools to follow best-practice examples of schools and local authorities that already provide high-quality, cost-effective lessons.

All three member organisations of SAS were heavily involved in the government task force responsible for the new strategy.

While the consensus might be that the schools charter is conservative in its scope and ambition,

SAS believes that its publication is a useful first step, and will act to promote swimming on the national political agenda.

Encouragement and diplomacy lie at the centre of SAS's commitment to work in partnership with the Government to deliver its mission for sport.

'Perhaps it is true that, in the past, swimming organisations seeking to put their message across did so separately and that message was diluted in the process. We believe that we can talk far more effectively and far more powerfully with one voice. The alliance will improve communications between swimming organisations and the Government, and will help to meet the targets that we all agree are of such importance to the country. We also hope that the alliance will make its presence felt beyond swimming and that it can act as a model for similar partnerships within other sports in the UK.'

**Di Standley, Chief Executive, Lifesavers RLSS UK**

**SAS will work to ensure that:**

- Everyone, in particular young people, irrespective of background, has an opportunity to learn to swim;
- Participation in swimming increases by the raising of awareness through better promotion;
- Swimming is seen as a beneficial activity as part of a healthier lifestyle;
- Swimming and lifesaving saves lives;
- Clear pathways exist in swimming to achieve personal goals with exit routes into lifesaving as a sport and other activities;
- Swimming and lifesaving develop community cohesion;
- There is a range of high quality and well-managed swimming facilities across the UK; and
- Swimming is promoted and provided to all as a fun activity.

To achieve the goals, the three organisations will work together to secure a UK-wide range of high quality, accessible and affordable swimming facilities that are run through a quality management programme with safety at its heart.

SAS grew from the participation of its three member organisations in the national Swimming Advisory Group, created to help government policy makers forge a future for Britain's most popular participation sport. Sharing discussions about vital issues, including community access to pools, child protection legislation and the role of

**'SAS seeks to act as a one-stop shop for all swimming-related enquiries, for the Government, public and professionals'**

swimming in the school's national curriculum, not only identified common ground, but also highlighted a need for those common aims to be expressed with one voice.

Built on long-term expertise and membership networks that reach out across the UK, SAS seeks to act as a one-stop shop for all swimming-related enquiries, for the government, public and professionals. However, the new service does not seek to exclude other swimming organisations and is eager to welcome them under its wing.

SAS is self-funded and works through regular meetings involving senior executives from each organisation. Sharing resources has already started at a strategic level, with closer working relationships forged between national education directors at ASA and RLSS UK. Lifesavers is looking to use ASA's national blueprint for

swimming as a model for its own strategies.

At a grassroots level, member organisations anticipate closer links between local clubs – for example, encouraging competitive swimmers whose racing days are coming to an end into lifesaving as a sport. The aim of this closer co-operation is to produce a wider and more co-ordinated range of swimming and lifesaving activities, which can be more readily promoted to local communities – ending the confusing patchwork of activities that is the current norm.

This is not about the three organisations losing individual identity. It's about building on their legacy of public service and recognising that new methods are needed to hit the new goals of building a healthier nation in which sport can flourish.●

**'What I hope the alliance will do is to clarify in the minds of everyone how the ASA, RLSS UK and ISRM can work together. We have always been good partners but the alliance goes one step further, to centralise resources and give us the ability to concentrate those resources on issues that we think are important. What we are trying to do is to find a way forward for swimming as a whole that actually works.'**  
**David Sparkes, chief executive, ASA**

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