

# Swimming



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## Introduction

This factsheet provides information and guidance on the delivery of swimming sessions within Scouting. This factsheet should be read in conjunction with POR rules 9.50-9.52.

## Swimming in class C waters

Those providing safety cover for a Scout swimming activity in class C waters (including swimming pools) where there are no operating guidelines in force must meet these requirements:

- **Risk assessment:** conduct a comprehensive risk assessment of the situation and make informed decisions as to the management of the activity. This risk assessment should be dynamic and continue throughout the activity. If the safety cover feels at any stage that the risks are too high then the activity should be stopped (refer to FS120000 Risk Assessment).
- **Environmental factors** - assess factors such as weather, water temperature, flow, clarity of water to determine a suitable duration of activity. Please refer to FS120629 – Water Safety (Waterborne Diseases & Immersion) for more information.
- **Swimming ability** - have sufficient swimming ability to conduct effective rescues should the need arise. Therefore they should be a strong enough swimmer for the location and water conditions with the ability to keep themselves and a casualty afloat during a rescue.
- **Rescues** - be capable recovering a casualty or swimmer in distress. This requires the knowledge of suitable rescue techniques. These should be appropriate to the location and equipment available.
- **Equipment** - be capable of using suitable rescue equipment for the location being used. This needs to be available and on hand for the safety cover to use.
- **Swimming area** - clearly define the swimming area and communicate this to the group in an appropriate way. This may include the use of markers, flags etc. When deciding on the swimming area consider the ability of the group, safety cover, other users in the area, winds, water movement etc.
- **Communication** - clearly communicate with the group. This needs to be included in any briefing given so that the swimmers are aware of the signals for exiting the water, swimming area etc.
- **Access** - ensure access for the swimmers to enter and exit the waters. Access to the water must be possible to conduct a rescue or recovery should it not be possible from the edge of the water.
- **Manage the group** effectively whilst the group is in the water. This will include; adequate briefings prior to the group entering the water, defining a suitable swimming area and communication whilst the group is swimming.
- **Ratios** - provide adequate cover based on the ratio identified in the risk assessment, and ensure that additional adult supervision is provided in line with the section ratios for outdoor activities.

It may be that you have access to someone with a formal lifeguarding qualification who will act as your safety cover for the above. If this is the case

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they must be capable of fulfilling these guidelines. Suitable qualifications should be appropriate for the water being used i.e. pool or open, and include:

- RLSS Water Safety Management Programme
- NRSTAC – National Rescue Award for Swimming Teachers and Coaches.
- RLSS National Pool Lifeguard Qualification
- RLSS National Beach Lifeguard Qualification

### **Swimming – Water activity permit holders**

When providing safety cover for swimming under a water activity permit you must meet these requirements:

- **Class C guidelines** – follow the guidance for swimming in class C waters as detailed above
- **Ratios** – you must operate with the same size group (or smaller) as you do under your permit.
- **Class of water** – you may operate on lower classifications of water but not higher, and the suitability of the waters for swimming should also be considered prior to the activity taking place.
- **Personal flotation devices** – all permit holders supervising swimming activities must ensure that all participants are wearing appropriately fitting buoyancy aids. This requirement does not apply to those with SCUBA or Snorkel permits, where no personal flotation device is required for the permitted activity.
- **Location of permit holder** – the permit holder must position themselves in a suitable place to effectively conduct rescues should they be required.

### **Swimming – Formal qualification**

Those providing safety cover for swimming in B1 waters and higher using formal qualifications must have the qualifications listed in POR 9.52.

Note that those holding the Beach Unit or River Unit may provide safety cover for flat water swimming activities but those holding only the Flat

Water Unit may not provide safety cover for beach or river swimming activities.

Those holding the Beach Unit may not provide safety cover for swimming in moving inland waters.

Those holding the River Unit may not provide safety cover for swimming in the sea.

### **Equivalent qualifications**

For reference a list is provided below which covers some of the most widely available courses considered to be of equivalent or higher to the RLSS Water Safety Management Programme (as required in B1 waters and above). This is not a definitive list:

- RLSS National Beach Lifeguard Qualification
- RLSS Emergency Response Activity Supervisor Award
- SLSGB Beach Lifeguard Qualification
- SLSGB Surf Coach Life Saving Award
- BCU Canoe Lifeguard

#### **Note:**

- Lifesaving awards such as the Bronze Cross and Silver Cross are not equivalent qualifications.
- Pool based qualifications such as the Bronze Medallion and the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification are not equivalent qualifications.

### **Further definitions**

The following must be used when defining the type of swimming activity:

- **Flat or still water** is that where there is a minimal variance in the water level and little flow for the duration of the activity. There are no obvious waves and undercurrents.
- **Moving water** is that where there is a significant rise and fall in the water level or significant flow during the period of the activity. There may also be obvious waves and surface turbulence or noticeable undercurrents which could also cause shifting of the sea/river bed.

### **Training and qualifications**

All adults in Scouting with an interest in swimming and water safety would be encouraged to take part in the RLSS Water Safety Management Programme. This programme has a variety of units ranging from a basic water safety unit through to in water rescue and environment specific units.

For further details on the RLSS WSMP go to [www.scouts.org.uk/wsmg](http://www.scouts.org.uk/wsmg)

### **Further information**

For further information and guidance please go to

RLSS website [www.lifesavers.org.uk](http://www.lifesavers.org.uk)

Surf Life Saving GB website [www.slsqb.org.uk](http://www.slsqb.org.uk)

## Questions and answers

**Q** – If I take my group to a beach and a lifeguard is on duty do I need to do anything extra?

**A** – Where an attendant lifeguard is provided you do not need to provide additional safety cover, however you do need to ensure that you do a dynamic risk assessment, your group meet the ratios for your section when doing outdoor activities and that you have set up a clear system of communicating with and monitoring the group.

**Q** – I have a hill walking permit, does that mean that I can lead swimming activities?

**A** – No, as part of hill walking and caving permits, those who have been assessed to supervise crossing of water can do so within our rules. However these people are not permitted to supervise swimming.

**Q** – I operate at the beach and on a river, will I have to hold lots of qualifications to allow my Scouts to swim in these areas?

**A** – You need to hold the WSMP with the additional units specific to the area (beach and river). These units take a maximum of 4 hours of contact time each and will often be combined to a shortened length of time.

**Q** – Why is the WSMP a 2 day course?

**A** – The course duration is defined by the RLSS, we are currently working with them to see if any elements can be shortened in the future.

**Q** – Are these the same rules if I am abroad?

**A** – Yes – these rules apply wherever you are in the world, but remember we do have a rule (9.64e) which covers activities run by other National Scout Organisations.

**Q** – What is sufficient safety cover?

**A** – This will depend on the outcomes of the risk assessment as each event and location will vary (refer to FS120000 for more information).

**Q** – How do I access the RLSS Water Safety Management Programme?

**A** – This is a new course being launched by the RLSS in April 2011. Courses will be available across the country provided by the RLSS, outdoor activity centres and The Scout Association. Details of the course and training events will be available once this programme has been confirmed by the RLSS (these will also be published on [www.scouts.org.uk](http://www.scouts.org.uk)).

**Q** – Do I need to get a separate swimming permit?

**A** – No, swimming does not come within the Adventurous Activity Permit Scheme, however there are ways for a holder of a water activities permit to supervise a swimming session. For details of the requirements please go to page 2.

**Q** – Can we use a lifeguard with a different qualification or must it be someone with the WSMP?

**A** – Although the WSMP is the qualification referenced, those who hold equivalent or higher qualifications would also be acceptable. A list of these can be found on page 2.

**Q** – What is the difference between Paddling and Swimming?

**A** – Paddling is defined in POR 9.48.

**Q** – Why can't a kayak permit holder run swimming without participants wearing buoyancy aids on B1+ waters?

**A** – Adults with water activity permits have not been assessed as part of their permit to manage and recover young people from the water without personal floatation devices being worn.

**Q** – Why can a leader run swimming in a swimming pool without any qualification?

**A** – Swimming pools fall within the definition of Class C waters and therefore are managed in the same way through approval from the District Commissioner. The DC should make an informed decision as to the ability of the leaders to safeguard the activity. When using a facility with written operating procedures these must be followed, including the level of lifeguard cover required.

**Q** – Why can those with SCUBA and Snorkelling permits run a swimming session without personal floatation devices (buoyancy aids) being worn?

**A** – Within the permitted activity buoyancy aids are not worn and by nature of the activity these people have been assessed to recover people from beneath the surface of the water without personal floatation devices being used.

**Q** - What rules do I follow if I use a Scout swimming pool?

**A** – All Scout swimming pools must follow POR 9.54 and are required under the Health and Safety Executive guidance within HSG 179 – *Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools* to have a set of Operating Procedures, these must be followed.

**Q** – Can I still go paddling in the sea?

**A** – Yes, this rule has not changed, see rule 9.49 for full details.

**Q** - Why has this been launched before the RLSS Water Safety Management Programme is available?

**A** – We have been working with the RLSS in the development of this qualification which is suitable to adults working in settings such as Scouting. The new rules are wider than just the WSMP and those who could run swimming before these changes can continue to do so now.

**Q** – What is an attendant lifeguard?

**A** – An attendant lifeguard is someone present at a location who has been charged with a duty of care to provide safety cover for the users by the management of the facility. The instructions of the lifeguard must be followed, this includes the swimming area. If you swim outside this area you will have to provide your own cover.

**Q** – Why is the Bronze Medallion not a suitable qualification?

**A** – The Bronze Medallion and Bronze and Silver Cross awards are lifesaving awards for those who do not have a duty of care to respond to an incident. They also do not include the safe management of swimming activities.

**Q** – What is an operating procedure?

**A** – Operating procedures are a document outlining the way in which a facility is managed, for swimming pools and beaches these will include the safety cover provided.