

Report of key findings from the Heart of Aquatics Listening Research

**An independent research programme conducted by
The Behavioural Architects to gather the views of the entire
aquatics community as part of Swim England's pledge
*'to ensure there is a positive culture across all its sports and that the
highest standards of welfare and safeguarding are in place.'***

Commissioned by Swim England

Content Warning

This report deals with issues of safeguarding and welfare that may be traumatising, distressing or harmful to some readers. A list of support organisations can be found on page 145.

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PREFACE: REPORT PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Content Warning

This report deals with issues of safeguarding and welfare that may be traumatising, distressing or harmful to some readers. Should readers need support, a list of support organisations can be found on page 144.

Overall content

The report comprehensively captures output from the Listening Research Programme that was first announced by Swim England in its [Heart of Aquatics safeguarding, welfare and culture plan](#) in March 2023.

Independent experts, The Behavioural Architects were appointed in June 2023 to design and conduct this research. The Behavioural Architects is an independent research agency specialising in understanding culture, behaviour and behavioural change.

Purpose of report

The purpose is to report back on the views and experiences shared from across the aquatics community – including current and former club members, parents, coaches, teachers, workforce, club committee members, swim schools, technical officials and pool owners/operators.

The report captures an honest and thorough reflection of the culture in aquatics now and previously. It also includes a set of recommendations for Swim England and the aquatics community to consider *‘to ensure there is a positive culture across all its sports and that the highest standards of welfare and safeguarding are in place.’*

Programme of research versus a specific review or investigation

It is important to note that the Listening Research Programme is not a legal investigation or a review into specific issues. It is a comprehensive programme of research designed to gather the views and experiences of the aquatics community. This report should therefore not be compared to a report such as the [Weston Report](#) which is a specific review dealing with defined issues.

The aim of the Listening Research Programme is not to investigate issues or determine the accuracy of people’s reported experiences. The implementation of solutions is also beyond the scope of this phase of work. The report is limited to steering and guiding the important change that needs to happen within aquatics, based on the experiences shared with the research team.

Scope and reach

Whilst the programme was conceived to be open to and reach as many members of the aquatics community as possible, it is not exhaustive. It must be recognised that the findings of this report only represent a proportion of the aquatics community and that this is the *first part* of the listening process. The Behavioural Architects sought to gather experiences from a range of individuals with different roles from across each of the four key aquatics disciplines across the regions. However, as with any research programme, it is reliant on people coming forward to participate. Thus it is possible that there may be

individuals who would have liked to share their views and experiences but for reasons beyond our control, were unable to do so. It is also important to reiterate the largely *qualitative* nature of this programme; the intention is to capture the range and types of experiences but not to specifically quantify each one. The research should in no way be seen as invalidating a single experience.

Timings of experiences

From time to time the report may reference timeframes. However, it is important to note that experiences and views shared are based on memory and it is therefore sometimes hard to ascertain whether an experience is ongoing or in the recent or more distant past. The more important point to note is not so much when experiences occur or occurred but the fact that they happened at all.

Understanding the differences between the research methodologies used in the Listening Research Programme

Members of the aquatics community were able to share their views and experiences in a number of different ways (see [Methodology](#)). A mix of qualitative research approaches were used to balance reach with depth and to maximise the opportunity for people to come forward to share their experiences of aquatics. The overall programme of research was specifically designed to be person centred and tailored to different audiences to ensure inclusion and maximise participation. The output from the collective qualitative elements of the research comprise the vast majority of what is published in this report and inform the content of the recommendations.

A separate [quantitative benchmarking survey](#) was also conducted, the findings of which can be found in the report [Addendum](#). This survey element had a very specific purpose which was to act as a benchmark for the future against which to compare the success and impact of reforms or changes at a future date. It was also conducted amongst club members only. It is, relatively speaking, an extremely small part of the overall approach and must be understood as such. The survey is not meant to be a definitive measure of the state of aquatics, but rather to provide some key benchmarking metrics regarding welfare, safeguarding and inclusion.

Confidentiality

All participants in the research shared their views and experiences on a strictly confidential basis. Verbatim quotes and case studies included within this report have been anonymised with any identifying information removed.

Safeguarding

The Behavioural Architects worked closely with a clinical psychologist, Fiona Starr, to develop the safeguarding policy and protocol for this project, which was also checked by Swim England's safeguarding team. This includes clear guidance for what to do in the case of disclosure of abuse or harm, monitoring safeguarding incidents and directing participants to relevant agencies who could provide further support where required. 19 current and ongoing anonymous reports of safeguarding incidents were recorded during the mass listening. These were shared with Swim England's safeguarding team for them to risk assess. The safeguarding team reviewed these and did not find any immediate risk based on the information provided.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scope:

The brief was to provide a deep-dive exploration into the sporting culture of aquatics and provide feedback to enable Swim England and the aquatics community to make changes. The programme was designed to answer the following four key questions:

In relation to safeguarding, welfare and culture...

1. *What are the current experiences of the research audiences?*
2. *What are the past experiences of the research audiences?*
3. *What are the community's hopes for the future of aquatics?*
4. *Views on Swim England? (I.e. how approachable is Swim England?)*

The evidence was gathered via a mix of qualitative research methods in the summer of 2023 and over 1000 individuals from across the aquatics disciplines and Swim England regions took part. It included an anonymous mass listening space open to all to share views and experiences; as well as a moderated online platform involving self-ethnography, interviews, observation sessions at clubs and events and workshops that focused on current and former Swim England members, coaches, parents, club committee members and welfare officers.

In October 2023, a short benchmarking survey was sent to all current Swim England members to capture quantitative broad based measures for safeguarding, welfare and culture to help Swim England track its progress over time. There were 3,589 responses to the survey. The survey had a much narrower scope than the broader listening programme and its findings need to be considered in the context of the main qualitative findings, which the main body of this report is concerned with.

The Behavioural Architects would like to express thanks to all those who took the time to participate in any part of the Listening Research Programme.

Findings:

Current versus present experiences and culture

An important overall finding of the research is that the main types of experiences shared are the same now as they were in the past. Former and current athletes reported similar positive and negative experiences, indicating that even past or historic issues are ongoing and systemic. This highlights the challenges of any cultural change. It is important for Swim England to recognise that past experiences are also still felt strongly in the present. They have far reaching consequences on individuals and live in the collective memory of the aquatics community, influencing beliefs and behaviours today. As such, they should not be disregarded as 'historical' but worthy of engagement and serious reflection.

Aquatics cultural themes

Five cultural themes emerge that exist across the different aquatic disciplines, each of which creates risks for welfare and safeguarding:

1. **Performance focus:** A narrow focus on performance can overshadow the broader benefits of aquatics, creating excessive pressure on young athletes and limited opportunities in clubs for those who don't make the grade or want to train so intensively. Concerns about losing top athletes are also linked to a lack of cooperation between clubs and disciplines.
2. **Culture of fear:** Extreme competitiveness along with power imbalances within clubs can lead to a 'toxic environment' where bullying and aggressive coaching styles go unchecked. In particular, people fear getting penalised by the coach for speaking up, e.g. not selected or sidelined. There is also a fear of repercussions from other members, parents and Swim England, including being victimised or ostracised. Coaches also can feel very vulnerable to unfair allegations and blame for welfare issues, affecting their own welfare and pushing them away from the sport.
3. **Closed community:** aquatics can be inward looking and feel non-inclusive to newcomers or people from under-represented groups. Many of the people who run the sport today - at all levels - are believed to have been involved in the sport for a long time and are known to help one another and their friends. This puts those without existing connections at a disadvantage when trying to access opportunities; a problem made vastly worse by poor communication and unequal sharing of information. The cost of involvement can also make the sport seem elitist and exacerbate insularity by pricing out potential new members.
4. **Heavy reliance on volunteers:** Volunteers largely run the sport on the ground at the grassroots and play an essential role in competitions at all levels. A volunteer-base can create a strong sense of community and benefit individuals, however volunteers also feel over-burdened and under-supported managing the responsibilities delegated to them. This is related to a high turnover of volunteers which places clubs under strain, and an increased risk of volunteers missing or not having the capacity to effectively manage welfare issues on top of the day to day running of clubs. Additionally, reliance on volunteers can create conflicts of interest that lead to a lack of impartiality dealing with complaints and breaches of confidentiality.
5. **Shared passion and commitment:** Involvement in aquatics is life enhancing much of the time. People make significant sacrifices but can enjoy a powerful sense of purpose, belonging and mutual respect from others for it. However, there is a risk that people's enthusiasm and drive can tip into harmful behaviour or a loss of perspective, such as children overtraining to the point of injury or exhaustion.

The culture of the smaller disciplines (artistic swimming, water polo and diving) are to some extent additionally defined by the challenges they face recruiting members and accessing resources, including pool space and help to promote their sports. This creates additional challenges for inclusion and safeguarding.

Lived experiences of the aquatics community

The experiences shared in relation to safeguarding, welfare and culture as part of the listening programme tend to be more negative than positive. However, it should be noted that individual responses often include a mix of both. Typically, negative experiences tend to be recalled more vividly but this does not mean they are solely reflective of the day to day experiences of aquatics more broadly. As Anne Whyte noted in her 2022 review for British Gymnastics, *saferguarding and complaints handling* ["rarely attract recognition if done well but will attract criticism and loss of confidence in an organisation if done badly."](#) Regardless of this, the evidence clearly shows a number of common, concerning issues

that need to be addressed in order to achieve Swim England's ambition of '*creating a positive culture across all its sports and that the highest standards of welfare and safeguarding are in place.*' Given that people's experiences of aquatic sports flow from, define and reinforce the culture, any negative experiences are of concern.

The main themes relating to positive experiences shared across the Listening Research Programme are:

1. **Wellbeing, camaraderie and support:** Aquatics can be a welcoming space for people to be themselves and thrive in a community of like-minded individuals who share the enjoyment and challenge of training and excitement of competition. Support from dedicated coaches helps people to feel motivated and valued, and what makes taking part enjoyable.
2. **Progress and achievement:** Seeing an improvement and associated markers of success are hugely rewarding for athletes, parents and coaches alike. Positive feedback and recognition help make the anti-social hours and hard work worth it much of the time. People of all ages also feel inspired by the skill and achievements of others. Evidently, appreciation of performance is not necessarily a bad thing. The danger comes when this becomes all that is valued and some individuals are seen to have higher intrinsic worth over others because of how well they are performing.

The main themes relating to negative experiences shared across the Listening Research Programme are:

1. **Excessive demands and pressure:** an expectation to keep up training, even when exhausted, stressed or during exam periods can be overwhelming and result in poor mental health for young people. Pressure to perform around the time of puberty when young people are already feeling more vulnerable is associated with a loss of motivation and leaving the sport. Coaches too can feel under pressure to get results, while also feeling they get the blame for any welfare issues. The obvious conclusion here is that 'performance first' is a dangerous approach when applied to young people and suggests a role for systemic changes to recalibrate values. Volunteers too are feeling the strain of time consuming roles and voice that too much is expected from them - from Swim England as well as members and parents. Across roles, the costs of involvement can put people's finances under pressure particularly in the current economic climate. Given that cost tends to be more of a concern from people from less affluent backgrounds, financial pressures are detrimental to both welfare and inclusion. All these pressures taken together can create a negative atmosphere that undermines enjoyment and sustained involvement.
2. **Unequal and unfair treatment:** imbalances in the level of attention, resources and support individuals or particular groups receive are common among club members and become a source of tension. Masters as a group feel they are deprioritised both due to the focus on high performing junior athletes, both at a club level and by Swim England. This includes a lack of investment and dedicated attention, resulting in frustration. At an individual level, favouritism is a common complaint; typically in relation to higher performing athletes receiving more attention from coaches, but also to members with personal connections to decision-makers receiving preferential treatment, e.g. around selection or in disputes.

Athletes with disabilities and Special Educational Needs have inconsistent experiences of inclusion, with a lack of skills and understanding among some of the workforce highlighted as key to address.

People from ethnically diverse communities have to overcome stereotypes, racist remarks and a lack of role models which can make them feel like they don't belong in the sport. These experiences point to an urgent need for concerted efforts to tackle discrimination, however unintentional it may be, and to identify changes that would help to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to get into and stay involved in the sport.

3. Poor communication: difficulty accessing information and top down communications create frustration and contribute to perceived unfairness.

Members and parents feel disempowered when club committee members and coaches are not responsive or otherwise do not appear open to two-way dialogue, whether that be by email or in person. (Volunteers who feel overburdened may of course be struggling to keep up with communications, rather than not wanting to engage.)

Communication of selection decisions is frequently a cause of upset, with people feeling that insufficient feedback or transparency around the reasoning behind decisions leaves them feeling aggrieved and not cared for. This is not surprising considering the effort and sacrifice children and families make to train, along with the value placed on performance success.

4. Bullying and aggressive behaviour: past and current experiences of bullying are widely reported, particularly bullying by coaches and other child athletes, leaving a lasting negative impact on people. Aggressive coaching styles including shaming and singling out individuals persist in some clubs unchallenged, either tolerated as expected behaviour in a competitive environment, or due to fear of the repercussions.

5. Repercussions for speaking up: Reporting bullying can result in negative consequences, from being ignored or penalised by coaches, to feeling ostracised or pushed out of the club/sport. Clubs are known to sometimes ignore or not act on concerns about bullying by coaches due to the risk of a coach leaving who they will struggle to replace, or fear that they or their child will be penalised.

For those on talent pathways, the intensity of experiences is dialled up. This includes positive experiences of support from coaches, but also excessive pressure resulting in poor mental health and heightened competitiveness creating a hostile atmosphere. As such, preventative mental health support and education become of particular importance as people move towards higher performance levels in the sport.

Views on Swim England

People's views of Swim England shared during the listening programme are predominantly negative in relation to welfare, safeguarding and culture, particularly for those whose role or experiences have brought them into closer contact with the organisation. The areas of concern are as follows:

1. Setting the culture: Many of the more problematic features of the aquatics culture are believed to flow top down from Swim England itself; in particular, a belief that too much attention and

funding is directed towards high performance athletes to the detriment of other members. The smaller disciplines such as para swimming and Masters swimmers feel there is a lack of respect and insufficient resources for their areas of the sport, (relative to swimming), preventing growth and greater inclusion. Swim England's culture is perceived to be insular and not open to feedback or challenge if criticism about Swim England or its staff is voiced.

- 2. Regulation and setting standards:** There is considerable frustration that Swim England makes regulatory changes to improve safeguarding without sufficient consideration, consultation or understanding of the impact these changes have on clubs and workforce at the grassroots. This is most pronounced for Masters, smaller clubs and smaller disciplines who feel changes make it difficult if not impossible for them to operate or become more inclusive.
- 3. Communications and IT:** Experiences of poor communication are linked to difficulty accessing information from Swim England; from late announcement of events that makes it difficult to plan, to problems with the website not being user friendly. Clubs find that IT problems and a lack of integration between management systems increases their workload. Frustrations are compounded when the tone of some email communications from Swim England are felt to be aggressive and lacking empathy with the challenge they face. The evidence suggests that Swim England needs to make changes to its own communications and IT to enable better communication between clubs and members.
- 4. Welfare and safeguarding:** Swim England is felt to be unsupportive when it comes to welfare and safeguarding, highlighting a range of issues that need addressing, including:
 - Insufficient help with managing safeguarding issues in clubs - while some report helpful personal interactions with Swim England staff, others including welfare officers find Swim England is not responsive as they need them to be.
 - Little clarity on how clubs are meant to respond - they can find it hard to act on reports fed back to them via Swim England's anonymous portal due to a lack of context; and feel protocols for responding to specific welfare issues need to be made much clearer in training.
 - Emotional support - coaches and families of victims of abuse feel they don't have enough emotional support for themselves when dealing with disclosures or raising concerns.
 - Historical cases - Swim England's perceived inability or unwillingness to investigate past complaints against Swim England, or revisit outstanding unresolved concerns, which makes it difficult for those affected to move on.
 - Approach - Swim England's current approach to safeguarding is criticised by some for being overzealous and biased against coaches.

Taken together, the views shared highlight a critical need for further focused engagement with different groups about how to improve processes, guidance and support.

- 5. Complaints handling:** Concerns about the complaints process remain for those with first hand experience, including the judicial process lacking empathy and mistrust in Swim England's intentions and impartiality. Some have an ongoing fear of complaining *about* Swim England due to a perceived risk of retaliation, based on past experiences.

- 6. Trust and approachability:** Swim England is not well trusted or viewed as approachable due to a fear of potential backlash for saying something unfavourable. This extends to mistrust in the Heart of Aquatics plan and this Listening Research Programme, particularly among coaches whose voice is felt to be notably missing from the Heart of Aquatics Oversight Committee.

More positive views relate to Swim England's support to sustain the sport during the pandemic and its role in keeping pools open more recently. Swim England is viewed to now need to play a decisive role in making bold changes to ensure the long-term sustainability of aquatic sports, including addressing a shortage of coaches, concerns about growing elitism and insularity, high turnover of volunteers and churn of junior athletes.

Hopes for the future

Participants in the Listening Research Programme make consistent calls for change in several key areas that clearly relate to the negative experiences and aspects of culture identified elsewhere in the research.

1. A shift in focus away from high performance to enhancing enjoyment and opportunities for more members

Various roles within aquatics hope for Swim England and clubs to do more to provide opportunities for a 'missed middle' tier of athletes who enjoy training in a club setting and competing at different levels.

Members would also like to see a greater focus on life-long engagement, including reducing athlete drop off in adolescence, more dedicated attention for Masters swimming, and more done to facilitate transitions between clubs and disciplines.

A range of people feel this shift is necessary to reduce extreme competitiveness, excessive pressure on young athletes and unequal treatment, to create a more welcoming, inclusive and positive environment.

2. Addressing fear surrounding safeguarding and making complaints

Coaches and those who have complained in the past hope for an independent body/organisation to be involved in managing reported safeguarding concerns and deciding on any sanctions, to ensure they are reviewed objectively and fairly.

Those who know of abuse that has taken place hope that safe, independent spaces will be provided for those affected to come forward and report what happened, particularly where a complaint involves Swim England or its staff.

For those who have lost faith in Swim England's leadership and intentions, an external review or overhaul of those in power is required to reassure that Swim England is serious about cultural change.

These hopes are underpinned by fear of repercussions for speaking up, and ongoing concerns regarding bias in Swim England's approach to safeguarding and complaints.

3. Making aquatics more inclusive and outward looking

Across the community, people hope for aquatics to become more diverse and inclusive. This includes wanting greater visibility of people from ethnically diverse communities, addressing cost barriers that risk the sport becoming more elitist, and more education for clubs and coaches to

create a level playing field for members with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. People feel that new voices in the sport are needed, including attracting staff and volunteers from outside of aquatics and giving young people more of a voice in clubs. Additionally, it is hoped that improved communication from Swim England and within clubs will help empower newcomers, reduce power imbalances and ensure more equal access to opportunities.

These hopes relate directly to concerns about insularity where those who 'know the right people' or are from a more privileged background are at an unfair advantage.

4. Stronger support for volunteers and the workforce

Volunteers involved in running clubs and welfare officers hope for more consultation, empathy and flexibility from Swim England when updating regulations and requirements, to ensure relevance and accessibility.

Volunteers running clubs would like to see streamlined processes and systems integrated to reduce administrative burden and increase efficiency.

Welfare officers and others involved in safeguarding hope for consistently responsive support with issues when required, and greater clarity on how they are expected to respond to specific issues.

Some volunteers would also like greater recognition of their contributions through actions as well as words, such as grants to obtain qualifications.

Aquatics coaches and teachers hope for more professional security in their jobs, particularly in the current economic climate and stemming from a fear of allegations.

These hopes reflect the heavy reliance on volunteers and coaches who can feel overwhelming pressure in their roles.

5. Continued listening and acknowledgment

This Listening Research Programme has sparked hope that Swim England will continue listening to the aquatics community as it looks to make changes. This includes providing safe forums for more victims to share views and ensure their experiences are fully acknowledged and learnt from.

Quantitative benchmarking findings

The quantitative benchmarking survey shows that there is much to be done to 'to ensure there is a positive culture across all aquatics and that the highest standards of welfare and safeguarding are in place.' It also substantiates many of the concerns raised regarding the role of Swim England reported across other stages of the Listening Research Programme.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The consistent areas where participants in the Listening Research Programme call for change give insight into the kind of culture people would like to experience and contribute to going forwards. It will be critical now to continue engaging with the aquatics community around *how* to address the concerns this research has highlighted. Some of those who took part in the programme are concerned that Swim England conducts consultations *after* decisions have largely been made, which exacerbates mistrust. It will be important to ensure a listening culture is just that and not a tick box exercise.

It is clear that the aquatics community care deeply about the future of their sport. The challenge for Swim England now is to create channels for people's experiences, passion and commitment to continually shape and realise the ambitions of the Heart of Aquatics plan.

Recommendations

Swim England has made a commitment that the learning generated from listening to the aquatics community will inform future action plans. The recommendations below provide initial input into these action plans, mapping out what needs to change as a matter of urgency. The focus is on what needs to change not *how*; this will need to flow from Swim England, working with the aquatics community.

Introducing a model for positive change

Recommendations are structured around four interconnected opportunity areas for driving positive cultural change.¹ As articulated in the [cultural section](#) of this report, the elements that make up a culture are multiple and connected. As such, it is recommended that Swim England starts to consider these areas simultaneously when developing its action plan.

The overarching principle of continued listening surrounds all areas and needs to be at the heart of taking this report's findings forward. Facilitating suitable forums and channels for continued listening should therefore be an immediate and ongoing priority for Swim England.

¹ These are structured in a similar way to British Gymnastics' four focus areas [Reform 25](#), but the areas themselves are different.



Continued listening

1. Continue to provide impartial, safe listening spaces to ensure all groups (past and present) have a voice in developing Swim England’s action plan and can give feedback on progress. This is likely to require separate listening forums for parents, coaches, members, and former members/parents.
2. Look to actively engage with people with serial or ongoing concerns who clearly care deeply. This will signal an openness to criticism, learning from past experiences and continuing to acknowledge victims.
3. Promote good practice for giving members/parents a voice and involving them in decision making within clubs, e.g. inductions for newcomers, feedback mechanisms, drop-in sessions.

Welfare, safeguarding and complaints management

Improvements to reporting processes

4. Provide an avenue independent of Swim England for raising safeguarding concerns and complaints, particularly past and present complaints against Swim England itself, ensuring those who have not come forward can still do so and harmful behaviours are followed up where relevant.
5. Conduct further focused research on user experiences of the new safeguarding and complaints processes to identify whether they are fit for purpose. In particular understand if/how clubs act on anonymised feedback, if there are sufficient levels of emotional support and overall ease of use of the process.
6. Appoint an independent expert to review patterns in safeguarding reports and complaints to ensure there is a clear feedback loop and that any feedback is acted upon in a timely manner.

Management of issues locally

7. Review the current system of welfare officers, in particular risks associated with conflicts of interest.
 - a. As part of this, Swim England might consider facilitating access to welfare officers from a different club, paid professional welfare officers, and how [Sport England's new National Network of Sport Welfare Officers](#) can ensure impartiality.
8. Provide clearer guidance and protocols for managing particular types of welfare issues, e.g. clear pathways for managing eating disorders or self-harm.
9. Ensure access to responsive support for welfare officers themselves when needed.

Preventative information and guidance

10. Develop and share good practice interventions to proactively and preventatively mitigate the specific welfare risks highlighted in this report. For example,
 - a. Promote body positivity, body diversity and healthy eating.
 - b. Provide information and support around puberty in relation to performance, with the aim of reducing pressure on young people at an already vulnerable time of life.
 - c. Give guidance for coaches on how to communicate selection decisions sensitively.
 - d. Create clearer guidelines and protocols for managing conflicts of interest, e.g. conflicts of interest declarations when resolving complaints or making decisions.
 - e. Provide explicit permission and support to take breaks or train less intensively, e.g. pathways for re-starting.
11. Equip clubs with resources to encourage active engagement with codes of conduct e.g. in situ prompts and regular reminders that bring to life the 'why' and 'how' for different codes as well as the 'what'.

Positive culture

Systemic Changes

12. Seek to rebalance attention and investment away from high performance junior athletes in favour of other groups within the sport. In doing so, Swim England should consider:
 - a. Ways to increase opportunities for lower level athletes to train/compete in a club setting, e.g. amalgamating clubs or incentives for more clubs to cater for a range of levels; lower level competitions.
 - b. Structural changes needed to grow Masters swimming and improve experiences, e.g. separation from the Swimming Leadership Group.
13. Introduce initiatives that encourage cooperation and collaboration between clubs and disciplines, with a focus on individual welfare and long-term engagement in aquatics.

Strategy and initiatives

14. Develop a long term plan to reduce barriers to greater diversity and inclusion, including:
 - a. Upskilling the workforce in how to better support members with SEND.
 - b. Fiscal interventions that reduce the costs of involvement, e.g. targeted subsidies and discounts; grants for training and kit.
 - c. Communications to increase exposure to aquatics sports outside of existing social circles, leveraging ethnically diverse role models and influencers.

- d. Conducting further research to identify support needs and interventions to address barriers and discrimination linked to ethnicity, gender and sexuality in club and competitive aquatics settings
15. Ensure equal access to information about aquatic sport, to reduce reliance on unofficial channels.
 - a. This includes website improvements such as improved navigation.
 16. Identify ways to bring in new voices. As part of this, Swim England should consider :
 - a. Reviewing recruitment strategies and criteria to ensure good representation of staff who do not have an existing connection to elite sport, including at Board/SLT level.
 - b. Driving youth engagement and youth voice strategies.

Support for clubs and workforce

17. Support administrative efficiencies for those that run clubs, e.g. integration of management systems; easy access to example documents needed for compliance.
18. Identify ways to give clubs more advance notice of events and changes to regulatory requirements.
19. Consult more with a range of clubs to identify support needs and show empathy when communicating to them.
20. Ensure the new Coaching Plan addresses vulnerability linked to the risk of allegations and financial/job security risks.
21. Include coach representation on the Heart of Aquatics Oversight Committee.

LISTENING RESEARCH: BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Background: The origins of the Listening Research Programme

As the national governing body for aquatics, Swim England is dedicated to ensuring there is a positive culture across aquatics sports and that the highest standards of welfare and safeguarding are in place.

Whilst aquatics can be a powerful force for good, supporting people's physical and mental health, it is also recognised that there have been behaviours and practices within aquatics that are unacceptable and have caused real pain and suffering to people taking part. It is also clear that people have felt unable to come forward to Swim England to express their concerns.

Swim England has clearly expressed the need for this to change.

The [Heart of Aquatics](#) is Swim England's new safeguarding, welfare and culture plan. The intention is to create a better future for everyone in aquatics – members, participants, coaches, teachers, parents, clubs and swim schools.

The plan focused on three key pillars of work in 2023 – listen, support and resource. Swim England acknowledges that it must continuously strive to improve in order to foster a positive culture and deliver for the people who are the lifeblood of aquatic sports. To ensure that happens, Swim England has sought to engage the help of the aquatics community. The Heart of Aquatics is the first step on Swim England's cultural change journey.

The Listening Research Programme was conceived as part of Swim England's commitment to develop a culture of listening to the aquatic community and understand what is taking place across the country.

Defining the Listening Research Programme: objectives

The Listening Research Programme was created as a way of gathering the opinions of past and present members, participants, coaches, teachers, parents, clubs and swim schools to provide feedback to enable Swim England to make changes.

It is a programme of research that was created to provide safe spaces for people to share their stories and experiences and to provide an understanding of the emotional and physical impact of the aquatics journey. It was designed to give mass opportunity to all, to tell their experiences.

Specifically, the programme sought to meet the following objectives:

In relation to safeguarding, welfare and culture ...

- 1. What are the current experiences of the research audiences?*
- 2. What are the past experiences of the research audiences?*
- 3. What are the community's hopes for the future of aquatics?*
- 4. Views on Swim England? (I.e. how approachable is Swim England?)*

Given the need to deeply understand experiences, the emotional and physical impact of people's aquatics journeys and the challenges faced, the programme was designed to be largely qualitative in terms of data collection. Qualitative research is exploratory, non-numerical and not statistical. It is either semi-structured or unstructured and concerned with gathering feelings, ideas, or experiences. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this programme to allow for a deep dive exploration into sports culture. Only through getting to the heart of underlying cultural issues will recommendations and solutions be developed, which will be able to make real and impactful change.

In order to ensure that people would feel comfortable sharing their stories and experiences, Swim England engaged an independent expert agency, The Behavioural Architects, to undertake the Listening Research Programme.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative Listening Research Programme took place between June and November 2023 and comprised 8 different research phases (7 qualitative exploratory phases and 1 quantitative benchmarking study).

The approach was designed to get both breadth and depth of understanding across a wide range of aquatics community members: the initial mass listening space was open to anyone who wanted to take part, with the subsequent qualitative phases designed to immerse more deeply into experiences of specific audiences.

The approach was predominantly qualitative in order to provide a depth of understanding around experiences, and allow people to share their views in a non-prescriptive way.

The quantitative phase was conducted after the qualitative research period to be informed by key themes and common language used by the aquatics community. It sought to provide a benchmark of relevant safeguarding, welfare and cultural metrics with the current Swim England membership only, to allow changes to be tracked over time. As such, the quantitative findings are reported separately as an [addendum](#) after the findings from the main qualitative listening programme.

Overview of approach and sample

The methodology comprised the following key phases:

1. **Mass listening:** The creation of an anonymous, easily accessible private listening space for all to share experiences. This ran for 6 weeks, between June and August with ongoing monitoring. A total of 819 responses were received.
2. **Event and training immersions:** 4 in-context observation and on-the-spot interview sessions at club training sessions and competitions, covering all four disciplines and a mix of regions.
3. **Online self-ethnography:** 32 current CYP (child and young person) members (plus their parents) and 14 adult members participated in an online platform over 2 weeks.
4. **19 x follow-up interviews** with a representative cross-section of participants from the online self-ethnography plus an additional interview with a former member.
5. **In-depth interviews** with coaches, committee members and volunteers including welfare officers, across all disciplines.
6. **National Operators focus group:** A 90 minute discussion with 7 national operators, built onto a quarterly National Operators face-to-face meeting.
7. **Listening workshops:** Two 2.5 hour sessions with a mix of roles and disciplines. Workshops took place in London and Loughborough.
8. **Quantitative benchmarking survey:** A high level benchmarking survey sent out to all current Swim England members to provide some initial metrics on perceptions of safeguarding, welfare and culture. Questions were informed by learning from the qualitative phases. A total of 3,589 responses were received.

Swim England was not present at any of the sessions and did not view any of the fieldwork.

	CYP members	Parents of CYP members	Former CYP members + parents	Adult members	Coaches / club teachers	Club committee members incl. welfare officers	Technical officials	Swimming schools & teachers	Pool operators	Swim England staff	
Mass Listening	A total of 819 responses across all 4 disciplines										
Event immersions	38	7	-	2	8	14	5	-	0	-	
Online self-ethnography research	32	32	-	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Follow-up IDIs or Paired depths	11	11	2 (1 child, 1 parent)	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	
IDIs with Pre-task	-	-	-	-	7	7	-	-	-	-	
Operators Discussion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7 National Operators	-	
Listening Workshops	2	-	1	3	4	4	0	-	0	-	
Quantitative Survey	3,589 Current members only								-	-	-

The sample numbers in the table above indicate the main roles within aquatics that participants were recruited on, to meet minimum quotas set. However, many individuals had multiple roles within aquatics. For example, the majority of participants in the listening workshop were also former CYP members, and parents of either current or former members. Introductions often began with participants explaining the multiple ‘hats’ they wore, and during discussions they would sometimes ask what perspective they would like us to answer from.

The qualitative phases were typically structured around the 4 key research objectives: current experiences, past experiences, hopes for the future of aquatics and views on Swim England. Questions and activities were adapted to the participants and context in which the research was taking place.

Full details of the methodology can be found in [Appendix A](#).

HOW TO IDENTIFY THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS THAT CREATE A CULTURE

A key aim of the research was to provide an insight into aquatics culture. This understanding is critical for ensuring solutions make real and impactful change, as opposed to reactively seeking to address individual issues. As such, we begin by providing a definition and scope of culture followed by an overview of insights and observations of how certain elements manifest within the aquatics community to create and sustain the culture.

What is culture?

Culture, as a concept, can be open to interpretation. However, in order to create recommendations and actions to change a culture, it is vital to attempt to define it. Whilst specifics of definitions may vary, it is generally agreed upon that culture is holistic and consists of a shared set of core meanings, values and beliefs that create behaviours. These elements, in turn, create a sense of identity for the members of a culture and inform how they see themselves. Culture is internalised and within a given social context, members learn what is perceived as acceptable or not. By its nature, culture is relative and dynamic.

What creates and sustains a culture?

One of the challenges of understanding and changing culture is that whilst some elements of culture are visible, much can remain hidden or less visible to those in it. This is frequently how harmful behaviours can become part of a given culture unless the right safeguards are in place.

For the purposes of reporting on this Listening Research Programme, we will be examining the following:

1. The role and relationships of different members of the aquatics culture
2. Language and tone of voice
3. Values and beliefs
4. Behaviours

1. The role and relationships of different members of the aquatics culture

Definition and scope

Culture is shaped and defined by the role people play in relation to others within a culture. An understanding of culture requires exploration of the interactions and power dynamics that exist between different sections of a given community. For the purposes of this report, we explore relationships between both within aquatics clubs and with Swim England.

Key insights and observations

There are a number of different protagonists within the culture that interact with one another in myriad ways at the club level, including:

- **Coaches:** making key decisions about who gets selected (key selection decisions), running training sessions with their own individual style. During the research, we often heard about the dominance of the head coach in setting the programme and tone of the club training experience, including norms of acceptable behaviour. Their influence can extend to determining the atmosphere and environment of the club, e.g. competitiveness of members and parents on and off poolside dictated by the motivational pep talks which may include overt comparison between athletes.
- **Parents:** enabling their children's aquatic journey and making considerable sacrifices themselves to support them in the sport, from getting up at the crack of dawn for training and events to spending considerable sums of money to buy kit, and pay for memberships and entry fees. We see different levels of engagement from those who are/were aquatics athletes themselves, involved in running the club, officiating at events, perhaps a coach themselves etc., to parents who see themselves as more peripheral. Strength of feelings parents had about Swim England appears to strongly connect to their level of involvement in the sport.
- **CYP members:** this includes top tier athletes through to members starting out at the grassroots. Athletes performing well are reported to hold a higher status and felt more valued than those who were not. Strong friendships can be formed between members based on mutual respect, shared passion and teamwork.
- **Masters members:** adult athletes taking part in clubs with a shared passion. Masters typically feel much less pressure than younger athletes and enjoyment can be much greater as a result. However, Masters often feel like an after-thought with so much attention on youngsters and developing the talent pool.
- **Committee members:** typically volunteers, often parents, who run the club in various roles which involve giving up large amounts of their time for free. Committee members interact with and effectively employ coaches although vested interest can sometimes influence whether they raise issues with coaches (e.g. their child's place on a squad).
- **Welfare officers:** a key voluntary role, providing a first point of contact for children, parents and adults within the club who have a child safeguarding or welfare concern. They are required to act independently and in the best interests of a child. However, this can be compromised by conflicts of interest and interference from committee members when managing issues.

Of note is the considerable crossover between roles with a single individual belonging to multiple groups. Participants often described wearing different 'hats' and would ask the researchers which perspective they should answer from during interviews.

Relationships with Swim England are largely influenced by how much any of these players have interacted with the National Governing Body (NGB). Members, volunteers and the workforce's relationship with Swim England as the NGB is at times conflated with interactions with regional representatives, e.g. regarding timing of competitions, grading days. Certain roles will have required

them to have more contact with Swim England than others, e.g. requirement to attend training. Particular experiences often relating to safeguarding incidents in this project also drive the strength of associations and feelings with Swim England.

A finding of this research is that members and parents who have less contact and see their role as more peripheral tend to have a more positive or neutral view of Swim England, with limited associations beyond the newsletter, fees and well run competitions to draw upon. However, others who are more heavily involved in aquatics, e.g. coaching or involved in running a club, or who had direct experiences with Swim England, are more negative; often contrasting their positive experiences at the club level with their dealings with or mandates from the governing body.

2. Language and tone of voice

Definition and scope

The language and tone of voice used during people's description of their experiences highlights important aspects of the culture and the power of language to subconsciously reinforce a belief or behaviour.

Key insights and observations

- Some competitive parents use the word "career" to describe their child's participation in the sport indicating how seriously they take it.
- The language amongst swimmers is more "I" focused.
- Harsh expressions such as young athletes not making the grade getting "binned" or "axed", reflecting the way that people see the consequence of not performing.

3. Values and beliefs

Definition and scope

Shared values and beliefs help hold the group together. In aquatics, this includes the importance placed on particular outcomes (notably performance), and beliefs around what is acceptable and what is not, (such as an aggressive coaching style, or questioning a coach's decisions), that are learnt and passed on within the culture.

Key insights and observations

- A belief that aquatics needs to be prioritised to do well (over education, socialising and in some cases long term health) determines how athletes and families organise their lives and perceive the world. Values of commitment and dedication hold members together and shape behaviour. Many values and beliefs are not expressed overtly or visibly at first (e.g. a belief that it is necessary to train on injuries) but manifest through people's language and behaviour.

4. Behaviours

Definition and scope

Social norms are built and reinforced by behaviours within a culture. Behaviours are key to building a positive culture, but culture can also be extremely damaging if supporting negative behaviours. If a negative behaviour is 'normalised', it may be ignored or go unchecked and thereby risk causing harm.

Key insights and observations

This Listening Research Programme documents both positive example such as:

- a tight-knit community of young divers cheering one another on in competitions
- more experienced athletes consoling younger swimmers when disqualified

but also negative aspects such as:

- it being normal for one parent to compare their child's split times to another's
- a coach publicly shaming a child about their weight.

AQUATICS CULTURE: UNIVERSAL CULTURAL THEMES

This section of the report introduces overarching cultural themes and features that impact experiences, and can present risks to welfare and safeguarding and/or barriers to a better future for aquatics. These themes are interrelated and should be considered together when identifying opportunities to bring about positive change.

Five cultural themes emerge through the Listening Research Programme that exist across the four aquatics disciplines:

1. Performance focus
2. Culture of fear
3. Closed community
4. Heavy reliance on volunteers
5. Shared passion and commitment

The cultural themes are created and sustained by the role and relationship of individuals within aquatics, their values, beliefs, language, tone of voice and associated behaviours. The degree to which these themes are present or felt, as with any culture, varies by context and individual. It is not to say that everyone in the aquatics industry experiences the culture in this way. However the fact that some of these elements exist at all is of concern and their persistence is and will be a barrier to creating a more positive aquatics culture.

It is important to note that whilst some reforms may have been undertaken to address some of the elements identified, cultural change takes a considerable amount of time to take effect.

Verbatims

There are numerous verbatim quotes supporting each theme, both relating to past and current experiences. We have restricted use of verbatims to those that best illustrate the theme. Longer verbatims that give more context have been cut down to reduce the risk of individuals being identified.

1. Performance focus

Swimming, in particular compared to the other aquatic disciplines, is characterised by a values and belief system focused on extreme competitiveness, where performance is put before all else. The broader benefits of aquatics can often be overshadowed by the social currency associated with winning or beating a time or score. (This manifests within the smaller aquatics disciplines to a slightly lesser degree). There can be a tunnel vision approach with a narrow focus on medals and selection. This is believed to be driven by Swim England from the top and trickle down into club and stakeholder behaviours at the grassroots. It is perpetuated by all involved and as one parent at an event told the researcher; *“We’re not here to have fun, we’re here to win!”*

The narrow focus on performance is likely to also be reinforced by the intense nature of training at anti-social hours that require total dedication. In social psychology this is known as *effort-reward justification*: when people have put a lot of time, energy, or resources into something, they feel a need to justify their investment by convincing themselves that the activity or object is more valuable or worthwhile than they initially thought. Parents and young people frequently described how caught up they (and

others) had become over time on performance, perfectionism and getting to the next level. A harmful social norm has been created around overtraining, training when injured and prioritising training over exam preparation. This has been encouraged by coaches and/or is perceived to be what others are doing too. In this context, welfare and safeguarding is not being prioritised.

Whilst the pressure to perform and take the sport very seriously often peaks in adolescence, it is of concern that there are reports of prepubescent children being treated like professional athletes, as illustrated in the quote below:

"From the early age of primary school at 8 years old, swimming was dubbed as 'training' and I began to prioritise my results in the pool alongside studying for my public exams. I became very overtired and was met with genuine exhaustion. I felt permanently 'on the edge' with the academic and social sides of my life suffering and I became genuinely miserable to be around. I would frequently overwork myself to the point of vomiting or collapse simply to please my coach. While I acknowledge that swimming is a results driven sport, the way in which the sport is delivered to children and hiding under the label of 'high performance athletes' is driving people away from the sport they once loved."

Masters member, Swimming, Mass listening

The focus on performance is not always overt, yet it is reflected in people's behaviour, such as where a coach's attention is directed, as shown by the quotes regarding past and present experiences below.

"Coaches told us to have a positive mindset and not be obsessed with times. But their actions spoke otherwise. They would solely concentrate on the swimmers performing well and did nothing to help when I got ill and depressed. They didn't care when after 8 years in the sport I left."

Former member, Swimming, Mass listening

"The focus appears to be only on medals with little consideration for the children taking part... Only elite swimmers are given attention."

Parent, Artistic swimming, Mass listening

Success and achievement brings status and in some cases, protection by the club/coaches when there is a dispute. Higher performing athletes are more likely to be favoured by coaches, creating rivalry between young people and parents. The inverse of this is that an athlete who is not performing well is considered of less intrinsic value and does not receive such positive or preferential treatment. When the stakes are so high, young people will go to ever greater lengths to impress and achieve, sometimes to the point of burnout.

It is not to say that people do not enjoy or are not highly motivated by achievement and competition; this is very much the appeal. However, while progressing and being challenged are clearly key drivers of enjoyment of aquatics, a singular focus on performance (e.g. times) can come at the expense of enjoyment and create anxiety and risks amongst athletes, coaches and parents alike.

“There seems to be a culture in swimming of pushing for ‘performance’ rather than enjoying the sport. As a committee member trying to run a club, I’ve found it really hard to encourage coaches to inspire a love of swimming and competing, and instead feel that there is a push to get swimmers to nationals.”

Club committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

Researchers heard about clubs and coaches aspiring to ‘high performance’ levels with excessively high standards required for entry and inappropriate training approaches for the actual level of the athletes, e.g. making children complete regional level sets in training when they are pre-county. At the same time, coaches feel under intense pressure from clubs and parents to get results, even in clubs supposedly less focused on performance.

“I coach two small clubs where the philosophy is not to win, we encourage multi-sport, but some people still want to win, and you fall victim trying to find the balance. It’s everything I love but it’s getting harder. I don’t want to walk away but sometimes think I should.”

Coach, Swimming, Listening workshop

Fierce competitiveness also fuels rivalry between clubs and even between disciplines where a fear of athletes being ‘poached’ makes coaches wary of collaboration, and suggests the focus is not on what is in the best interests of the young person.

The missed ‘middle’

A laser focus on performance is felt to translate into a distinct lack of opportunities for participants across aquatics who still want to train/compete within a club setting but are sidelined or excluded for not making the grade.

“We never even got to the swimming trial, I sent a message out to the club saying she would like to try out and got nothing back. So about 5 weeks later I just went along and asked and she said ‘it’s not worth it, she’s not good enough’. At the age of 10! She just said she’ll never be good enough if she’s not swimming county times and she hadn’t even seen her swim... It could have been the end of swimming.”

Parent, Artistic swimming, In-depth interview

Competition over spaces in clubs - due to limited pool space - is recognised as the fundamental challenge for catering for and keeping more athletes in aquatic sport. However, researchers consistently heard calls for a rebalancing of resources - at a club and NGB level - to cater better for members who are not aspiring to elite levels, such as making it on to a talent pathway or selection for regional/national squads.

“This is the biggest problem as it’s all about focusing on the elite people at the top. The total focus is those on the elite pathways and anything that isn’t about the elite swimmers is at the bottom of the agenda.”

Former member, Swimming, Listening workshop

“There is an over-focus on performance. All clubs are about performance as Learn To Swim says this is their role, but in terms of performance you want a more inclusive club and to further their reach, but this is a massive challenge – clubs shouldn’t be exclusively about performance, not all people aspire to be these high performer athletes.”

National operators focus group

In water polo, the focus on winning, combined with limited opportunities to compete, is associated with high performing players taking all the opportunities to play, at the expense of local B team players.

“There are no B team games because there are few players as better players belong to multiple clubs which stops the development of local players. There are few games so everyone is like ‘we must win’. B team players never get an opportunity to be tested so they eventually drop out.”

Masters member, Water polo, Mass listening

It is important to caveat that recreational and less performance driven clubs do exist. Masters also feel the negative aspects of a performance focus much less acutely, often commenting how much more they enjoy taking part now compared to when they were younger.

Nonetheless, it’s clear that performance is what is valued and carries higher status across aquatics. For example, squads that exist for athletes who just want to train less intensively get devalued and even ridiculed within clubs rather than seen as a positive choice, as demonstrated by the quote below.

“My club has a squad for swimmers who are no longer competing or who want to train less intensely. This has become a really toxic subject, where the coaches sometimes threaten swimmers to move them to this squad if they don’t fix their technique, for instance. It feels like this squad isn’t a true part of the club and most of the time the swimmers on this squad haven’t chosen to be there.”

CYP member aged 16-17 & coach, Swimming, Mass listening

2. Culture of fear

The focus on performance and extreme competitiveness creates an undercurrent of fear and sense of vulnerability that runs through aquatic sports. This culture of fear exists at all levels and is seen as a major threat to a positive future for aquatics. It frequently manifests in athletes losing the love for their sport and a workplace where people are feeling sufficiently vulnerable that they are considering leaving the sport.

There are a number of distinct types of fear that contribute to this overall cultural theme of fear.

i. Fear of failure

It was consistently reported that feelings of failure loom large across aquatics; some mentioned that all (young) athletes will fail at some point because the bar for success is set so high and is always moving higher. Athletes can often feel an intense pressure to succeed. They can carry a great weight of disappointment when they are not doing as well as expected or achieving their ‘performance potential’ which is exacerbated by the way in which parents and coaches respond. Feelings of vulnerability can be

heightened during competition, with young people tearful following public announcements of disqualifications, diving/artistic swimming scores etc.

“When he was 9 he was told he had to get 11 qualifying times for NEDs. He got 10 and he had ‘failed’. It was a constant failure game. If he didn’t get a medal at a region he’d fail. A new coach would get excited by him but it was always impossible for him to completely succeed or he’d be no 1 in the country. I would say he has PTSD [from it].”

Parent, Swimming, In-depth interview

The consequences of failure can be extremely damaging for young people and fear of failure leads to a lack of focus on the appropriate welfare and safeguarding protocols. Being dropped from the squad/club makes them feel there is no place to continue in their sport competitively; their aquatics career ends abruptly if they don’t make and/or retain their place in their team or squad. Children reported how their friends in the squad had just ‘disappeared overnight’, creating stress and worry that the same could happen to them. The fear of being dropped creates a pressure to prioritise aquatics above all else, including health and wellbeing. This results in potentially harmful behaviours such as training when injured, or deprioritising education and friendships. The fear of failure has far reaching mental health consequences. It is not just simply about losing a place or disappointing others but can result in status anxiety; young people feel they matter less if they are not performing which has a detrimental impact on their self-esteem.

ii. Fear of the coach

It is important to begin by saying that we heard examples of fantastic and inspirational coaching during the Listening Research Programme, and also a feeling that coaches can be unfairly scapegoated for deeper issues within the sport, such as too much focus on aspiring to elite levels. As previously highlighted, this report is not trying to suggest this is everyone’s experience or that everyone is fearful of their coach. However, the fact that such fear exists at all is of course a concern as it is a fundamental contributor to a negative culture.

The fear that some members and committees feel towards their coaches has been very much their experience in the past and still is today for some. Fear relates both directly to both aggressive coaching styles as well as to a more indirect fear of the coach due to the power they have to influence experiences and success, (from selection decisions to more time spent with certain athletes).

“Pressure for continuous pb’s expected. Teenage years consisted of a toxic environment involving body shaming, belittling and being spoken to with bad language. Didn’t have a voice! Afraid to lose your place in the squad.”

Masters member, Swimming, Mass listening

Fear is often driven by what people describe as bullying behaviour. This manifests in training styles that involve shouting, name calling and in some instances, in the past, physical punishments. Athletes also report coaches deliberately ignoring them or other children that they do not like or are upset with. Children and parents are clearly fearful of falling out of favour with the coach due to the impact this could have on their own success and status within the club.

Favouritism of certain children is a common complaint, including coaches outwardly referring to a certain child in the squad as 'their number one' and then threatening that they would lose this spot if they did not perform as a way to motivate them.

"The coach has a list of favourites. The rest of them, including my child, are often shouted at really aggressively. This is not motivating at all to my child and they will become completely disengaged with the session. Coaches should be encouraging and full of praise to young children. The same coach also gave a talk about nutrition and the importance of drinking water but shouts at some children if they try to take a drink."

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Some reported ongoing experiences of coaches exerting excessive control, particularly in relation to weight and diet and people are afraid to challenge this.

Many feel that where bad behaviours exist amongst coaches, they can frequently go unchallenged or are ignored by clubs, despite concerns raised by members or parents. This tendency to turn a blind eye can be driven by the fear of losing the coach given the vital role they play and their increasingly short supply.

"My experience is that people are scared to complain in case it affects their child or in-case the coach decides to leave and they can't find anyone to replace them."

Coach & committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

iii. Fear of unbalanced power dynamics within clubs

Power dynamics in clubs can be complex and hierarchical with multiple lines of authority. The head coach is often seen to be setting the tone of the club overall and determining how far athletes can progress in the sport.

There are some concerns that coaches are not always approachable and can react negatively to parents asking questions. Whilst there is an acceptance that coaches must make subjective decisions using their expert judgement, there is a desire for decisions to be more transparent.

The other side to this is that coaches themselves can feel an unfair and inappropriate pressure to justify their every move to 'entitled' parents who are too quick to criticise and jump to conclusions without understanding the context of their behaviour, which cannot always be transparent as the quote below demonstrates.

"They [parents] see you talking to one swimmer for half an hour because they said they [the swimmer] wanted to commit suicide and they don't hear that conversation and wouldn't you want your child to have the same respect? And this gets fed back to people higher up but it's not favouritism, it's about giving to those who need it, when they need it."

Coach, Swimming, Listening workshop

Similarly, coaches can feel that volunteer committee members may try to exert too much influence over matters they don't understand, making their job harder and less rewarding. Problems of job insecurity and the vulnerability of coaches, e.g. if parent committee members turn against them, are well recognised. It seems that so much power being in the hands of the coach creates tension and sometimes bad feelings that can be detrimental to the wellbeing of athletes and coaches alike.

“Too much is placed on volunteer parent committees who hold the careers of professionally qualified coaches in their hands. [These are] often parents with absolutely no experience and that can make or break. Swim England allows them to self govern like themselves. This means that if there are any problems, the whole system is corrupt and comes crashing down.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Members and parents report believing that sometimes friends of the coach or committee members receive preferential treatment, e.g. in relation to keeping a place in a squad or if there was a dispute, because of the power they hold. High performing athletes are perceived to hold a higher status and intrinsic worth to the coach/club, which in some cases is believed to afford them 'protection', e.g. if accused of bullying or abuse towards others.

It will be critical that any attempts to drive positive cultural change acknowledge and account for the complex power dynamics and hierarchies that exist within clubs, given the fear, perceived lack of fairness and tension these create. This is at the root of why some serious issues can go unaddressed or ignored, and sometimes small issues escalate out of proportion.

iv. Fear of speaking up

There is a widely held perception that speaking up about concerns can have more negative consequences than drive constructive change. A reticence to speak up is based both on personal experiences and having heard or seen what has happened to others.

Parents and volunteers are fearful of being 'blacklisted' or labelled a trouble-maker for 'saying the wrong thing' about those in positions of power, resulting in being denied opportunities, e.g. to become a coach.

“The problem I have is that I can't be too vocal. I can't say exactly what I am thinking about when my kid is in the room... If you do, you get a black spot next to your name and then my chances of training to be a coach are gone.”

Parent & committee member, Listening workshop

Whistleblowers who had spoken out reported how they had received threats, abuse and faced intimidation from other members of the community who didn't like what they had said, leading to further trauma. This kind of behaviour sends out a strong signal to others about the risks of speaking up or making official complaints.

“Last summer, a swimmer left the squad and made a major complaint to the safeguarding officer and the result was that the Team Manager went around all of the team members asking them ‘if they were the person who made the complaint?’ or if they knew who it was. This is not at all conducive to a safe environment. Girls are now afraid to blow the whistle and are only prepared to consider doing this once they leave the squad, for fear of jeopardising their place when it comes to future selection.”

Parent, Artistic swimming, Mass listening

The victims of abuse also fear their experience will continue to not be fully acknowledged or validated by Swim England. This creates significant stress and a lack of closure, seriously impacting welfare and leaving people vulnerable to gaslighting and attempts to dismiss their claims as those of vindictive trouble-makers.

A fear of speaking up breeds a culture of reinforcing unacceptable behaviours, fuelling what people describe as a ‘toxic’ environment on the ground. This has serious implications for safeguarding and welfare; issues can’t be addressed if people are too afraid to raise them. There is a strong desire across the aquatics community for more support and reassurance to guide and empower them to feel safe to speak out when needed.

v. Fear of accusations

So far this report has principally focused on the vulnerability athletes feel. However, coaches feel extremely vulnerable to unfounded accusations of abuse and misconduct, which impact their livelihoods, career and social standing. Decisions parents dislike or disagree with can get conflated with welfare and safeguarding issues, making coaches the subject of more complaints.

“Coaches are ‘coaching to protect themselves’ these days. I know many good coaches and swimming teachers who are considering leaving the sport. They feel unprotected and unable to do a good job for fear of a parent or swimmer making an allegation which could potentially affect their whole career and livelihood.”

Coach, Swimming, Mass listening

The impact of false allegations against coaches is serious and can cause extreme stress; on occasions complainants are reported to have behaved in aggressive and confrontational ways. Coaches describe feeling constantly on their guard, at the expense of coaching to the best of their abilities and having natural conversation with members.

“Just because you dislike something/someone, this isn’t necessarily abuse. Swimmers and parents can complain about anything and the stress upon coaches knowing this makes them uncomfortable.”

Coach, Swimming, In-depth interview

Technical officials too can feel exposed and like their every move is on show at events; to put a foot wrong risks them being ousted or harshly criticised.

"It's very difficult to feel safe at a club. I don't feel safe nationally, this time [after an 8 month dispute by a parent against me] I was proved innocent but I have heard of so many people who have had complaints against them and you feel like I could almost go quite easily."

Technical official, Swimming, Listening workshop

"Sometimes as an official, some of the older officials, mostly referees, forget that most of us are parents as well as volunteer officials. I've seen parents who were berated publicly (along with their child) because their child came over to talk to them after their race, and whilst also paying attention to the children in the pool (in a 50m pool, during a freestyle 400) they talked to their child about their race."

Parent, former member, club committee member & technical official, Swimming, In-depth interview

vi. Fear of Swim England

Across aquatics, there is a widespread fear of complaining about or falling out of favour with Swim England due to concerns of potential repercussions. This was clearly apparent running listening workshops during the research with participants very anxious that Swim England might be listening or able to identify them personally. There is a belief that concerns will not be dealt with in a fair and appropriate manner if too critical of Swim England staff, and a perception that Swim England is more concerned about PR than supporting clubs or learning from mistakes.

"Swim England has always discounted any criticism to protect their image, even if the criticism is more than justified. The whole structure needs revamping. Some of the characters involved especially in water polo have been dreadful; at best, incompetent and at worst, criminal. Those at the very head of Swim England have always swept an awful lot under the carpet and this includes accusations (much substantiated) of bullying. The sport has often been correctly identified as ruling via a climate of fear - when you are dealing with children this is totally unacceptable."

Parent, Water polo, Mass listening

3. Closed community

Aquatics is described as a small world, where everyone knows one another and people talk! There is a belief that *'it's not what you know but who you know'* and that it is helpful to build alliances to not fall out of favour with key decision-makers. From accessing information and advice to help progress in the sport to selection decisions, those who are connected to those with influence are felt to have an unfair advantage, as illustrated below.

"There is very little advice and guidance about progression pathways. The selection process for regional, talent and national squads is mainly down to who knows who, and very little down to the "talent" of the individual player. Parents are unaware of the pathways, let alone asking for opportunities whenever there are ones to trial or compete beyond the local club."

Parent, Water polo, Mass listening

The hierarchies that exist means that people can feel they can't share their opinions openly and need to watch what they say or risk negative repercussions, including being denied opportunities. Breaches of confidentiality are perceived to be common. This carries the risk of being ostracised or denied

opportunities if an individual falls out of favour with others with power and influence. Consequently the fear attached to speaking out is significant and a serious barrier for reporting of safeguarding incidents and welfare concerns.

“When you go to a national event, you are always on show, you can't say anything that is against the grain, you will get a dot against your name, they will find ways to reject you whether it's true or not this is passed down from person to person. I have to be careful about what I like or post on social media, who I talk to at nationals so that I get the spaces. For the last 2 years, they haven't put out a programme for it, so if you say one bad thing or joke with the wrong person and they don't find it funny, then straightaway word gets around as it's such a closed culture.”

Technical official, Swimming, Listening workshop

“I've witnessed elite athletes raise issues/concerns only for them to be swept under the rug and disregarded and I've seen athletes afraid to say things because they are worried of the impact it will have on them in the sport because it is such a close community with a few people seemingly making all the decisions.”

Masters member, Water polo, Mass listening

Additionally, newcomers joining clubs find they don't always receive a friendly welcome from established cliques and competitive parents.

“Swimming seems to be more cliquy, with much more competitive parents than other children's sports I am used to.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

These cultural features are sustained and reinforced due to the fact that those running aquatics (across levels) are believed to have a long history of involvement and to be deeply embedded in the culture. This can result in insularity and bias; bad behaviours and beliefs are part of the social norms of the culture; individuals within the culture become immune and resigned to particular social dynamics, or may believe that certain hierarchies are inevitable.

Lastly, there is concern that rising costs will mean that the sport will become more closed and insular. People consistently describe aquatics sports as elitist and non-inclusive, with a disproportionate number of members in clubs from more privileged backgrounds, and families on lower incomes increasingly likely to be 'priced out'.

4. Heavy reliance on volunteers

Aquatics relies heavily on volunteers who largely run the sport on the ground at the grassroots and play an essential role in competitions at all levels. Workforce and members who have been in the sport for a long time are willing to give up their free time because of their passion for the sport and community, and because they recognise how critical volunteers are to sustain their clubs and the sport overall.

A shortage, as well as a high turnover of largely parent volunteers makes clubs fragile, particularly for the smaller disciplines.

"In swimming, where one volunteer falls off, there's a line of 20, 30, 40 more who can step in but in diving and water polo it's such a small group or when you lose one or two people, you're constantly working to replace them."

Parent, Water polo, In-depth interview

There is frequent pressure to volunteer (more), resulting in volunteers sometimes feeling they have taken on more than they bargained for and feeling overburdened by the commitment and responsibility they now hold. Volunteers reported feeling under-supported and unappreciated by Swim England and sometimes parents within their clubs. There is felt to be a general lack of empathy with the fact that they may have other full-time jobs and competing responsibilities and the strain volunteers are therefore under. These factors are likely linked to high turnover of volunteers; they also create a welfare and safeguarding risk, increasing the chance of volunteers making mistakes or missing things.

A volunteer-base can create a strong sense of community and benefit individual wellbeing (e.g. through providing a sense of purpose and connection). However, in aquatics it appears to exacerbate a sense of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' that can make some people feel less welcome, especially where information is not easily accessed or readily shared outside of established cliques. Parents describe how volunteering can feel like the only way to find out how things work (e.g. competition schedule, gradings, rules), particularly in the smaller disciplines where understanding of the sports is more limited for newcomers.

"I couldn't understand why some kids would progress quicker than others or some kids didn't take to it. And that was the point where I thought, 'I need to learn myself as a parent about this sport, what it's about because it's so different from any other aquatic sport."

Parent & committee member, Artistic swimming, In-depth interview

Whilst volunteers are perceived to be motivated by a genuine desire to help and learn, different members of the aquatics community (including other parents) frequently voice concerns that some volunteers are inclined to act out of self-interest, (namely, influencing matters in favour of their child's success as opposed to treating everyone fairly and acting for the good of the club as a whole). A parent's natural desire to support their child could tip over into biased decision making, particularly in such a highly competitive environment where passions run high.

"People whose children swim who run the club and then if they are not good people, the club is shaped around their children. I think that's the challenge in youth sport, but we've been part of other sports where it hasn't been as negative... Parents who are more easy going about swimming are less likely to try and take on the parents who are on the committee."

Parent, Swimming, In-depth interview

Numerous examples of conflicts of interest were reported which had already become detrimental to safeguarding and welfare. For example, welfare officers struggle to act independently when they are also a parent or have a longstanding relationship with other committee members or coaches.

Equally, other parents often feel like they cannot raise concerns with welfare officers for fear confidentiality is breached and spread within the club, with potentially negative repercussions this might have on their child; from overt or covert backlash from coaches, to abuse and gaslighting from other members and parents.

“People are too scared to approach welfare officers. The perception is things are never kept confidential and they’ll find out who’s it about, with the child then further punished for ‘complaining’.”

Parent & committee member, Diving, In-depth interview

5. Shared passion and commitment

Throughout the research, the passion and dedication of those involved in the different aquatics sports was clearly apparent. The aquatics community care deeply about their sports and want to see them thrive.

When entering the club system, those new to a given sport are immediately struck by how invested other parents are and by the shared belief that this is an activity that needs to be prioritised in order to have a place in it. Aquatic sports are felt to require a high level of commitment and sacrifice but people report a willingness to do it because they love it! Early starts, late training sessions, whole weekends spent poolside and strict programmes are considered the norm. Peers, siblings and partners not involved in aquatics can struggle to understand the appeal or why their friends and family choose to spend their time in this way. There is, however, a mutual respect between the athletes and volunteers that helps motivate people to keep coming back. We heard from parent volunteers who have never participated competitively themselves but were still motivated to continue contributing their time.

“If you are at school, everyone knows if you are a good footballer but no one knows about your swimming ability. You are doing this on your own before or after school or on weekends and people who you sit with at school wouldn’t know this, it’s quite an isolated sport so people doing that have a common goal and they see them 5-6 times a week – there’s a level of mutual respect. They spend a lot of time together; the hours are long, and it can be whole weekends for competitions.”

Pool operator, National operators focus group

It is clear that aquatic sports are an important and positive part of people’s identities, providing a sense of purpose and belonging. People talk about their ‘swimming family’ and value the role this plays in their lives.

Progress and achievement, individually or as a team, as well as the excitement of competition, cannot be divorced from the passion people feel and can be a great source of pride. Young people and adults get inspired watching the skill and success of others and seeing young people progress in aquatic sport. Coaches and more experienced athletes can provide inspirational role models for young people. When things are going well and athletes have role models they can relate to, people’s dedication can translate into incredibly positive experiences.

However, shared passion and commitment has a negative side too. All the enthusiasm people feel can tip over into irrational and harmful behaviours that allow negative aspects of culture to pervade, e.g. overtraining to the point of injury; parental support spilling into frustration and berating children for them not doing well enough. It is therefore vital that people's passion is channelled in positive ways and issues proactively managed.

AQUATICS CULTURE: SPECIFIC INSIGHTS BY DISCIPLINE

From the views and experiences heard across the research, some cultural insights emerge that are more specific to individual aquatics disciplines and that can dial up particular welfare and safeguarding risks. These are outlined below.

Overall, the evidence shows that the culture of the smaller disciplines (artistic swimming, water polo and diving) are all to some extent defined by the challenges they face recruiting athletes and accessing resources, including pool space and help to promote their sports. Swim England is perceived to stifle the growth potential of these disciplines, through a perceived lack of support when updating regulations which makes it harder for them to operate.

The artistic swimming and water polo community consistently report feeling like a lower priority to Swim England, calling out for greater recognition, respect and support. Both would like to see greater collaboration with swimming to help recruit athletes but find swimming clubs and coaches resistant due to fears about losing their best athletes, or claims water polo will have a negative impact on stroke technique.

Swimming

The strong focus on individual performance in swimming and fierce competition for spaces appears to create a particularly serious and even unfriendly atmosphere in some clubs, e.g. members and parents reluctant to share information that could benefit other junior athletes; conversation limited to comparing athletes performance/times.

Children report feeling that their place in the squad or club is always vulnerable, adding pressure to prioritise swimming above all else. For example, people report that stepping back from training or taking a break would not be an option if they wanted to progress and continue in the sport.

“Parents yelling at their kids at the poolside for not doing enough, parents slagging off other children or coaches. This doesn't feel safe or nice.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Water polo

People involved in water polo connect the focus on fun and teamwork - with wins and losses felt together - with a collegiate atmosphere. Players describe the sport as welcoming and inclusive in terms of gender and ages playing together. However, a lack of promotion and exposure to the sport outside of private schools and certain social circles can also create a perception that water polo is elitist, with some players unfairly advantaged by their background or connections. Insularity is also highlighted as having a negative impact on the sport.

"It [water polo] is very insular. Everybody knows there are certain families such as [names redacted], and everybody knows them and that can't be good for the sport because they can't be the best players".

Masters member, Water polo, In-depth interview

Artistic swimming

The artistic swimming community describes their discipline as an *aesthetic sport*, highlighting the importance of uniformity in teams. While there can be a strong sense of teamwork and belonging, individual mistakes standing out can heighten pressure and fear for athletes. The focus on aesthetics and uniformity can also extend to swimmers' appearance; athletes are acutely aware of looking different, particularly comparing their body shape with others and linking a slim physique to greater success.

"Russians win in artistic swimming because they all look the same and are uniform, we need to achieve that!"

Coach, Artistic swimming, In-depth interview

In relation to inclusion, the sport is sometimes felt to be unnecessarily gender biased which some feel is reinforced by sexualised clothing, or fewer opportunities for boys/men to compete (linked to low numbers). However, there is enthusiasm at how the sport is evolving to be more gender inclusive of men, e.g. a stronger focus on athleticism and power in movements.

Limited exposure to artistic swimming can make the sport feel impenetrable to newcomers who report struggling to initially access and then understand the sport, including the terminology and movements/figures. However, those in the sport longer-term highlight how much it has changed in recent decades, including easier sharing of knowledge about how the sport works with digitisation, e.g. videos on the Swim England hub.

Diving

The diving community is perceived by its members to be tight-knit and supportive. With all the attention on the performance of a single athlete, fear of failure and individual pressure is heightened. However, this can also promote collective support for young athletes and club members and parents rally to support and enthusiastically cheer each other on during competitions. Some broader benefits beyond success are noted by parents, e.g. confidence children build from standing on the diving stand in front of so many people.

Raising welfare and safeguarding concerns can be very difficult as conflicts of interest are rife given the community's small size (limited by its infrastructure and the narrow window of age to take part).

"There have been times where the welfare officer's child has caused problems, but there is no one to talk to. For example, a child called my child fat during training, the coach heard, but was intimidated by the welfare officer and the child and didn't intervene or reprimand the behaviour."

Parent, Diving, Mass listening

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE AQUATICS COMMUNITY

This section of the report details the range of both positive and negative experiences that were shared across the Listening Research Programme. These experiences are shaped by, as well as defining of the respective aquatic cultures within which they occur.

Introduction to experiences heard through the Listening Research Programme

People from across the aquatics community shared a wide range of experiences with us across the different stages of the Listening Research Programme. A number of consistent themes and issues emerged and are outlined below.

The vast majority of the experiences shared via the anonymous mass listening space were negative (c. 85% negative to c. 15% positive); however, it should be noted that individual responses themselves often included a mix of both positive and negative experiences. For example, contrasting negative experiences after raising safeguarding concerns with other positive interactions within a (now different) club setting. It is important to note that there is clearly variance in experiences between clubs on some of the same issues, highlighting positive practices and behaviours which can be learnt from. As noted previously, the purpose of this report is not to precisely report the prevalence of any given experience but to document the full range of experiences recounted, irrespective of where and when they occur.

Experiences shared in other stages of the research were relatively more positive, mixed or neutral. We can't be certain but expect this may be due to participants speaking more honestly via the anonymous mass listening forum and focusing on sharing one or two highly memorable standout experiences where we might expect a degree of negativity bias². This should not detract from the significance of these experiences, but rather highlights issues that have a lasting impact on people and are critical to address.

Current versus past experiences

Swim England's brief was to explore both current and past experiences. This is important for Swim England to help gauge how people's experiences may have changed over time, particularly in the last 1-2 years since a number of changes have been made.

A key finding from the Listening Research Programme is that the main types of experiences shared are the same now as they were in the past. It is also not always possible to tell for certain when incidents took place from the responses shared via the mass listening since the anonymous nature of this platform meant researchers were unable to check with individual participants. However, consistency between the mass listening responses and current and ongoing experiences shared in other parts of the in-depth qualitative methodology (during interviews and workshops) confirms the persistence of the experiences detailed over the coming pages. Additionally, former and current athletes reported similar positive and negative experiences, indicating that even past, historic issues are ongoing.

² This includes the 'Peak End Rule', a cognitive bias whereby people tend to judge an event or experience largely on how they felt at its peak (lowest or highest point) and at the end, rather than judging the experience as a whole.

This is not surprising given that cultural change typically takes a long time; it can take years to create substantive change. It is therefore too early to say if recent changes made by Swim England are or are not effective in supporting a positive culture.

In any case, we strongly caution against disregarding historical examples as the evidence clearly indicates that the underlying issues they help to illuminate are systemic and still prevail to this day. Historical experiences are still felt strongly in the present (as is the case with trauma) and have far reaching consequences on individuals and the aquatics community more broadly. Experiences live in people's collective memory and have a lasting impact on beliefs and behaviours today, e.g. confidence to speak up when something doesn't feel right.

"I have witnessed on many occasions from such coaches 'bullying' which included verbal, belittling, excluding, sidelining etc. Matters were disclosed to Swim England at the very highest level. Concerns were dismissed as historic - bullying is never historic! Said coaches are still within the system at the 'top'."

Parent, Water polo, Mass listening

The different types of experiences discussed below include verbatims from recent and ongoing examples, as well as experiences where we are not able to say when something happened. We do not attempt to accurately time-stamp everyone's experiences as the Listening Research Programme was designed to capture people's recounted experiences, not to be an investigation of specific events.

Below we detail the main types of experiences shared across the Listening Research Programme.

Positive Experiences

1. Wellbeing, camaraderie and support

Those who took part in the research were keen to share the positive impact aquatics has on their physical health and mental wellbeing; something they became acutely aware of during the pandemic when pools were shut. This was particularly important for people when struggling in other areas of life, for whom aquatics can provide a welcome escape from stress and worry.

Aquatics clubs can be a welcoming space for people to be themselves, build strong (for some, lifelong) friendships, and thrive in an environment of like-minded individuals with shared goals and passion.

"I love playing water polo and train everyday. I especially love representing the region and when we stay away and spend time together as a team. It builds a good bond with everyone."

CYP member aged 13-15, Water polo, Mass listening

Some younger athletes describe an environment of mutual support, particularly between generations who are not directly competing, e.g. older swimmers consoling and reassuring younger athletes when disqualified in races, and within the smaller disciplines.

Parents and athletes with additional needs share positive experiences of feeling welcome and included, such as making adaptations for individual needs; as demonstrated by the following quotes:

“My younger son has ADHD and didn't have a good time at primary school at all, but whatever had happened in the day, however upsetting or horrible, could be completely forgotten by coming to training and being welcomed into a friendly, inclusive space. Here it didn't matter if he had a bit of excess energy, no one minded if he was a bit 'quirky' and it meant that we could end each day on a positive note ready to start again in the morning. My boys are 25 and 19 now and are still part of that safe and friendly club - one is coaching and one still swimming. This is where all their friends are from.”

Parent and club committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

“He has recently joined [club name redacted] and is fully included, made lots of friends and is building his confidence week on week. Both the staff and peers welcome him and cater to his needs. He even competed in his first gala this weekend. Having a child with additional needs always comes with challenges but I can't thank the club enough for how they've welcomed him into their swimming family.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Athletes and parents recount positive experiences of supportive and dedicated coaches who encourage and champion them/their child. Coaches and volunteers describe feeling a deep sense of purpose within the community through their involvement, particularly when they receive positive feedback and thanks from athletes and parents.

2. Progress and achievement

Making progress in aquatics is widely reported as a key source of pleasure and pride. Whether it's achieving a new PB, winning a medal or receiving positive feedback from a coach, seeing an improvement and associated markers of success are hugely rewarding for athletes, parents and coaches alike. Seeing progress and receiving recognition makes people feel all their hard work and commitment has been worthwhile.

“I love teaching and coaching the younger swimmers and seeing their faces light up when they get PB's at meets, be it club championships or opened/county meets.”

Parent and coach, Swimming and artistic swimming, Mass listening

“As a parent, the swimmers take you on a journey with highs and lows but it's all part of sport. As a parent/spectator I take delight in seeing your own children and other people striving to achieve their best. It's good to see para swimming become more accepted and I hope it continues to be more respected as the athletes that take part in this sport are extremely professional and so fast!”

Parent, Swimming/para swimming, Mass listening

People report feeling a sense of awe at the achievements of others, including young people inspired by watching more experienced athletes and finding role models. From realising the hope of making it onto a team, to the dream of competing at the olympics, children feel motivated by the achievements and the heights they could reach.

These positive experiences underline why people within aquatics are united by a shared passion and commitment to the sport.

Negative Experiences

1. Excessive demands and pressures

Across the aquatics community, people widely recount feelings of overwhelming pressure taking a toll on the wellbeing of all involved (athletes, parents, volunteers and the workforce).

Below we outline the key factors that lead to perceptions of excessive demands and pressures:

- i. Pressure to perform and get results
- ii. Negative impacts on athlete body image and mental health
- iii. Overburdened and overwhelmed volunteers and workforce
- iv. Financial pressures

i. Pressure to perform and get results

While aspiration and ambition to succeed is associated with positive experiences, there is a fine balance and it can also quickly turn to overwhelming pressure. Throughout the Listening Research Programme people consistently reported how, in aquatics - particularly swimming - you either 'move up or out' of the sport altogether. Pressure on athletes to not fall behind and perform can come from multiple angles; coaches, parents and peers themselves. Young athletes can worry about keeping up with peers, and report feeling embarrassed and deflated when put in a group/lane with younger swimmers. This pressure is frequently attributed to young people 'burning out' and falling out of love with the sport.

Some coaches are perceived to push children too hard, too quickly, or to exert excessive control over young athletes in a bid to boost their performance. This can take the form of telling members they must not take part in any other sport, or what they can or can't eat (e.g. no carbs on rest days). It is important to note that coaches themselves are also put under pressure to get results by committee members, parents and others. They frequently report feeling that they tread a difficult path between pushing athletes to progress and applying too much pressure that could be harmful to individual welfare.

The backdrop of all this pressure is evident at competitions where it can all become too much. Young people (and parents) were observed becoming very emotional and crying due to worries about under-performing.

"[At a competition] I'm feeling nervous as you don't know if you are going to win or not... Some of the girls get very anxious or upset, a lot of them are quite critical of themselves and they've been known to be really upset."

CYP member aged 16-17, Artistic swimming, In-depth interview

The competitiveness of some parents putting pressure on young people is evident through behaviours such as becoming outwardly frustrated with their child for ‘not trying hard enough’ or only coming in second place.

“Another thing we have found is that occasionally parents can be very stressed. Once at a gala I overheard a child say ‘look daddy, I got a silver’ and he said ‘it should have been a gold.’”

Committee member, Swimming, In-depth interview

The sheer demands of aquatics *training* sometimes become exhausting for young people, with non-attendance not considered an option. Young athletes shared experiences of coaches humiliating people for missing or being late to training; there is a general belief that not keeping up with training is a sign of weakness. Girls report little sympathy or concessions for missing training when they have their period, feeling like this is perceived as a weakness and frowned upon. Taking a break is seen as potentially ‘career ending’, with young athletes and parents feeling that it’s a case of either needing to be totally dedicated or not continue to take part. Injuries are not always even a valid excuse for stepping back, as shown by the quote below.

“I told my coach (and my parents sent him an email) that I couldn’t train as frequently due to an injury only for him to tell me that I had to sort out my ‘commitment issues’ as what I was doing was unacceptable at the age of 13.”

CYP member aged 16-17, Swimming, Mass listening

Balancing the demands of aquatics training with education, in particular, creates anxiety and can leave no space for anything else. It is often when young athlete’s feel the pressure of needing to focus on education (GCSE exams for example), when they drop out of the sport.

Puberty and performance

The pressures on athletes to perform are felt to heighten around puberty, with young people’s bodies developing at different rates distorting perceptions of how they are performing. Parents and young people recount how young athletes are either told or left feeling they are ‘under-performing’ relative to their age, or given an inflated view of their abilities. Both scenarios leave them crestfallen at a later point when their peers catch up, and are associated with young people leaving the sport.

Parents voice a need for better information and support from clubs around these times so that young athletes are not left feeling confused and demoralised by an apparent drop in progress. It is felt that reassurance and dialogue that discourages unhelpful comparisons would help keep young people motivated and reduce excessive levels of competitiveness at a particularly vulnerable time of life.

ii. Negative impacts on athlete mental health and body image

Current and former young athletes associate mounting pressure to perform with a detrimental impact on their mental health. Being singled out and shamed, e.g. for missing training, and constant feelings and fear of failure, are felt to have contributed to a negative self-image, anxiety and PTSD.

A belief that a leaner physique is the only way to be competitive and progress is linked to disordered eating. People share experiences of comments from coaches and peers about their weight during adolescence having a big impact on how they perceive their bodies, from weigh-ins until recently, to ongoing use of coded language that suggests they need to lose weight (e.g. to 'do more cardio', or referring to their body shape as 'a bit thick'). In artistic swimming, becoming hyper conscious of looking different and not fitting the mould is perceived to heighten the risk of developing eating disorders. Across disciplines and age groups there can be unhelpful physical comparisons (particularly in swimwear) which risk creating negative body image.

iii. Overburdened and overwhelmed volunteers and workforce

Volunteers feel the strain of time consuming roles, particularly committee members who can feel overwhelmed trying to run the club and remain compliant with regulations and training requirements set by Swim England. They describe feeling stretched between requirements to keep on top of lots of paperwork, e.g. around qualifications like Swim Mark, and organise things like travel and accommodation for athletes going to competitions. They feel there is an expectation from both members and Swim England to do their job 'well', and a seeming lack of acknowledgement that they may also have full time jobs and families as well. These pressures appear to be dialled up in smaller clubs and for the smaller disciplines who cite fewer resources as adding further pressure.

The pressures volunteers feel poses a serious challenge for managing complex welfare and safeguarding situations, or stepping back to identify changes that would create a more positive atmosphere and environment in clubs for members. Volunteers call for more support, not only around safeguarding but also around making other administrative aspects of the role easier and more efficient, in order to make improvements that would benefit welfare.

Coaches describe ever increasing pressures on their time with the need to respond to individual questions and requests from parents as well as involvement in managing welfare issues. The risk of accusations being made against them always looms in the background due to a perceived risk of unfair sanctions imposed on them. Those facing allegations describe highly stressful and time consuming experiences that are driving them and others away from coaching altogether.

iv. Financial pressures

Money worries linked to the high costs of involvement in aquatics are widely reported as a source of stress - particularly in the ongoing cost of living crisis - as well as a reason aquatics is not felt to be an inclusive sport.

The costs of club and competition fees, travel to competitions and kit can have a noticeable impact on household finances and require careful budgeting. For example, one parent talked of using her earnings from coaching on top of her full time job to cover her daughter's swimming costs.

Workforce and volunteers call out the high cost of qualifications and courses as putting their finances under pressure, sometimes feeling cynical about whether these were really necessary or more about creating revenue for Swim England. These added costs can be off-putting for continuing to volunteer/coach, which in turn increases pressure on clubs who already struggle to recruit for paid and

unpaid roles. As discussed under [‘Culture of fear’](#), the risk of clubs not being able to replace coaches can contribute to safeguarding concerns being downplayed or ignored.

“The expense of a 2-day meet is a lot. We’ve paid £117 for a hotel room, probably £25 in petrol, maybe more, £45 on food plus £30 for a meal out, meet entries can range from £6-£9 for a race so probably cost us around £55 to enter. We have 2 dogs which luckily my mum looked after otherwise we’d have to put them in kennels. It would have been another £60. In total we could have spent £300.”

Parent at swimming event

“To obtain a L2 coach qualification you need to pay Swim England circa £700 to go on a course that has little relevance to the swimmers you actually coach.”

Parent, coach, technical official & team manager, Swimming, Mass listening

2. Unequal and unfair treatment

Experiences of unequal and unfair treatment are reported across aquatics. The key drivers of these relate to:

- i. Favouritism
- ii. Masters feeling undervalued and under-supported
- iii. Exclusion of para swimmers and people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)
- iv. People from diverse cultural backgrounds feeling unwelcome
- v. Gender and sexuality discrimination and disadvantage

i. Favouritism

Favouritism in the form of coaches giving more time and attention to certain - typically higher performing - athletes appears to be a common experience and is widely reported as creating tension within clubs. These athletes are felt to get special treatment, while others are ignored and can feel of less importance to the coach, negatively impacting their confidence and frustrating parents. Some clubs and coaches are also believed to protect favoured athletes if accused of bullying or other inappropriate behaviour, ignoring or downplaying incidents which can leave victims feeling that they have no choice but to leave the club.

Meanwhile, the ‘favourites’ themselves can feel under enormous pressure with so much attention being on them. When they do not perform as well, they fall from a great height and can experience overwhelming feelings of failure that typically results in them leaving the sport.

“Not all children and families are treated equally at the club. There are ‘favourites’. Some children have much more input and feedback and a much more positive experience. Some children’s experiences are much less positive, actually negative on occasions. Children have been ignored, told off and not felt happy, included or liked by some adults. Historic and current. Many children leave the club due to the pressure and not a positive experience.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Members with connections to those in positions of power, e.g. the children of prominent committee members, are sometimes perceived to be given more opportunities or preferential treatment. This can be a barrier to those in positions of responsibility acting appropriately and following guidelines. For example,

a welfare officer not saying anything to the coach when her daughter's squad were being weighed weekly due to concerns this might jeopardise her child's place in the squad.

ii. Masters feeling undervalued and under-supported

Masters report how they can feel like an afterthought, at a club level and by Swim England at a national and regional level. A perceived lack of investment in Masters swimming is linked to experiences of poor administration and communication.

There is frustration that Masters are not considered properly when setting standards (notably the level 2 coaching qualification which is believed to be unnecessary for them). This is perceived to create red tape and make it difficult for clubs to function properly. Masters can also feel excluded due to the focus on junior swimming in swimming clubs.

"As a Masters swimmer, it feels as though we are at the very bottom of the queue for anything. There is so little investment in Masters swimming from Swim England, it's really disappointing."

Masters member & coach, Swimming, Mass listening

iii. Exclusion of para swimmers and members with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Contrasting the positive experiences of inclusion already discussed above by some para swimmers and athletes with disabilities, others describe opposing experiences of not having the same opportunities or acknowledgment as non-disabled athletes that make them feel less valued. For example, not being remembered in the medal counts at competitions; being told they cannot officiate because they use a wheelchair. In training and competitions, athletes with additional needs can feel there is a lack of consideration and support to include them, e.g. not being given enough time for para swimmers to get on the blocks or ready for a race at non para swimming meets.

"As a para swimmer I feel like we are not considered equal to other swimmers, and sometimes at competitions we are not even remembered in the medal counts. At one competition this year I was given a spare medal from a previous year rather than the newer nicer medal like everybody else. It is like our achievements are not as important and I have had people in my own squad that say 'you are just a para swimmer', even though I train harder and achieve faster times than them."

CYP member aged 13-15, Para swimming, Mass listening

Some describe experiences of being overlooked by coaches who lack the skills and knowledge to nurture young talent with additional needs. For example, a parent described how their daughter with autism (now on a talent pathway) had initially been overlooked and told by the head coach at their artistic swimming club that they would only ever be able to swim in novice competitions.

The report found that there is demand from the workforce and families alike for appropriate support and guidance to help coaches to better include and bring on young talent with SEND, particularly in smaller disciplines where there is less well established provision for swimmers with disabilities.

While there are positive stories of athletes with SEND feeling aquatics is a place they are truly accepted, valued and belong; every negative experience can result in the individuals involved feeling the opposite of this. Building skills, empathy and confidence within the workforce and those who design/run events will be critical for creating inclusive experiences all of the time.

iv. People from diverse cultural backgrounds feeling unwelcome

Members and parents from diverse cultural backgrounds describe recent and ongoing experiences of not always feeling welcome, from a stereotype that non-white athletes are less able swimmers, to racist bullying. In some cases, this has resulted in young people leaving clubs.

“The stress and anxiety as a result of racism made me quit.”

CYP member aged 13-15, Swimming, Mass listening

“I think one of the worst experiences we've had was when I had one of the white parents say we didn't expect her to know how to swim, especially where they come from.”

Parent, Swimming, In-depth interview

“[name redacted] swimming club are racist foul mouthed bullies, not only to my son, but also to me. They were abusive and bullied my son out of the club. My son has only just turned 11, I fear for non white members, which just to say there are not many!”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

The impact of racial discrimination is extremely damaging for those affected and should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

These experiences underline the overall lack of diversity across aquatics which is clearly an issue that must be addressed. Overall it is felt that too much emphasis is placed on Diversity and Inclusion training and not enough done to help bring non-white athletes up through the sport and address the barriers they face.

There is felt to be insufficient visibility of athletes from diverse backgrounds and alongside financial barriers, this makes aquatics feel like a non-inclusive, white, middle class sport.

“Swimming is a very white sport. I have been to so many galas where my child was the only child of colour. My children have not got any top swimmers like them to look up to and the policies from Swim England to improve diversity are not good enough. Most of the campaigns have been targeted at encouraging swimming as a life skill using adults and not targeted at children who want to swim competitively. There is no recognition of the barriers swimmers from BAME backgrounds have to overcome to just compete with their white counterparts.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

v. Gender and sexuality discrimination and disadvantage

Some women report feeling like they are not treated as equals by men in swimming, e.g. men assuming they are faster and rarely offering to drop behind when they are slower; pushing past women in training

which puts them off. They would like to see these behaviours acknowledged and better managed in clubs and public pools.

“Please issue a campaign to address misogyny in swimming pools. Men always push in front, dive over, join the wrong lane when they are slower than me and my female friends. I have asked a lifeguard for assistance on more than one occasion due to being tugged (literally my leg was tugged as I overtook a slow man) and dived onto. Lifeguards say they can do nothing to help. I have spoken about this on social media and the amount of women who reply with their own horrible pool stories is distressing. Women are put off from the sport due to men's behaviour. Train lifeguards/pool staff to spot this behaviour and act on it.”

Masters member, Swimming, Mass listening

Experiences surrounding the inclusion of transgender and non-binary people focus on fairness in competitions and safety in changing rooms. Continued work must be done to better understand the transgender and non-binary issues referred to and how to resolve them. There is also concern about the way situations are discussed or ‘gossiped’ about harming the welfare of transgender people, as shown by the quote below.

“Occasionally I have witnessed overly competitive parents, and there is a local swimmer who causes controversy (as it's not clear which gender s/he/they are) although they swim as a girl.”

Masters member, Swimming, Mass listening

Both recent and historical experiences of homophobia were recounted, including derogatory homophobic remarks directed at members and coaches by each other. Concerns about the welfare and safety of LGBT+ people in aquatics are ongoing and must be addressed.

3. Poor communication

Experiences of poor communication, from both clubs and Swim England, is a common complaint throughout the aquatics community, and believed to cause and exacerbate problems affecting the culture: notably power imbalances linked to a culture of fear and perceptions of aquatics as an insular, closed community. As outlined in the cultural themes section the heavy reliance on volunteers who are overburdened and under-supported is also likely part of the cause of poor communication at a club level.

Communications at a club level

Parents shared their frustrations around a lack of clear, regular or even basic information from some clubs, e.g. term dates and event dates emailed to them. Insufficient information around processes, events and technicalities of the sport are disempowering and create power imbalances within clubs, with some individuals perceived to hold all the knowledge. Lack of communication is perceived to make new parents feel peripheral and less confident to volunteer.

“I feel that parental support within the club is low due to lack of communication, support needs to start straight away with parent training programs on pool control, time keeping and coach support. This

would make for a more inclusive and supportive club especially for those that are new to swimming like I was, this would have helped me volunteer quicker and more confidently.”

Parent & squad manager, Swimming, Mass listening

Effective communication channels are believed to be more important following the pandemic due to the loss of informal knowledge sharing. Coaches comment on how parents used to chat while watching children train but few sit in on sessions now although restrictions have long been lifted.

Trying to have a two way dialogue with coaches or committee members can be a challenge for members, who perceive a lack of openness to engaging with them. Slow, inadequate responses from committee members (or no response) to queries or welfare concerns raised create a perception that communication is not two-way or the ‘done thing.’

People frequently voice that there is little point raising issues as it will either be ignored or little will change as a result. Young people report feeling that coaches can be resistant to engaging in conversation with them and their parents, e.g. asking questions about what they are doing in training or their progress. Meanwhile, coaches and volunteers running the club struggle to keep up with time-consuming and sometimes demanding requests from members and parents.

Communications with Swim England

The frustrations people have around poor communication at a club level are similar in nature to those with Swim England, e.g. late announcement of events and gradings; lack of clarity on how things work, notably talent pathways for those not already on them.

It appears that some of the challenges clubs face accessing information is filtering down to how they then interact with members, as the quote below suggests.

“There’s a lot of frustration within the club from parents that come from very last minute communication of when grading days would be. This is because Swim England base their season on the elite end, and clubs are the final thought.”

Parent & committee member, Artistic swimming, In-depth interview

Further detail on experiences of communications with Swim England are discussed in the [Views on Swim England section of the report](#).

Communication around selection decisions

Squad selection communications are consistently highlighted as having an inappropriate tone of voice and being unnecessarily harsh and cold, e.g. emailing when they are dropped from the squad with no explanation and/or warning. The absence of any feedback or transparency around the decision can raise questions about fairness of the decision, but more than anything the manner in which decisions are communicated leaves young people feeling upset and sometimes ostracised.

These experiences are likely to become a lasting, dominant memory for people who leave the sport after a short time. More empathetic communication of selection decisions however could leave people with a different impression of aquatics, or better still encourage them to keep taking part.

“During the selection for regionals and nationals for my daughter, we were sent an email that she had been dropped from the squad with no explanation. It means we as parents have to pass on the news rather than hearing this from the coaches directly.”

Parent, Water polo, Mass listening

4. Bullying and aggressive behaviour

People report numerous experiences of bullying and aggression in all its forms, both historic and ongoing. Verbal and emotional bullying of athletes by coaches is most widely experienced, along with reports of children bullying one another within clubs. Bullying is a key driver of the pervasive culture of fear and is also linked to a narrow performance focus where welfare is secondary.

Bullying and aggressive behaviour by coaches

Bullying by coaches is felt to be closely connected to an aggressive coaching style. People experience and observe:

- people being singled out for a lack of performance or commitment
- verbal threats
- shouting
- use of derogatory terms

While people who responded via the mass listening space may be describing experiences in the past, there is also clear evidence of ongoing experiences. Even experiences long ago have a lasting negative impact on athletes.

“I started swimming again in my forties after a twenty year break and my physical and mental health have improved significantly. But I’m still scarred by the actions of a rogue swimming coach who dominated my life for ten years as a teenager. A little power corrupts. I even see the same tendencies in swim coaches now. Big fish in small pools.”

Masters member, Swimming & water polo, Mass listening

“My son has suffered from PTSD from bullying and threats from his coach at his former club and received several sessions from a sports psychologist after moving clubs. When he moved clubs, my son struggled to complete full sessions, frequently crying and having panic attacks during sessions. This is not normal behaviour for my son who has always been a happy and confident child, an excellent student and a good friend.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

A combination of factors within the culture create a conducive context for aggressive behaviour and bullying by coaches. These include:

- the power coaches have to make or break aquatics 'careers' through determining who gets selected for the squad
- a more general fear of getting on the wrong side of the coach resulting in being picked on or ignored. There is evidence that aggressive methods are accepted by - and sometimes defended - by some parents who believe a more aggressive style works for their child, or who were coached this way themselves and consider it normal. Combined with the pressure on coaches to get results, this positive reinforcement (or absence of challenge), can allow more aggressive styles to persist.

Body shaming and coaches bullying athletes about their weight features in reported experiences of current and former athletes, particularly in swimming and artistic swimming.

"An awful swim coach at our club constantly humiliates girls about being 'fat' or being on their period. He ignores you when you say your child is injured and cannot do specific strokes. He then badgers the child asking why they can't do it."

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Recent incidents of sexual bullying by swimming coaches were also reported. This includes lude and sexualising remarks about young athletes, and making young female swimmers feel uncomfortable and unsafe by asking about their sexuality and relationship status, leering at them or trying to chat them up.

"I moved up to a new coach, he was young himself, approximately 20 but he would always flirt and leer at the 15 year old girls who were in my squad. This all led to a deep rooted fear about going training. I no longer felt safe in an environment that was supposed to be supportive."

CYP member aged 16-17, Swimming, Mass listening

Bullying between peers

Junior swimmers and their parents shared experiences of physical, verbal and emotional bullying by other peers in swimming clubs. This is sometimes an extension of bullying that is taking place in school, but potentially less visible in the swimming environment, e.g. in changing rooms or under water.

Some reported experiences of where coaches had joined in teasing by bullies or not challenged it, and of clubs downplaying the behaviour, as shown by the quote below from a young person.

"I was being bullied by the boy who had bullied others, my bag was kicked across the pool, I was sworn at, my kit was hidden in lockers, and I was hit on the back - all in front of the coaches - my parents had an investigation launched at the club as I became withdrawn and depressed - the club found it to be expected in a competitive environment. I couldn't face being bullied daily and they refused to move me to another group away from the boy so I chose to leave the club."

CYP member aged 13-15, Swimming, Mass listening

The response (or lack of) to bullying by coaches or peers is often felt to be equally damaging or even more so than the original experience of being bullied itself. People speak of feeling let down by clubs turning a blind eye following a complaint, not addressing bullying complaints effectively or with empathy.

Frustration is compounded where people feel Swim England had not supported them as hoped when approached for help, including recent examples where people felt Swim England had suggested that they were at fault, or have not continued to respond around an ongoing concern. Past experiences also create ongoing mistrust of how effectively Swim England deals with safeguarding issues, as shown by the following example where a young person was discouraged from pursuing a complaint where there is an apparent conflict of interest:

"I was bullied by a coach, I reported it so I was kicked out of my club and told my complaint no longer stood. I tried to take it to the regional welfare officer who didn't want to know and wouldn't respond. I took it to Swim England and was told in a meeting that I was fine in my new club and we should just forget about it and that my old coach would be spoken to about the protocols he broke. I said I wasn't happy with this and told that if I wanted to take it further I would be made to go in front of a panel and questioned by numerous people. I had only just turned 16. So I was bullied by Swim England to not take it further. The Swim England representative was friends with the chair of the club and they sat there chatting together, they both officiate together."

CYP member, Swimming, Mass listening

5. Repercussions of speaking up

Negative repercussions after speaking out - whether experienced firsthand, witnessed or warned of by others - are directly linked to a culture of fear and a "toxic environment" within aquatics which some people describe as their past and ongoing experience.

Whistleblowing, raising concerns or even simply asking questions are reported to result in a range of negative consequences, from being ignored or their complaint 'swept under the rug', to being ostracised, to hostility, threats and intimidation directed towards them. Members and parents share disappointing and stressful experiences after notifying clubs of situations, including breaches of confidentiality that made things worse for them.

"I was told by a parent that it was better not to become a whistleblower because I did not want to 'burn bridges' as people might take retaliation on my children."

Parent, technical official & committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

Inertia, a lack of proper acknowledgment or insufficient action leaves people feeling invalidated and acutely aware of power imbalances within clubs, as shown by the quote below:

"If anyone speaks out they are shut down, ostracised and they are seen as the problem. These are not just my views, a great number of parents feel like this but the coaches are long standing and viewed as successful by many, so no-one speaks out. When anyone does, they are shut down."

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

People can feel they have no choice but to leave the club (if not pushed) after speaking out. For others, hearing about or seeing the experiences of others makes them very reluctant and afraid now to come

forward. Clearly, an environment where concerns are not raised and mistakes learnt from is detrimental to athlete welfare.

Talent Pathways

This short section summarises findings around the specific experiences of those on talent pathways and performance programmes.

Reported experiences of the Talent Pathway programme are polarising and tend to be more extreme with athletes typically highlighting strongly positive or strongly negative experiences. All responses indicate that the high levels of dedication and sacrifice that the broader membership base describe are amplified for those on the talent pathways. For example, athletes describe the lengths they go to maintain their place on the pathway, including strict diets and deprioritising education and other activities outside of their aquatic sport. Financial pressures are found to increase too and fuel a belief that taking part at high performance levels in particular is non-inclusive, and can become a cause of resentment, as shown by the following quote:

"I have found that the further my children develop then the greater the costs incurred. In all the other sports I am involved with, I have never seen before that an athlete is charged for representing a regional or National development squad. I have paid out over £300 this year as my eldest lad is on a talent pathway and has made a regional squad. It seems bizarre that these successes are charged for and does leave the feeling that it is more a money making exercise."

Parent, Swimming & water polo, Mass listening

More positive experiences describe:

- the benefits of the supportive network of coaches and nutritionists to develop and nurture talent
- gratitude for the opportunities they have been given

"I'm now involved in para swimming and the talent teams in Swim England are fantastic. The opportunities given to the swimmers on talent pathways are so helpful and the people behind those, running, organising and coaching provide a supportive environment for swimmers to develop and flourish."

Parent, coach & club committee member, swimming & para-swimming, Mass listening

However, athletes and parents also report opposing negative experiences of feeling pushed too hard and overly critical coaches who lack empathy with the pressure they experience. Most describe experiences where their welfare is not the top priority. For example, swimming coaches with 'a sole focus on times' have a negative impact on mental health, in some cases resulting in young people leaving the sport altogether. Parents also express concerns around children getting insufficient sleep and attribute high rates of drop out to the intensity of training where 'only the fittest survive.'

Competitiveness between athletes on talent pathways appears to be heightened and results in an environment that can be stressful and at times combative. For example, constantly comparing times with each other, arguments in changing rooms over who is faster and should lead in lanes, and bullying at camps with little intervention from coaches or staff. As one athlete put it, 'it's every man for himself'.

"My son had a passion for the water, reaching the British Age Group and Junior Finals as a talented ambitious young swimmer. He was also on the Swim England Talent Pathway. My son tells me that

whilst at a camp he 'stood out like a sore thumb.' He was bullied and tormented throughout his time there."

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

"The warm up was 10x200 and I was around 5th in the lane and these two girls were not letting me in front; they were slowing my training and because the coach couldn't do anything about it I just had to stay on their feet. They were not happy with me being faster than them and got angry, it set a bad mood upon the group."

CYP member aged 13-15, Swimming, Online platform

The intensity of athlete experiences on the Talent Pathway programme is consistent across disciplines. However, more extremely negative experiences are found for artistic swimming that are a cause for concern. A focus on aesthetics is perceived to create additional pressures that are detrimental to young people's mental health, such as pressure for athletes to 'starve themselves to get as thin as possible' and harsh criticism that is 'too mentally abusive.'

"I've had a few panic attacks which have been quite dangerous to where I was hyperventilating during a hypoxic swim set when preparing for GB trials because I was pushing myself too hard. Another time, I witnessed a girl faint because she hadn't been drinking enough and she was being pushed too hard so she was unable to continue with the strenuous training. Unfortunately, I don't feel very valued or respected as an athlete or a human being through the progression pathway."

CYP member aged 16-17, Artistic swimming, Mass listening

VIEWS ON SWIM ENGLAND

This section discusses the range of views shared about Swim England, including examples of the kinds of experiences and interactions that have informed these.

The views on Swim England in relation to welfare, safeguarding and culture shared as part of the listening research are predominantly negative, particularly the responses shared via the anonymous mass listening.

When directly asking people their views of Swim England outside of the anonymous mass listening survey, associations are weaker and views more neutral, especially for members who are newer to the sport or who have not interacted directly with Swim England. For these members, reference points for Swim England generally tend to be limited mostly to paying their membership fee, the newsletter, and well-run competitions and events.

The range of views on Swim England shared relate to a number of key areas, outlined below. For clarity, these views are principally about Swim England at a national governing body level. However, we have highlighted the instances where people refer to Swim England at a regional level or it is unclear what level of Swim England their feedback relates to.

Defining the aquatics culture

People's experiences of aquatics clubs on the ground are remarkably similar to how people describe the values and behaviours of Swim England itself. Many key features of the culture within aquatics are considered to flow top-down from the governing body. Specifically, the commonly held belief that Swim England focuses too much on 'the elite' or aspiring elite (higher performing athletes on talent pathways, sometimes referred to as 'elite pathways'), which filters down to a sometimes myopic performance focus at the grassroots.

Swim England's perceived focus on higher performance athletes is felt to be to the detriment of the vast majority of Swim England's membership and gets in the way of providing better support for clubs around safeguarding and welfare, as illustrated by the following quote.

"Swim England gets sufficient funding and needs to prioritise what is important. There's British Swimming for elite swimming... From a safeguarding perspective if you call up [for help with an issue], you need to be given help."

Parent & former club member, Swimming, Listening workshop

Elite *swimming* specifically is perceived to be the clear focus for attention and resources, both of which are considered important for creating a positive culture and increasing diversity. This is a common complaint from members of the smaller disciplines, who feel under-supported and under-appreciated by Swim England. Greater cooperation and collaboration between aquatic sports is considered unlikely until Swim England itself places greater value on the smaller disciplines.

“Artistic swimming never gets referred to at Swim England generic training/CPDs. The language is all aimed at mainly speed swimming. Artistic swimming always feels like an afterthought, there’s a lack of respect.”

Parent & committee member, Artistic swimming, In-depth interview

Para swimmers and Masters also voice feeling like an after-thought, with limited opportunities to participate and these areas of the sport to grow.

“[There are] not enough para swim opportunities for my son to attend. Mainstream clubs are not set up for disabilities... I have to travel 2 hours to find a suitable club for my son to compete at a level where he can win medals fairly. However, our club is welcoming and supports my son in galas.”

Parent, Para swimming, Mass listening

Similar to the finding that aquatics clubs and different disciplines can feel like a ‘closed community’, Swim England’s culture too is considered to be insular with key decision-makers at regional and national levels perceived to have been involved in the sport for a long time and not open to listening to critical voices about Swim England or its staff.

Lack of support

A lack of support from Swim England is one of the more consistently and frequently cited experiences the community shared during the Listening Research Programme. This is related to three key areas discussed below:

1. Regulations and requirements
2. Communications and IT
3. Safeguarding

1. Regulations and requirements

Clubs, volunteers and coaches describe having difficulty keeping up to speed with the regulations and standards set by Swim England. Furthermore, there is felt to be insufficient support to assist with compliance.

There is an overriding perception that Swim England is removed from the reality of running a club on the ground; setting standards and mandating that clubs and coaches comply but not appreciating the practical challenges these create or making them easy enough to do.

“The NGB has become ever more distant from its membership, imposing change, affecting livelihoods and frankly, bullying people into submission or away from the sport. In my opinion, Swim England is a negative influence upon the sport at all levels, ticking boxes to ensure the next block of funding rather than supporting those who provide the local service.”

Coach, Swimming, Mass listening

Excessive administrative burden and 'red tape' is frequently cited, with frustration heightened where regulation is not felt necessary or appropriate for their club size or membership, e.g the level 2 coaching requirement for Masters.

Raised standards, new training and qualification requirements are described as 'tick box' exercises that do little to actually bring about positive change on the ground, or even result in negative impacts. For example, the reissued policy on supervision is perceived to have reduced access to competitions for young athletes and exacerbate opportunities seeming only available to the small high performing minority - a problem that is called out particularly in water polo.

"They have asked us to finish an inclusivity course, but there are no real steps taken to increase inclusivity - they just want us to finish that exercise."

Committee member, Swimming, Listening workshop

Smaller and more rural clubs feel particularly disadvantaged and do not believe Swim England appreciates or considers the added challenges they face to comply with regulations, e.g. to access training courses.

"Swim England is great at organising events especially at top and elite level but they make life difficult for small teaching clubs and they barely recognise their existence. Very soon these clubs will cease to exist and swimming and certainly water polo will start to decline in numbers of participants. They need to support the smaller clubs as well as the competitive clubs."

Parent, Swimming & water polo, Mass listening

Overall, there is frustration and resentment that Swim England updates regulations and requirements without taking time to consult with and really listen to those on the ground about the impact these will have at the grassroots before making decisions.

2. Communications and IT

Communication is felt to be poor at times, lacking or too last minute, with information difficult to access and IT problems. Frustration is greatest among volunteers involved in running clubs and who therefore interact with Swim England's resources the most, including the website, paperwork to get Swim Mark for the club, and the accounts management system. Such difficulties can also fuel a belief that the NGB is unsupportive and disconnected from the reality of those on the ground.

"They don't seem to realise the amount of admin they create with outdated systems and nothing being fully integrated."

Masters member & committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

Late announcement of competitions and grading days creates practical challenges and frustration (for clubs and families needing to make plans), as well as reinforcing a perception that aquatics has to be prioritised above all else which makes the sport non-inclusive.

"We didn't receive information on dates for this gala from coaches for a long time - it really makes our lives difficult, we couldn't find hotel rooms on the same floor. This makes it even more difficult to manage young kids.. It's a big responsibility. But coaches also receive the timetable at the very last minute."

Team manager, Event observation

The *tone* of emails is sometimes criticised for being unsupportive or lacking empathy with particular challenges some clubs face, e.g. rural clubs in accessing courses. The quote below may be referring to Swim England at a regional level rather than the NGB as they refer to matters regarding affiliation.

"Their communication skills are poor and emails are aggressive in tone. I get emails from Swim England which mean very little to me as they are not written with any context. I recently asked a question about affiliation but have yet to get a reply."

Masters member, Swimming, In-depth interview

There is, however, also positive mention of how digitisation has helped share knowledge and ensure greater clarity and consistency for coaches; highlighting the role improved communication might play in increasing more equal sharing of information and easing pressures more broadly.

"The hub with videos has been so helpful for coaches as there can be a discrepancy between the way people teach certain figures. Having them online has really helped the sport."

Coach, official & swimming teacher, Artistic swimming, Training session immersion

3. Safeguarding

Those who have come into contact with Swim England around safeguarding issues tend to have a poor view.

Firstly, the *process* of raising a confidential safeguarding concern does not always work for clubs being alerted of an issue that had been reported anonymously to Swim England. Welfare officers find they cannot always act on what was fed back to them from Swim England due to insufficient context, as shown by the quote below.

"The anonymous portal where you can just register a welfare complaint on the website and it will come to you as a club member and it will say naff all. It may not even give you the name of the child or the issue so what are you supposed to do with it? You don't know if the claim is true, who said it, when and how it was said. You don't know the context. I get what they are trying to do with an anonymous claim but then it's not worth the paper it's written on."

Parent & welfare officer, Listening workshop

Former parents of victims of abuse describe their experience of reporting as a very transactional process for a highly emotional issue. They highlight the importance of being able to talk to someone who is independent and will support families *as well as* children/members following the reporting of incidents and any investigations.

Coaches and parents alike raise a need for better *emotional support* for themselves in situations where they identify significant risks or have children disclosing welfare issues to themselves, e.g. instances of self-harm and eating disorders.

“Many look to me as a friend with issues of self-harm and I report it but who is there to support me as I’ve had to deal with this before it gets to welfare?”

Coach, Swimming, Listening workshop

Guidance and training for welfare officers is sometimes criticised for not being prescriptive enough around specific welfare issues, e.g. for how to respond to incidents of young members self-harming. Welfare officers with expertise in safeguarding contrasted clear processes to follow when working in councils and schools, to their experience volunteering in aquatics.

“I have a good knowledge of safeguarding and work within a SEN department and it’s what I’ve done for a number of years... Within my previous role I knew exactly where and who I was going to, but we don’t have this with Swim England. When you have an issue it’s not clear where to go.”

Parent & welfare officer, Swimming, Listening workshop

The researchers heard mixed experiences and views of personal support from Swim England staff and representatives for welfare officers when dealing with safeguarding incidents. Swim England ‘friends’ are generally valued and regarded as helpful. However, volunteers and parents can also find Swim England unresponsive or a lack of continuity leaves them under-supported, particularly with ongoing issues.

“They appear approachable until it’s something they don’t want to hear and then you either get ignored and told there are no Swim England friends, or you get emailed and told to stop making contact.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Swim England’s approach to safeguarding is viewed by some as *unsupportive of coaches*, particularly the impact of suspensions which leave coaches’ reputations tarnished even after they have been cleared of wrongdoing. Swim England’s approach is felt to create an environment where coaches feel very vulnerable and fearful of accusations.

“They have been very poor in support of coaches/teachers, coaches instantly suspended on the result of any allegations against them without any evidence, making it very difficult to retain or get staff into the sport. No support for coaches harmed by either parents or under age swimmers.”

Coach, Swimming, Mass listening

People voice deep concern about Swim England’s perceived unwillingness to revisit past cases where people have outstanding concerns, such as cause to believe their complaint was not properly investigated, particularly when individuals concerned are still in role. This makes it difficult for those affected to move on, and causes people to doubt Swim England’s competence and integrity regarding safeguarding more generally.

Complaints handling concerns

As highlighted in the [Weston report](#), Swim England's previous systems for managing complaints were found to be in need of major reform. Despite Swim England's acceptance and commitment to all Weston's recommendations and changes that have since been made, confidence in policies and trust in independent handling of complaints remains a concern for those who shared their views relating to the complaints process during the Listening Research Programme.

A key concern is that those responsible for the problems raised in the Weston report are the same people overseeing reforms, particularly among those who have been involved in aquatics for a long time. There is some mistrust in the independence of the judicial system whereby Swim England has an interest in the outcome. People worry that Swim England will continue to find ways to protect those in positions of power or influence, particularly individuals connected to the elite end of the sport, based on past experience such as that described in the following quote.

"One example is that a prominent national coach made a complaint at our club and we resolved the matter (although not in his favour). It was then escalated by the coach to Swim England. We then discussed the matter with our Swim England "friend" who advised us that this person was very well-connected in the swimming community and 'might we want to revise our position?' Seriously?"

Parent & committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

For those who had considered making a judicial complaint, the process is felt to lack empathy and unfairly deter and penalise people who have already experienced considerable stress and trauma, e.g. being informed they would have to pay and go through intense questioning by a panel.

"My mum contacted Swim England and spoke to someone who asked my mum to make a serious complaint but it meant paying £100 - that's a lot of money when something has affected a family so much already, also to go through the whole process again. It left me very depressed and affected my life so much, going through the intense questioning by a panel of people who clearly had no interest in your view and no intentions to help."

CYP member aged 13-15, Swimming, Mass listening

More generally, some raise concerns that Swim England is too preoccupied with managing away complaints rather than listening to critical voices and reflecting on its own culture. There is an ongoing fear of complaining *about* Swim England due to retaliation and risk of unfair treatment, including people describing experiences of being bullied and 'gaslit' by senior staff in the past.

Additionally, the new complaints systems can be perceived to be more favourable to Swim England than the system applied to complaints against others, e.g. the claim that Swim England refuses to allow historic complaints against themselves.

"They [Swim England] are scared when people try and help constructively and then vilify people who try and help and you become the enemy when you criticise them."

Masters member, Swimming, Listening workshop

Trust and approachability

The broadly negative views and interactions with Swim England discussed above translate into low levels of trust to make all of the aquatics community feel safe, welcome and included. Some contrast positive experiences of individual Swim England staff and specific teams with the trust they have in the leadership and organisational culture more broadly.

“The organisation has been supportive at individual levels but at a governance level all too often considers itself superior and knowledgeable when it's dated and out of touch.”

Parent, club committee member & competition organiser, Swimming, water polo & para swimming, Mass listening

Those more heavily involved in aquatics have become wary about what they approach Swim England about, for fear that they will be knocked back and even punished (such as being denied access to opportunities) if they say something unfavourable. Researchers observed this fear first hand while conducting the research, with some of those taking part expressing concern about Swim England identifying them and expressing a need to ‘watch what you say’ in a group setting.

“They are not supportive, certainly not approachable - the experiences in my family have shown clearly that criticising the senior members will do nothing but get a black mark against your name. This is simply not a professional organisation in the way it deals with its members.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

There is also mistrust in Swim England's intentions with the Heart of Aquatics plan and this Listening Research Programme, with people concerned these are just ‘another PR stunt’ rather than a genuine willingness to fundamentally create positive cultural change. Coaches in particular are cited as missing from the Oversight Committee, reinforcing a belief that coaches get unfairly blamed for welfare issues.

“The heart of aquatics is about safeguarding kids but what about struggling coaches? Why is the coach voice not on the oversight committee? They have put in a team to supervise without any coach input. It's all about what looks good on paper and it's about coaches being mean to people, but it's not balanced and looking at things objectively. It's an immediate reaction as there is no understanding of governance.”

Coach, Swimming, Listening workshop

Role in sustaining aquatic sport

As the National Governing Body, Swim England's actions are seen to have a decisive role in affecting the future of aquatics, from a positive role in helping to maintain infrastructure and ensuring access to aquatic sport in turbulent times, to the opportunity now to evolve the sport and culture.

Swim England is credited with supporting the aquatics community and helping protect the sport during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, for example, help to continue land training sessions with social distancing practices in place; running zoom sessions to help motivate athletes and maintain the social element of the community. Similarly, Swim England is praised for keeping pools open during the more

recent energy crisis, without which many of the problems discussed would be worse, e.g. competition for places in clubs, only people from more affluent backgrounds having exposure to water polo.

"I think Swim England did a good job in COVID and fighting to keep pools open"

CYP member aged 13-15, Swimming, Mass listening

Those who are heavily engaged or work in aquatics believe Swim England needs to now be a driving force behind broader systemic changes that will drive long-term sustainability and greater inclusivity.

Two key areas people believe Swim England should be addressing when making changes include:

- A shift of emphasis away from junior high performance swimming, reducing excessive pressure and excessively competitive 'toxic' culture
- Better support for volunteers and the workforce, particularly in relation to managing welfare and safeguarding issues

Some suggest amalgamating clubs as a potential solution to these needs so that 'middle tier' athletes are better catered for (and not lost from the sport) while addressing the issue of excessive burden upon volunteers running clubs, e.g. via paid key roles, notably welfare officers.

The following quote from the National Operators focus group talks to this idea but we also found an openness to amalgamating clubs in other strands of the research:

"We know change is required, but how will they do it when the stream of volunteers is diminishing and the system is set up from 30-40 years ago? There needs to be support for different groups talking to each other to create change. Too many different clubs are all competing for the best club and water space... [It requires] getting them into a big room to amalgamate and whose responsibility is this? They [Swim England] need to be more bold in order for the sport to survive... There needs to be clear guidance on safeguarding etc. which is harder when you have clubs all over the place."

National operators focus group

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

In this section of the report, we summarise how members of the aquatics community express their 'hopes for the future of aquatics'. These hopes outline desired changes that they believe are required to create a more positive culture.

Participants in the Listening Research Programme make consistent calls for change across a range of different areas.

Their hopes for the future cluster under five overarching themes:

1. A shift in focus away from high performance to enhancing enjoyment and opportunities for more members
2. Addressing fear surrounding safeguarding and making complaints
3. Making aquatics more inclusive and outward looking
4. Stronger support for volunteers and the workforce
5. Continued listening and acknowledgment.

1. A shift in focus away from high performance to enhancing enjoyment and opportunities for more members

More opportunities for the 'missed middle'

Across the aquatics community, people hope for a shift in focus from the minority of higher performing athletes to the broader base of members, nurturing athletes' passion whatever their level.

There is a hunger for Swim England and clubs to do more to help retain and recognise those who enjoy training in a club setting and competing at different levels. As discussed above, amalgamating clubs - so that a single club can cater for multiple ability levels - is suggested as one way to achieve this.

"Swimming needs to be far more accommodating of people who want to swim for the sake of it. Clubs have to accommodate this. It's not all about Adam Peaty. No swimming club talks about 'how does that feel' but they should, they need to."

Masters member, Swimming, Follow-up interview

People suggest that bringing back competitions that focus on camaraderie and fun would diffuse the pressure to always reach the next stage and enable young athletes to experience the broader benefits of aquatics, helping to sustain participation. This is particularly front of mind for Masters who contrast the pressure they felt - and see young athletes still experience - with the greater enjoyment they get from taking part.

“Reintroduce smaller meets - interclub galas are so much fun, you’re there as a team. Swimming is so much about the self now, only swimming for you versus your club. If they are swimmers never going to go regionals, they can still scream at the top of their lungs and cheer each other on with all their friends, it doesn’t take a lot of talent to do that!”

Masters member & parent, Swimming, Follow-up interview

Some hope for greater acknowledgment of individual progress, rather than a constant comparison to peers, to foster a less hostile environment, free from extreme competitiveness and overwhelming pressure that can be detrimental to young people’s wellbeing.

In water polo, more investment at the grassroots level is felt to be important to give players of all levels the chance to play in matches, and to reduce clubs competing for and trying to ‘poach’ the same best players to the detriment of the sport.

“For water polo, I would like to see more investment in grassroots level polo and an ethos of cooperation between clubs so that some of the more established clubs don’t kill off new club initiatives by ‘poaching’ the best players/ones with most promise from clubs that are trying to become established, but will never manage it if they constantly lose their rising stars.”

Coach, Water polo, Mass listening

Greater focus on life-long engagement

There is a strong call for encouraging longevity and enjoyment of aquatics sports for life, with Swim England felt to have an important role to play in driving this change.

“They [Swim England] should be driving a culture through the sport of fun, safeguarding, accessibility, longevity for those already involved and entry points for all ages to get involved.”

Parent, Water polo, Mass listening

Finding ways to reduce drop off in adolescence - when young people can believe they aren’t good enough or feel able to continue - is seen as a priority.

Clubs and coaches genuinely and proactively encouraging athletes to ease off training during exam periods can be important to help prevent young people becoming overwhelmed and losing motivation.

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY: EMPATHETIC COACH OFFERING FLEXIBILITY AROUND GCSES

One of the young athletes interviewed who had recently moved clubs contrasted experiences of his former coach who made no concessions for exams, with his new coach who offered as much flexibility as needed during his GCSEs. From being ready to stop swimming altogether at his previous club two months earlier, he had recently chosen to go to training on the morning of exams under the new coach; feeling that training helps to manage exam stress rather than adds to it.

"My coach [at my previous club] came up to me at some point and actually was putting pressure on me, asking me to attend more sessions during my GCSEs and to keep focusing on swimming... But at the new club, the coach said "If you need to take any time off at all, if you need to be late to a session, or anything like that, it's absolutely fine."

CYP member, Swimming, In-depth interview

There is also hope for better information and support around puberty when young people are already feeling particularly vulnerable and can worry about their performance.

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY: PROGRAMME TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF PUBERTY

A chair and parent of a swimming club had received feedback on how mums in particular were concerned about their daughters' welfare when going through puberty and wanted coaches to be sensitive to this in training.

He applied for external funding through corporate sponsorship to run a social programme: a series of land activities and lectures to help both swimmers and coaches understand what's happening to young people's bodies through puberty, the effects this can have on their training and how to have conversations about this with one another.

The programme has increased communication across the community, with a greater acceptance of puberty's impact on training and helped to mitigate parental concerns.

Given the drop off in later teenage years and at university, there's also hope for more support to help encourage and transition junior swimmers into other clubs, disciplines and Masters swimming. People suggested a range of ways to do this, including younger athletes having more exposure to Masters athletes.

"I see so many young people (18 to 25 years of age) finish in the sport when they start their careers and never return to it. It is such a shame. I think Masters swimmers ought to be invited to talk to these young swimmers to sell them the benefits of swimming for life."

Masters member, Swimming, Online platform

One participant shared how their club invites school leaver past players back to play against 6th formers, keeping them involved and also inspiring existing students to continue playing when they leave school.

"We put on a past players event during Christmas and they play against the current sixth form. Hopefully the sixth formers will remember this and come back and play when they go to university so there is that hook."

Masters member, Water polo, Follow-up interview

Artistic swimming and water polo hope for better communication and collaboration with swimming to encourage athletes to move disciplines within the community, rather than drop out altogether, e.g. promotion and signposting in clubs.

Masters swimmers hope for greater recognition of their area as an important part of the swimming lifecycle. They would like to be given more dedicated attention by Swim England, to grow their Masters swimming and improve experiences for current members. Suggestions for changes that would help include: separation from the Swimming Leadership Group, more promotion of Masters swimming, consistent coaches and better pool access in clubs.

“Masters swimmers are largely ignored or excluded by Swim England and receive a very poor level of service from Swim England. There is no recognition of the lifecycle of swimming (from childhood through adulthood) or the necessity of children seeing peers and swimmers of all ages taking part in swimming. Masters swimmers are a really important part of the swimming lifecycle. Every bit of administration of Masters swimming is poor and excludes all but those in the know.”

Former member, Swimming, Mass listening

“One hope for the future is that the internal structure is rearranged so that the Masters community are separated from the general Swimming Management Group [Swimming Leadership Group], (who have no interest in adult swimming whatsoever) and are able to create for themselves a much more bespoke service for the Masters community.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

2. Addressing fear surrounding safeguarding and making complaints

Increased independence managing issues and complaints

People hope for involvement of independent parties to ensure clubs and Swim England handle safeguarding issues impartially and fairly.

Some coaches hope for safeguarding concerns and incidents to be reviewed independently, and sanctions decided by someone outside of Swim England, to create a stronger feeling of safety in their role. Athletes and parents with experience of concerns being brushed over or mismanaged in the past also feel this would help people feel confident to come forward in the future too.

“Going forward, sanctions imposed by Swim England should be following independent decisions and should be proportionate and comparable to other sporting organisations.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

At a club level, some members and parents hope for welfare officers who are entirely independent of the club, to remove all risks associated with conflicts of interest and breaches of confidentiality.

Independence is also important for complaints where Swim England may have an interest in the outcome or the complaint is against Swim England staff, as shown by the following quote.

“Make people feel safe to complain against those who work for or are part of the organisation and make sure that when people do complain about the organisation and its staff they have a process to go to that they can trust to be fair and independent.”

Listening workshop

A clean slate

Those who have had negative experiences with Swim England hope for a review and complete overhaul of those in positions of power. There is a desire for bringing in fresh perspectives - including people from outside of aquatics - who are not perceived to be preoccupied with ‘protecting their own’ or to have been known to ‘sweep things under the carpet.’ It is believed this would bring confidence that Swim England is serious about cultural change, with a new outlook and agenda. These hopes predominantly relate to Swim England senior leadership and board, although there is also mention of the need for fresh perspectives at a regional level.

“A recruitment strategy that only looks within the sport has given us what we have now - a network of people that all know each other and protect each other, even when swimmers and volunteers have valid concerns about welfare matters.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

“I believe water polo is on the up - some of the new coaches are a breath of fresh air - but while the rump of the old guard are still in place things cannot ‘cleanly’ move forward - management previously has been a disgrace within Swim England and in many cases still is.”

Parent, Water polo, Mass listening

3. Making aquatics more inclusive and outward looking

Initiatives to increase diversity and ensure fairness

Increased representation of people from ethnically diverse backgrounds

It is hoped that greater visibility of people from ethnically diverse communities within aquatic sports, including seeing a more diverse workforce, will help to create an environment where athletes from non-white backgrounds feel welcome. Members also want clubs and workforce to be better equipped and confident around how to tackle discrimination preventatively and when they see it.

“For newer coaches to have the ability/process to challenge discrimination. For teams to have to prove that they are openly encouraging and supporting diversity within all aspects of the sport. A more diverse coaching team.”

CYP member aged 13-15, Water polo, Mass listening

"I hope that swimming continues to grow in popularity and that a diverse variety of people become professional and increase visibility for younger generations. This could be done through advertisements, campaigns and media but also within clubs. I love swimming and it will always be a part of my life so I hope that this would encourage other young people to join."

CYP member aged 16-17, Swimming, Mass listening

More training and provision for members with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Parents in particular hope that children with additional needs, whatever their ability, are able to take part in a way that works for them, with adaptations made where needed so that they can develop and enjoy the sport. There is a feeling that coaches and clubs are not sufficiently educated on SEND, and require ongoing training to better support individual members' needs, working collaboratively with parents.

"I would like Swim England to listen to parents who raise concerns about clubs and provide training for coaches on the support of neurodiverse swimmers. I would like there to be online resources available to clubs, possibly developed in conjunction with parents, that clubs can access for ideas for adaptations and how to talk to parents about difficulties during sessions. I would like coaches to be required to undergo continuous professional development that promotes inclusivity in the sport."

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Adult disabled members would like to be as involved as all other members, regardless of disability; for example, being supported to officiate poolside in a wheelchair.

A more financially accessible community

Members appreciate the rising costs for pools driven by the energy crisis, but hope Swim England can do more to reduce financial pressures or being priced out of the sport with expensive fees and competition entries, on top of training costs and other expenses. They hope that those who are struggling to afford the costs can receive financial support, allowing everyone a fair chance to take part and if relevant, continue to higher levels where costs can be very high. For example, people suggest grants to subsidise fees, discounts, promoting cheaper kit or second hand initiatives to reduce the pressure to buy the 'very best'.

"Our club is very inclusive and we are running an initiative to teach disadvantaged swimmers in our area who can't afford swimming lessons. I think more could be done to encourage swimmers from disadvantaged backgrounds. Perhaps a grant to support them. Or help for a club to have a free member who can't afford fees; it's a very middle class sport as it costs so much. This would help more swimmers from backgrounds that can't access swimming due to costs. I don't think Swim England does much to support this."

Former member, Swimming, Mass listening

Fair provision for transgender members

Members and parents share a hope for more guidelines around inclusion of transgender and non-binary members, particularly in a way that does not 'spotlight' them. For example, inclusive language in communications. Opinion is divided on what constitutes fair as regards changing room rules and provision. This is clearly an area of ongoing debate and will require continued, sensitive engagement.

Proactive body positivity and promotion of body diversity

Across the aquatics community, members hope body diversity will be better welcomed and celebrated, particularly in artistic swimming.

“We try to make sure the pictures we put out on social media are of all our body shape sizes, genders, ethnicities, everything. Because it doesn't matter who you are, what you do, if you love a sport, you've all got a common goal.”

Committee member, Artistic swimming, Follow-up interview

New voices

At a club level, there is hope that it might be possible to attract volunteers from outside of aquatics, reducing conflicts of interest as well as bringing in new perspectives to positively evolve the way things are done. There is also a hope to increase youth voice within clubs and involve younger members more in decision making, in a way that works for them.

“It needs to be made that it's not just about being a swimmer or being a parent, if someone just wants to get involved from the wider community they should be able to.”

Parent of former CYP member, Swimming, Listening workshop

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY: LEVERAGING OUTSIDE EXPERTISE TO IMPROVE CLUB RELATIONSHIPS

A club chair new to aquatics but experienced in management and leadership was asked by the club committee to train the club's coaches on how to manage parents stepping in during training, which had become a source of tension.

The chair used role play conversations and scenarios with coaches to identify how to have more constructive and empathetic dialogue between coaches, parents and athletes.

Enhanced communication

People share hopes relating to better communication, at various levels, to reduce power imbalances and set a positive tone.

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY: DEVELOPING A CODE TO IMPROVE CLUB BEHAVIOUR

Following a bullying incident on body shaming, a welfare officer held a co-creation session bringing together coaches, parents, athletes, Master athletes, and a Swim England representative to discuss and align on the values of the club.

A code was developed setting out the club's values and expected behaviours to ensure a collaborative and supportive environment for everyone.

“We wanted to be specific to our club and led by the swimmers. We got them to tell us what they thought the behaviours and values and ethics of the club were what they wanted out of it. And so we came up with a really strong set of values and ideas about what the club stands for.”

Parent & welfare officer, Swimming, Follow-up interview

Communications with club members and parents

When starting out at the club or as a new Swim England member, it's felt that a comprehensive induction on how the club and sport operates would make it easier to feel included.

“When kids join a swimming club there should be a proper conversation/meeting to explain how it all works, with the context of who Swim England is.”

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY: INDUCTION PROGRAMME AT AN ARTISTIC SWIMMING CLUB TO SUPPORT NEW JOINERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

An artistic swimming club has developed a 12 week academy and induction process that helps new swimmers and parents to feel included from the outset. The club was struggling with a high turnover of newcomers, where a big skills gap was leaving children feeling demoralised due to being at a much lower standard to established members when they joined.

To tackle this, the club introduced a 12 week programme just for beginners to give them a comprehensive flavour of artistic swimming. Parents are introduced to the sport by providing a session on what the sport entails and a glossary of language they can expect to hear when their child describes their training, to familiarise themselves.

At the end of the programme, beginners perform a routine where they swim in front of the entire club, including parents and family members. They receive a certificate, a medal and a club cap. The programme runs once a year and is advertised locally and through larger leisure centres.

Some also see a role for Swim England to facilitate constructive sharing of information, e.g. forums for parents.

“Start building a ‘welcome to swim parenting’ section of the website where parents and experienced parents can converse in an official way rather than bitching on Facebook. This could also promote pathways to volunteering.”

Parent, Swimming, Follow-up Interview

Parents and coaches alike hope for more positive interactions with one another, particularly in clubs where tensions are high. They would like clear feedback mechanisms to raise questions or concerns, and conversations to start with an open mind.

Positive examples exist where clubs had increased engagement from parents and members, and reduced tensions by inviting feedback and creating regular forums for sharing information and asking questions.

“We get parents pushing kids who aren't enjoying it anymore and making them come. We sent out a questionnaire to parents to assess goals, asking ‘is it about enjoyment or the competitive side?’ This has helped us tailor sessions better so we can retain youngsters.”

Coach, technical official & swimming teacher, Artistic swimming, Event immersion

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY: INCREASING PARENT VOICE IN ARTISTIC SWIMMING

A club chair shared how she initiated processes to give parents more of a voice within the club. As a parent, she had felt frustrated by never being asked for feedback. As soon as she became chair, her focus was on creating forums to get feedback and learn how to improve members' experience.

"If you've got anything to say, come and tell us because we can't fix things if we don't know about it."

The club now has face-to-face drop-in sessions for parents and swimmers every 12 weeks and sends out a survey at the end of every season asking what they enjoyed and what they want to see more of.

Communications between disciplines

Members from artistic swimming and water polo believe more communication between disciplines would foster a more equal and positive culture across aquatics. For example, open conversations on how best to support athletes and promote one another, to dial down suspicion around 'poaching' talent.

4. Stronger support for volunteers and the workforce

Stronger support for volunteers

As a sport so heavily reliant on volunteers, there are strong calls for more to be done to support those giving up their time for free, acknowledging their contributions through actions as well as words.

Empathy and flexibility

Volunteers would like Swim England to have more understanding and empathy of individual club's circumstances to ensure accessibility and relevance of training and standards. Smaller clubs and the smaller disciplines in particular can feel like Swim England does more to stifle than support them, suggesting a need for greater dialogue and listening to their needs and challenges.

"There is too much deflection of responsibility onto parent volunteers who are doing their best with stern consequences if they don't comply and no responsibility on the part of the body responsible for the sport. Swim England needs work with clubs to evolve practical, workable policies and solutions. An example is all Coaches need to be L2 Coach 'immediately' or lose affiliation. In our region no Level 2 courses were available for 6 months after the policy was put in place."

Parent, Swimming, Mass listening

Volunteers including coaches hope for more support and flexibility around the need for face-to-face training given the travel time and costs involved, including virtual training options where possible. This can be particularly important for rural clubs.

"More online courses for teaching and coaching will help more people uptake and become qualified to help the younger generations. Lots of people want to get involved but the majority of the sport is based on the support of volunteers with full time jobs and families. Help to make it easier for us to get qualified and involved"

Masters Swimmer, Swimming, Mass Listening

Some volunteers also hope that their job roles outside of aquatics might be considered when establishing what training they actually need. For example, a social worker or teacher will already have completed comprehensive safeguarding training.

Responsive and proactive communications from Swim England

At a Swim England level, volunteers want more responsiveness to their issues, often sent via email, to give reassurances that they have been heard. Delayed or no feedback creates a feeling that their experience or matter is not important to Swim England.

“I wish they would communicate better. They changed a particular thing to do with safeguarding and I emailed them back in May, sent the email 3 times and I still have not heard back from them.”

Committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

Committee members and coaches alike hope for a more understanding tone of voice from Swim England. Some committee members complimented members of the Swim England team they had spoken to on the phone regarding issues, but felt this human side of the organisation is lacking in other communications, e.g. blanket emails regarding compliance. Communication with a personal touch is greatly appreciated and can help them feel more confident in their roles. For example, one participant commented on how grateful he was to receive an introductory email from his Swim England Welfare Lead earlier this year telling him to contact her if he had any welfare concerns.

“Until recently I wouldn't have known how to escalate welfare concerns until recently I had this email from Swim England from apparently my Welfare Lead. I replied directly to her ‘this is brilliant - thank you’.

Coach & Parent, Water polo, Follow-up interview

Across the board, volunteers (and members) hope for communication further in advance about events, to allow them better plan aquatics commitments around their lives. For example, being given more notice of galas, meets and grading days; and shared access to dates for technical officials:

“Publish national or regional meets calendars circulated to officials so we have opportunities to sign up for dates that suit. We currently only hear about meets when we get a pleading email desperate in the last few days. There just isn't a coordinated system.”

Technical official, Swimming, Mass listening

Clubs would appreciate advance communication (and consultation) around proposed changes to standards and regulations. People voice frustration at decisions regarding regulation update decisions being already made and in place before a club has had a chance to implement any changes, causing added pressure and stress to be compliant in time or risk the club being shut down.

Easier administration

Committee members running clubs hope for more streamlined processes and systems to help increase efficiency and make it less time consuming to be compliant. For example, easy access to example documents needed for compliance, and integrating operating and accounting systems, as described in the following quotes.

"I would like to see more support for clubs so that numerous volunteers aren't duplicating work from an administrative perspective. A repository of example documents that clubs are supposed to have to be compliant with all the necessary regulations would be a good place to start. Examples of documents that would be considered good or best practice."

Committee member, Swimming, Mass listening

"As a treasurer I have to look at multiple accounting systems - Swim England's system, there is one that we use at clubs and putting it all together just takes up too much of my time."

Treasurer, Swimming, Club immersion

Recognition and reward

Lastly, volunteers hope to feel acknowledged for their commitment to aquatics. As a role that often requires a lot of time, as well as the costs incurred for training and qualifications, some would appreciate more recognition. Volunteers suggest financial incentives such as discounts on fees or grants to get qualifications for long service volunteers, through to less tangible tokens of appreciation, such as check-ins to see how they are doing.

Job security for workforce

Aquatics coaches and teachers hope for more professional security in their jobs, particularly in the current economic climate. At present, they often feel vulnerable to contracts terminating or last minute lesson cancellations, which puts them under financial pressure and can make the job feel untenable; as illustrated by the quote below.

"I would like to see more secure jobs for swim teachers. I have an 8 hour contract plus casual hours. Mostly school swimming in the day time. My contract has been changed with short notice, if a school cancels my hours are withdrawn, I am even ending up owing my swim school hours because they are closing for maintenance. I am having to consider giving up a job I love because I cannot afford to keep doing it."

Coach, Swimming, Mass listening

Professional support when facing unfair dismissal or attempts to remove coaches from clubs on false pretences can be important for those who have come across such situations. For example, a coach shared how Swim England's Coach+ membership had been helpful through providing access to responsive support and legal advice. There is hope that more coaches can receive this level of support if needed.

As discussed above, fear of allegations also plays into perceived job insecurity for coaches and will need to be considered within the broader strategy to address pressures that are pushing coaches away from the profession.

5. Continued listening and acknowledgment

The Listening Research Programme has sparked hope that Swim England will continue listening, proactively seeking feedback and providing safe spaces for people to come forward to share their views and experiences.

“Continue seeking and listening to the voice of people involved.”

Parent, Water polo, Mass listening

“They should be a lot more open to improving the sport and listening to the experiences of children and families.”

Parent, Artistic swimming, Mass listening

Some people who took part in the research voice concern that Swim England conducts consultations *after* decisions have largely been made, which exacerbates mistrust. Going forwards, it will be vital to cultivate a listening culture and continually engage with different groups around *how* to address the concerns the Listening Research Programme has identified.

‘Historical’ cases

Throughout the Listening Research Programme, we became aware of victims who would like further opportunities to talk to someone independent about their experiences, in the hope that what happened to them could be prevented from happening to others. Victims of abuse and their families hope to feel recognised and accepted by Swim England, including Swim England reaching out to ask how they are doing, and through transparent acknowledgement of what happened at their clubs.

“They could come out and say ‘we can’t put it right for the victims but we can for kids going forwards, we’ll always do the right thing.’”

Parent of former CYP member, Swimming, Mass listening

Similarly, those who complained in the past and believe they were mistreated or complaints mishandled, call for the opportunity for historic cases to be considered for reinvestigation, ideally by an independent, legally qualified person/organisation. They hope that those involved (including Swim England staff) will be open to admitting when things were not dealt with appropriately, mistakes learnt from and proper apologies offered where they are due. Those who feel they have been mistreated can feel very strongly that only this approach will signal a real commitment to change.

“Actually listen to and hear what is said (both in this listening exercise and otherwise), accept they are sometimes wrong, and then put things right when they are.”

Masters member, Swimming, Listening workshop

ADDENDUM: Quantitative benchmarking survey with current club members

This section of the report details the approach and results from the quantitative benchmarking survey which was conducted after the main listening research and informed by key themes and findings discussed above. The quantitative research had a limited scope and should be considered in the context of the more comprehensive qualitative research findings.

Purpose of the quantitative benchmarking survey

The purpose of conducting the quantitative benchmarking survey was to capture numerical measures for safeguarding, welfare and culture, from current club members, to enable Swim England to track its progress over time. The data is intended to be used as a point of comparison to assess whether changes that are implemented do, over time, have the desired positive impact of creating a more positive culture across aquatics.

Methodology of the quantitative benchmarking survey

The quantitative benchmarking survey was carried out online for two weeks, between Thursday 19th October and Wednesday 1st November. Swim England sent 170,000 email invitations to current club members, aged 16 years and over, and to parents of under-16 current club members. Current club members below 16 years of age answered questions in the survey only after their parents gave explicit consent.

The quantitative benchmarking survey followed an intensive period of qualitative research employing multiple methodologies including in-depth interviews and a mass listening programme available to current and past members. The structure, flow, questions and response options of the survey are closely informed by this qualitative research, and the key themes relating to safeguarding, culture and welfare that emerged.

The survey covers topics including:

- Feelings about current members' aquatics discipline in the past 3 months
- Agreement with a set of statements measuring the general state of play regarding safeguarding, welfare and inclusivity in aquatics
- Positive and negative experiences in aquatics in the past 3 months
- A scenario exploring what respondents believe they would do in the event of witnessing a safeguarding incident
- Awareness of Swim England (the National Governing Body) and its purpose
- Perception of how Swim England is delivering for its members
- Awareness and experiences of raising a safeguarding and welfare concern, or a judicial complaint
- What respondents would like to change about aquatics

Scope and limitations

The report outlines below a number of key limitations to the scope and function of the quantitative survey which mean that it cannot and should not be interpreted as delivering a definitive statement on safeguarding, culture and welfare for aquatics. It is an attempt to provide numerical data against some of the key themes that emerged through the Listening Research Programme. It was not designed to capture data against all themes or to prioritise one issue over another. Further, the quantitative survey should not be interpreted as a validation of the findings of the full programme of qualitative research. It is the wider listening research that has informed the content of recommendations.

Short time-frame of the quantitative survey

The survey was designed to capture a snapshot of current members' recent experiences, not to capture experiences over time. This snapshot provides an initial set of quantitative markers against which Swim England then uses for comparative purposes at a future date. The survey asked current members about experiences in the past 3 months in order to capture experiences while they are relatively fresh in respondents' minds, and minimise errors due to lack of recall.

It should be noted that the survey's purpose was not to measure the prevalence of past experiences and it did not attempt to capture experiences going back further than 3 months. It therefore cannot and should not be used to extrapolate to historical experiences.

Broad-based measures of safeguarding, welfare and culture

Quantitative measures of culture, welfare and safeguarding need to be, by definition, broad-based, in order to function as high-level benchmarks (since it is difficult to interpret or take action based on measures that are too specific and conditional). However, there is additional nuance and granularity behind high-level measures that the survey was not designed to collect or measure. Therefore, once again, the benchmarks collected in the survey should not be interpreted as the full and definitive statement of safeguarding, culture and welfare in aquatics.

Audience

The quantitative survey was sent out to current Swim England affiliated club members *only*. The survey cannot comment on the experiences of former members who have subsequently left aquatics, or of people who never participated in aquatics. The experiences of current club members may plausibly be different from past club members who left, or of people who never joined. Therefore, the survey findings cannot and should not be used to extrapolate conclusions about the state of safeguarding, welfare and culture among potential or past club members.

Who answered the survey

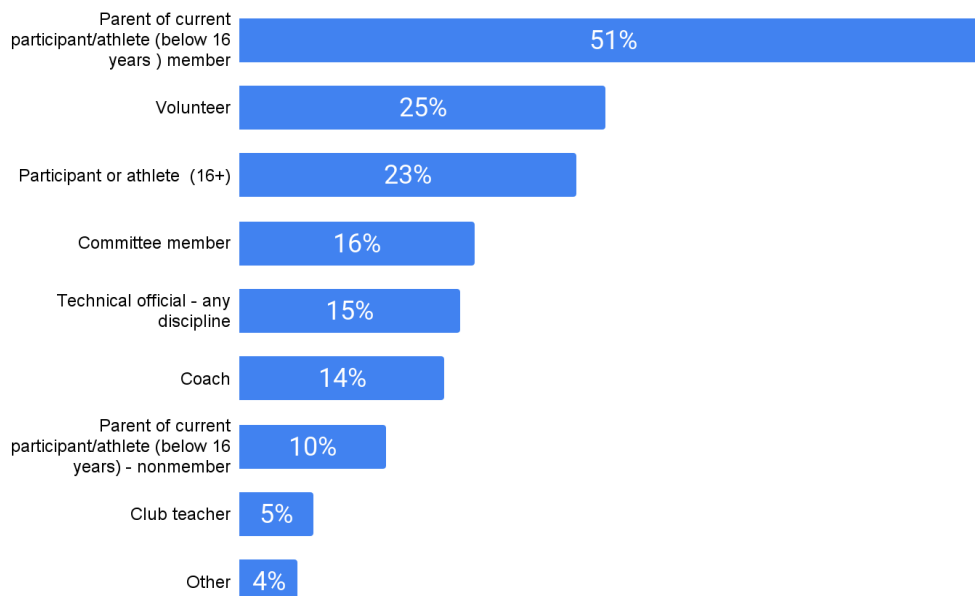
3,589 respondents completed the survey. The sample breakdown is summarised below.

Role

As highlighted in the qualitative research, in aquatics individuals can wear many 'hats'. Respondents were asked to indicate both all the roles that they performed, as well as the roles they spent the *most* time in over the past 3 months. Respondents were asked to answer the remainder of the survey in the capacity of the role they had spent most of their time in within that recent time period. This was done to avoid the ambiguity of respondents answering thinking of multiple roles, or overburdening the respondents by asking them to answer the survey multiple times - once for each role that applied to them.

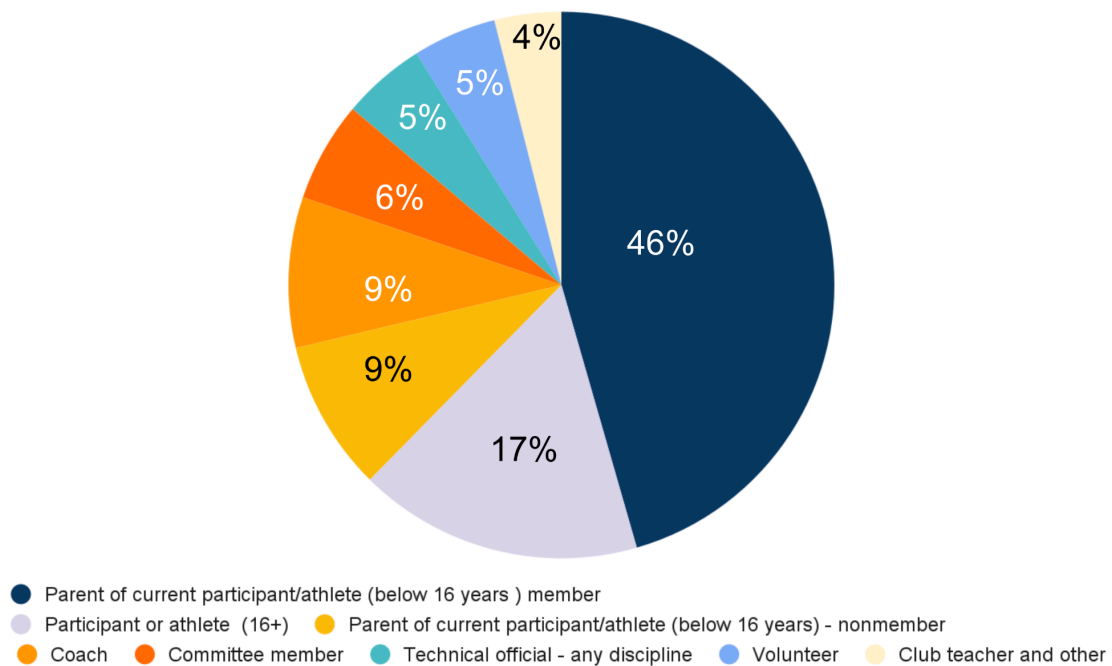
The largest single group, among the roles below, is that of parents of current participants or athletes below 16 years of age, specifically parents who are members of Swim England themselves, with more than half of respondents (51%) indicating they spent time in the past 3 months in this role, and nearly half (46%) indicating they spent *most* of their time in the past 3 months in this role.³

Roles played by survey respondents



³ This was the case across the four aquatic disciplines.

Role in which survey respondents spent most of their time in the past 3 months



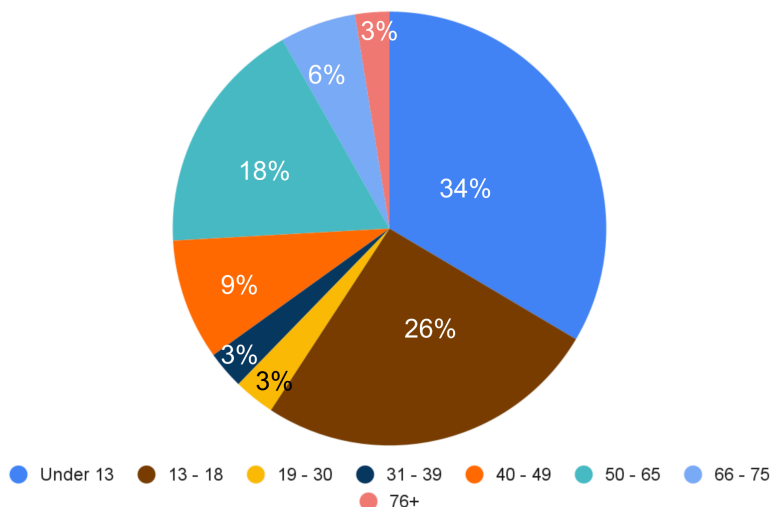
Note: Q1: "How are you involved in your aquatics community? Please select all that apply." Q2: "And thinking of the past 3 months, which of the following did you spend **most** of your time in?" N= 3,589

Age

Respondents were asked to enter their age if they indicated they spent most of their time in aquatics as a participant, member of workforce, volunteer etc. If they indicated they spent most of their time in aquatics as the parent of a participant under 16, they were asked to enter the age of their oldest child under 16 participating in aquatics. For the remainder of the survey, parents were asked to answer questions thinking of their oldest child under 16 participating in aquatics. Once again, respondents were asked to answer thinking of one child, in order to prevent the ambiguity of answering with the experiences of multiple individuals in mind, and to prevent overburdening respondents by asking them to take the survey multiple times, one for each child under 16 participating in aquatics.

34% of respondents are parents of a child under 13 years old, the largest single group of respondents in the survey, followed by the parents of participants under 16, and participants between 16 and 18.

Ages of survey respondents (or of survey respondents' oldest child under 16 active in aquatics)



Note: Q3 [asked to respondents who spent most of their time as adult participants, coaches, technical officials, volunteers, club teachers or others]: How old are you?

[Asked to respondents who spent most of their time as parents of participants under 16]: How old is your child who participates in aquatics? (If you have multiple children below the age of 16 participating in aquatics, please answer the following questions thinking about the oldest child under 16 in aquatics)

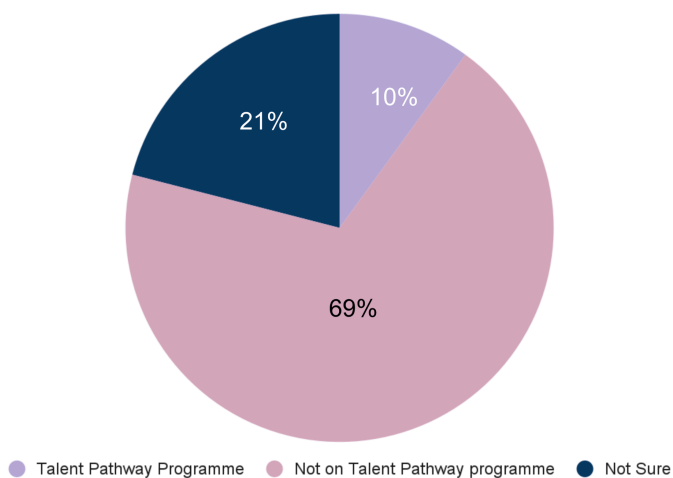
N= 3,589

Talent Pathway Programme

Adult participants were asked if they were on the Talent Pathway Programme, and parents of minor participants were asked if their child⁴ was on the Talent Pathway Programme.

69% of respondents said that they (or their child) are not on the Talent Pathway Programme. 10% of respondents indicated that they (or their child) are on a Talent Pathway Programme. Just over 20% of the respondents are not sure.

Respondents who are (or whose child is) on the Talent Pathway Programme



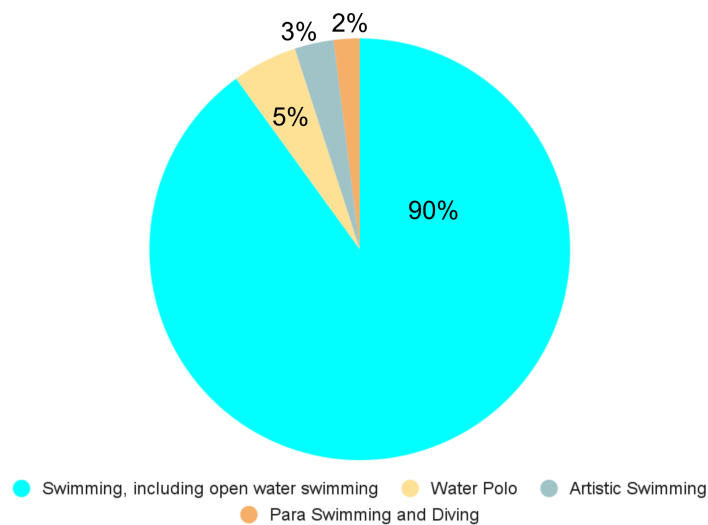
⁴ As a reminder, respondents who said they spent most of their time in the past 3 months as parents of under-16 participants were asked to answer the survey thinking of their oldest child under 16 participating in aquatics.

Note: Q3a: [asked to 16+ participants] Are you on the Talent Pathway Programme?
[asked to parents of under-16 participants/athletes]: "Is your child on the Talent Pathway Programme?"
N= 3,589

Discipline

For the bulk of respondents, they (or their oldest child under 16 active in aquatics) are most active in swimming (which includes open water swimming). 90% indicated that their discipline, or that of their oldest minor child, is swimming. For 5%, their discipline is water polo. Sample sizes for respondents from para swimming and diving were too small to be analysed individually. Therefore, for the remainder of the benchmarking survey analysis, data for para swimming and diving are combined into a category called 'Other'.

Aquatics discipline in which respondents were most active in the past 3 months⁵



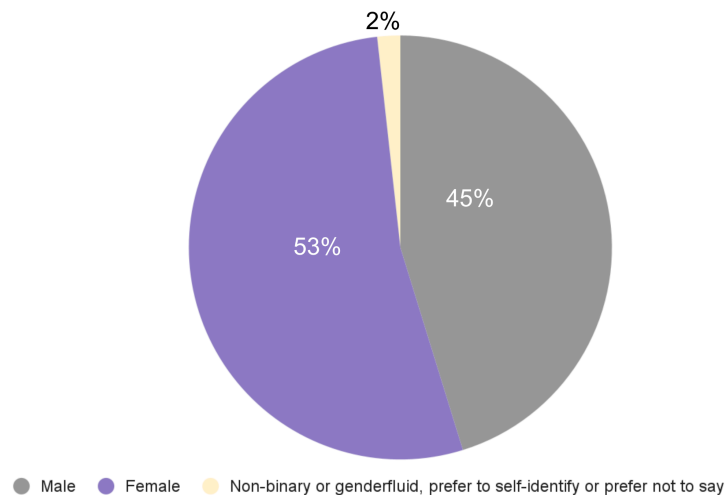
Note: Q4: [asked to participants 16+, coaches, officials, teachers, volunteers, committee members, club teachers or other]"What is your aquatics discipline (this includes open water swimming)? If you are in more than one, please think of the one you are most active in." [asked to parents]: "What is your child's aquatics discipline (this includes open water swimming)? If your child is in more than one, please think of the one they are most active in."N= 3,589

Gender

45% of the survey respondents are male, and 53% are female.

⁵ A higher proportion of workforce and volunteers from water polo (38%) and artistic swimming (42%) completed the survey than swimming (27%) or diving and para swimming (30%). The reader may query whether differences in findings by discipline are confounded by differences in the % of workforce and volunteers in disciplines. However, differences in the patterns of results for water polo and artistic swimming suggest that both discipline and role contribute to differences in perceptions, attitudes and experiences.

Gender of survey respondents



Note: Q16. [asked to participants 16+, coaches, officials, teachers, volunteers, committee members, club teachers or other, and minor participants answering with the explicit permission of parents] "Are you... (male, female, non-binary or gender-fluid, prefer to self-identify, prefer not to say) [asked to parents of minor participants answering the survey for their child]" "Is your child... (male, female, non-binary or gender-fluid, prefer to self-identify, prefer not to say) N= 3,589. Under-16 respondents were only shown this survey question after their parent or guardian gave explicit consent.

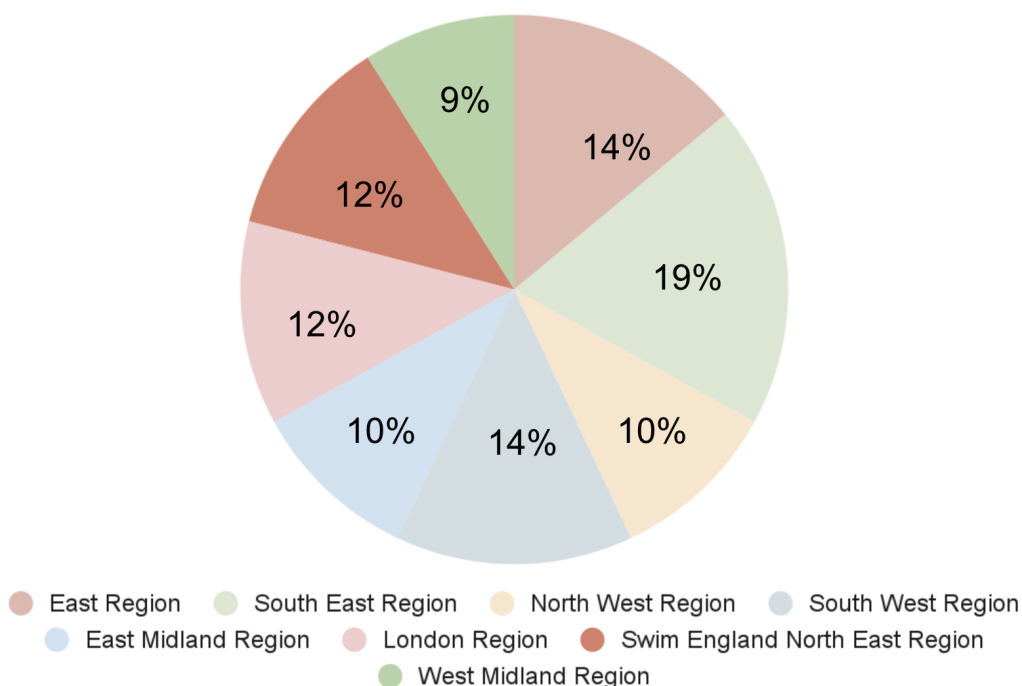
Region

Respondents were asked to indicate their Swim England county, which was then mapped to Swim England regions:

- East Region
- South East Region
- North West Region
- South West Region
- East Midland Region
- London Region
- Swim England North East Region
- West Midland Region

Respondents are fairly evenly split across the regions, with the highest proportion of respondents (19%) in the South East region, followed by 14% in the East region and South West region.

Survey respondents' Swim England region



Note: QD4. Does your Swim England county begin with... If your Swim England county name begins with 'Swim England', please ignore that part. For example, if your county is 'Swim England Cambridgeshire' we're just thinking of 'Cambridgeshire'.

1. A - L (e.g. Bedfordshire ASA, Swim England Cambridgeshire, Lancashire County WPSA)
2. M - Y (e.g. Middlesex County ASA, Swim England Norfolk, Yorkshire ASA)
3. Don't know

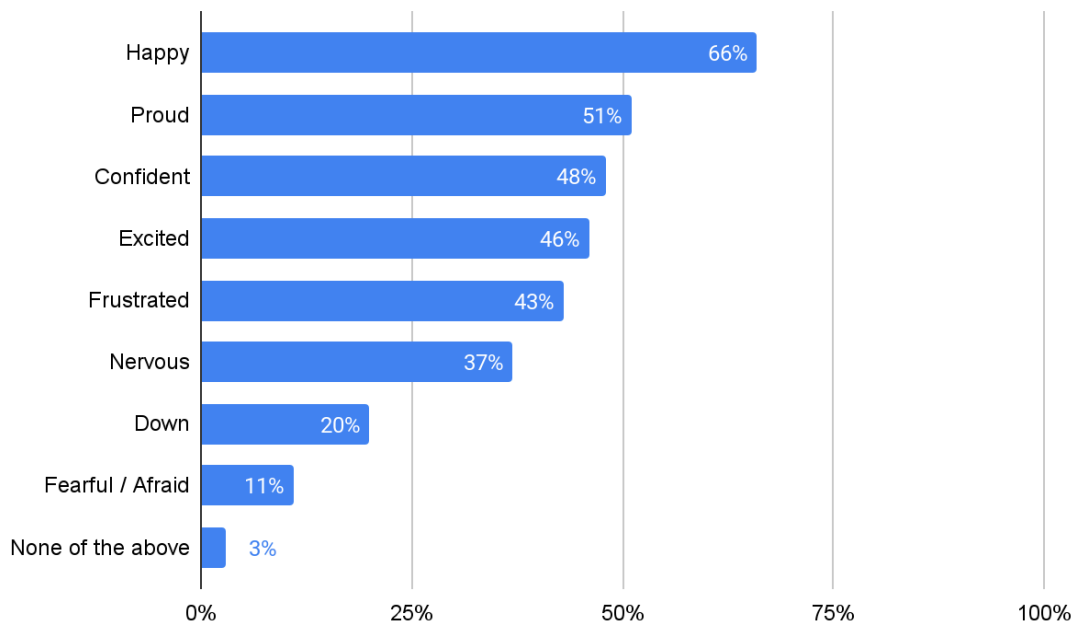
QD4a. Which of these Swim England counties are you part of? (Tick one). Swim England counties were matched to Swim England regions according to matching provided by Swim England. N= 3,589.

What respondents felt about their aquatic discipline in the past 3 months

Respondents were asked to indicate their feelings in the past 3 months, thinking of the role and aquatics discipline they had spent the most time in. We asked this question to explore respondents' general feelings, before asking about specific experiences (positive and negative) in the past 3 months. We note that the quantitative survey did not seek to flush out the underlying reasons behind these feelings. We refer readers to the report for the main Listening Research Programme to help explain the reasons that underpin these feelings.

Overall, more respondents indicate each of the 'positive' emotions: happiness, pride, excitement, confidence or excitement, compared to each of the more 'negative' ones: nervousness, feeling down, frustration or fear. The most frequently-reported feelings are those of happiness (66%) followed by pride (51%). However, we caution that nearly half (43%) of respondents report feeling frustration and more than a third report feeling nervous (37%).

What respondents felt about their aquatics discipline in the past 3 months



Note: Q6: [asked to parents answering for children] "In the past 3 months, has your child felt..." [asked to others] "In the past 3 months, have you felt..." N= 3,589. Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

Moreover, once respondents were asked what they had felt *most* in the past 3 months, while happiness remains the most commonly reported feeling (chosen by 34%), frustration is the second-most frequent, with 17% of respondents reporting this.

There are further nuances depending on the role in which the member had spent most time in the past 3 months. For example, when asked what they (or their child) felt most in the past 3 months, those who spent most time as participants (or parents of participants) report they had felt happiness most (39-41%), but only 13% - 22% of the respondents who had spent most of their time in other roles report this.

Respondents who spent most of their time as committee members, volunteers and coaches report they had felt frustration most in the past 3 months; almost half of the committee members (44%), about a third of respondents who spent most of their time as volunteers (34%) and coaches (31%), compared to between 10% - 16% of participants (or parents of participants).

What survey respondents felt *most* about their aquatics discipline in the past 3 months - by role in which they spent most of their time



Note: Q7: [asked to parents answering for children] "And in the past 3 months, which has your child felt most?" [asked to others] "In the past 3 months, which have you felt most?" N=621 (Participant 16+); 578 (Child answering for themselves); 1380 (Parent answering for child); 309 (Coach); 174 (Technical official - any discipline); 164 (Volunteer); 225 (Committee member 225); 138 (Other). Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents

Measuring perceptions of safeguarding, welfare and inclusivity in aquatics

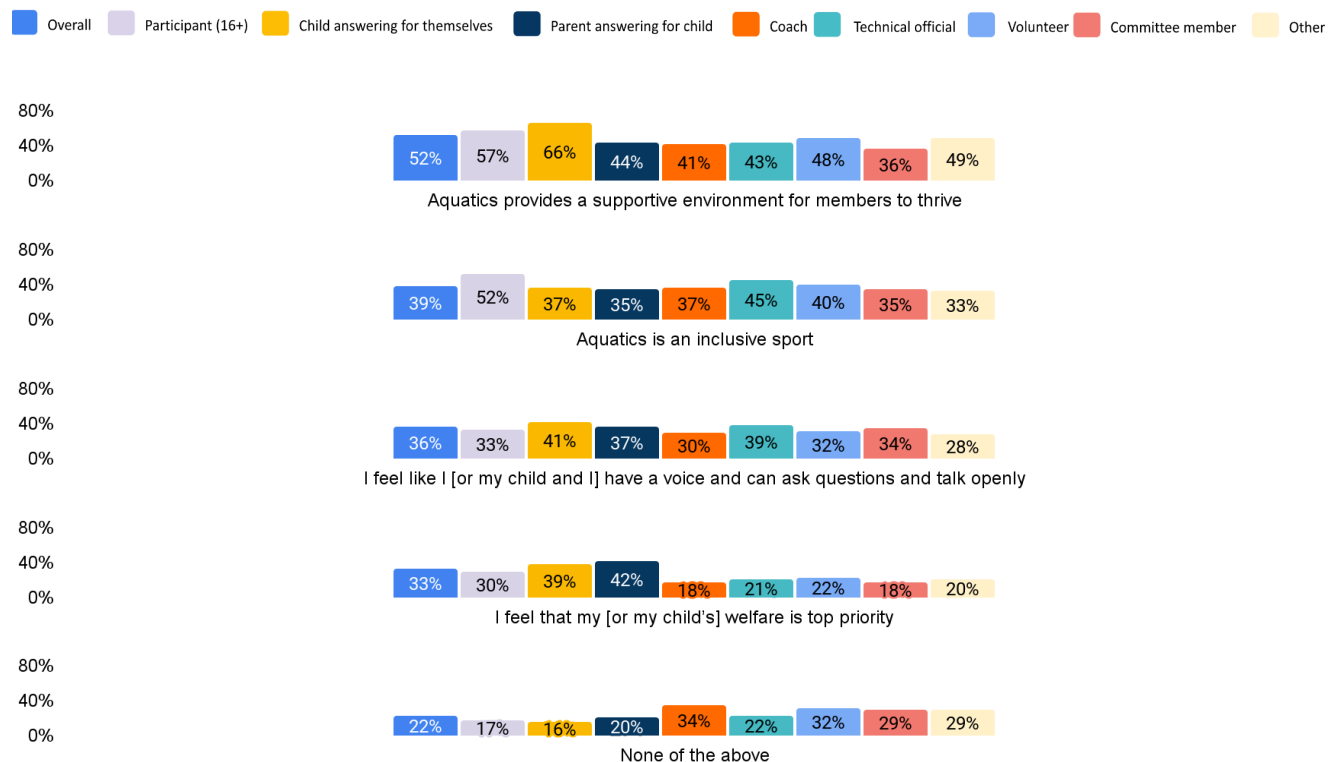
Respondents were asked to indicate which of a set of statements they agree with (or 'none of the above') based on their own experiences of aquatics in the past year. The question was deliberately framed in this manner to provoke a response and ensure a clear response was shared in the survey. The statements were based on extensive qualitative research preceding questionnaire development.

Just over half (52%) of respondents indicate they feel aquatics provided a supportive environment where members could thrive. It is of concern that such a large number of respondents were not able to agree with this statement. Only a minority (between 33% and 39%) agree with the remaining statements, and 22% do not agree with any of the statements.

Respondents' feelings about their aquatic discipline relating to welfare, safeguarding and inclusion can be very different depending on the role in which they spent most time in the past 3 months. For example, more than half of respondents who spent most of their time in the past 3 months as participants 16 years and over, report that they believe aquatics is an inclusive sport (52%), compared to 35-40% of parents and participants under 16 years, volunteers, committee members and coaches.

Workforce, technical officials and volunteers are also significantly more likely (30%) to report that they agree with none of the high-level benchmarks. This is consistent with these member groups being the most likely to report frustration and fearfulness (above).

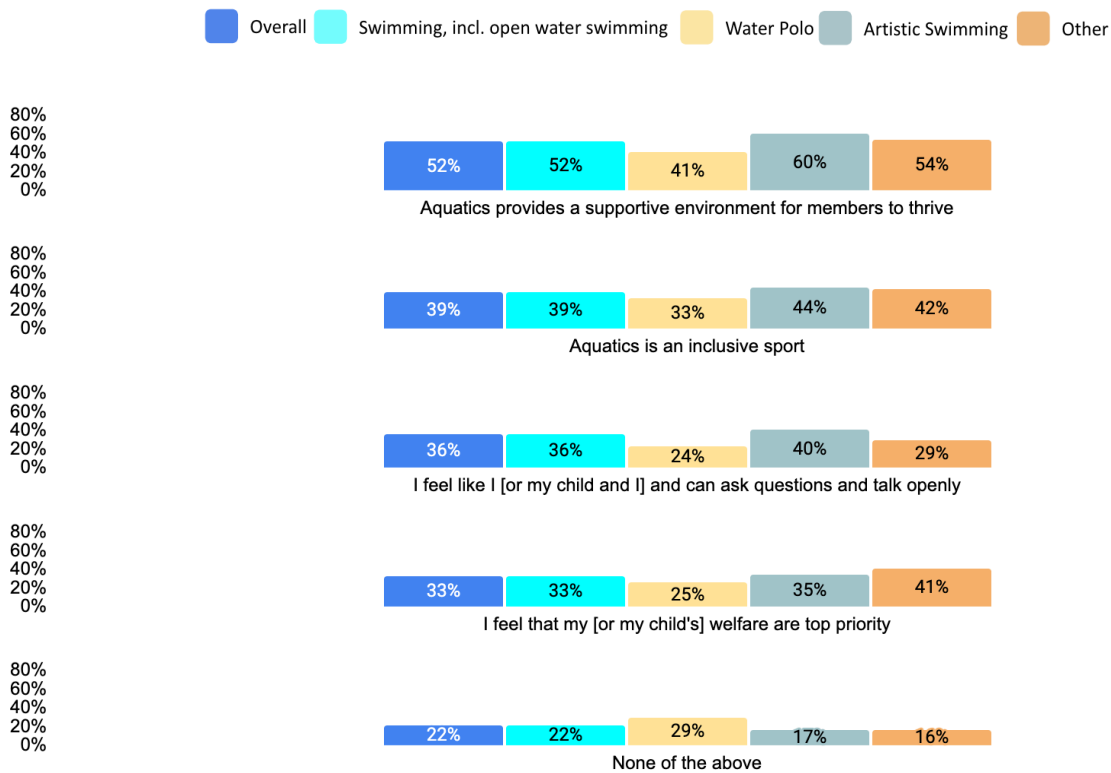
Agreement with statements regarding the state of safeguarding, welfare and inclusion in aquatics - by role in which respondent spent most time



Note: Q8: [asked to parents answering for children] “Looking at the statements below, which would you agree with based on your child’s experience in the past year?” [asked to others] “Looking at the statements below, which would you agree with based on your own experience in the past year?” N=621 (Participant 16+); 578 (Child answering for themselves); 1380 (Parent answering for child); 309 (Coach); 174 (Technical official - any discipline); 164 (Volunteer); 225 (Committee member 225); 138 (Other). Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents. Children were asked simpler versions of the same statements: 1. Aquatics is a sport where everyone is equal and feels welcome; 2. The adults in charge care about my wellbeing more than my results; 3. I feel supported and encouraged; 4. I feel like I can say what I think and feel, and don’t worry about asking questions

Respondents who spent most of their time in water polo are less likely than other disciplines to agree with any of the high-level benchmark statements.

Agreement with statements regarding the state of safeguarding, welfare and inclusion in aquatics - by discipline



Note: Q8: [asked to parents answering for children] “Looking at the statements below, which would you agree with based on your child’s experience in the past year?” [asked to others] “Looking at the statements below, which would you agree with based on your own experience in the past year?” N=3217 (swimming, incl open water swimming); water polo (165); artistic swimming (107); Other (100). Sample sizes for diving and para swimming were too small to be individually analysed. Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents. Children were asked simpler versions of the same statements: 1. Aquatics is a sport where everyone is equal and feels welcome; 2. The adults in charge care about my wellbeing more than my results; 3. I feel supported and encouraged; 4. I feel like I can say what I think and feel, and don’t worry about asking questions.

Positive experiences

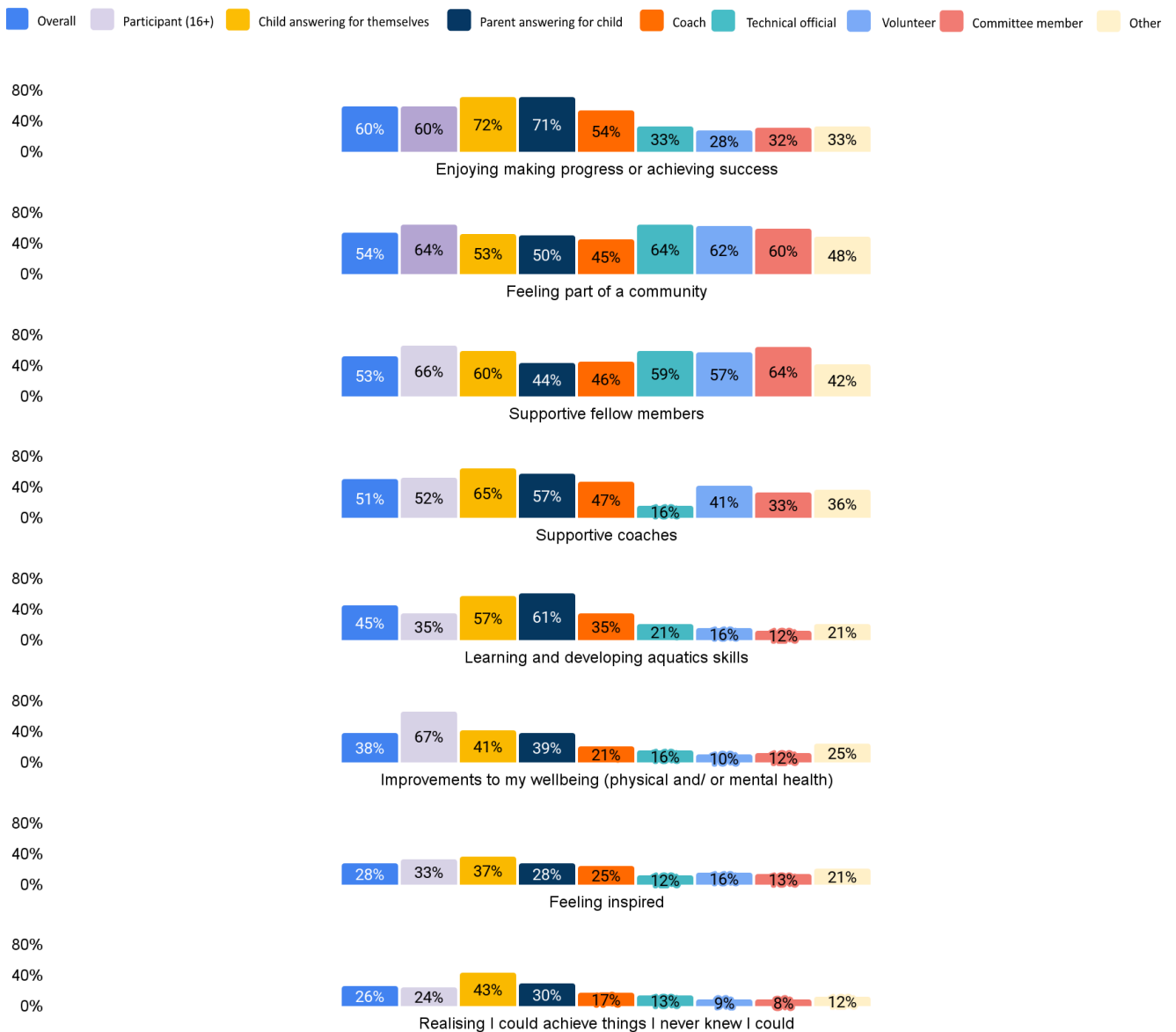
Respondents were shown a range of types of experiences, and asked which of these they could relate to over the past 3 months. The main positive experience reported relates to making progress and

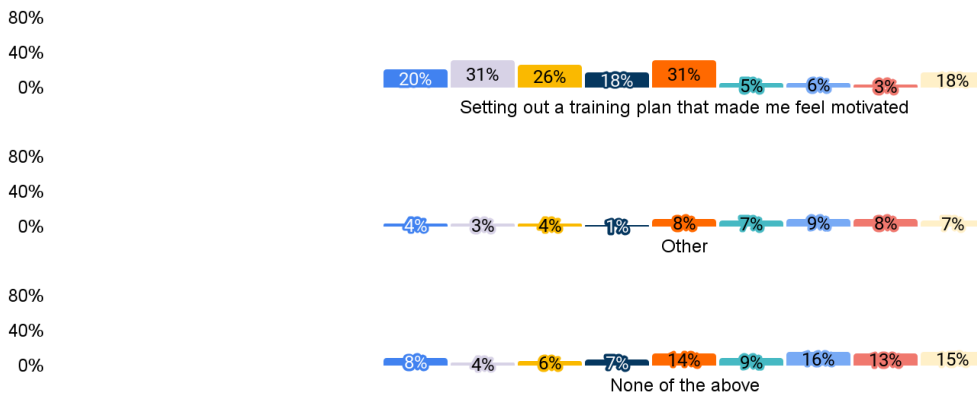
achieving success, selected by 60% of respondents. In addition, consistent with the high-level benchmarks above, a sense of community and supportive fellow members and coaches are key positive experiences, with over half of the members selecting these.

Overall, most respondents relate to at least one of the positive experiences in the survey (with only 8% indicating they couldn't relate to any). On average, respondents select 2 positive experiences.

Respondents who spent most of their time as coaches, teachers, technical officials, committee members etc. are significantly more likely than parents or participants to select 'None of the above' i.e. they are significantly more likely to report that they relate to none of the positive experiences mentioned in the survey. We note that some positive experiences are less relevant to respondents who are not participants, e.g. setting out a training plan that made me feel motivated.

Positive experiences survey respondents can relate to in the past 3 months - by role in which respondent spent most time





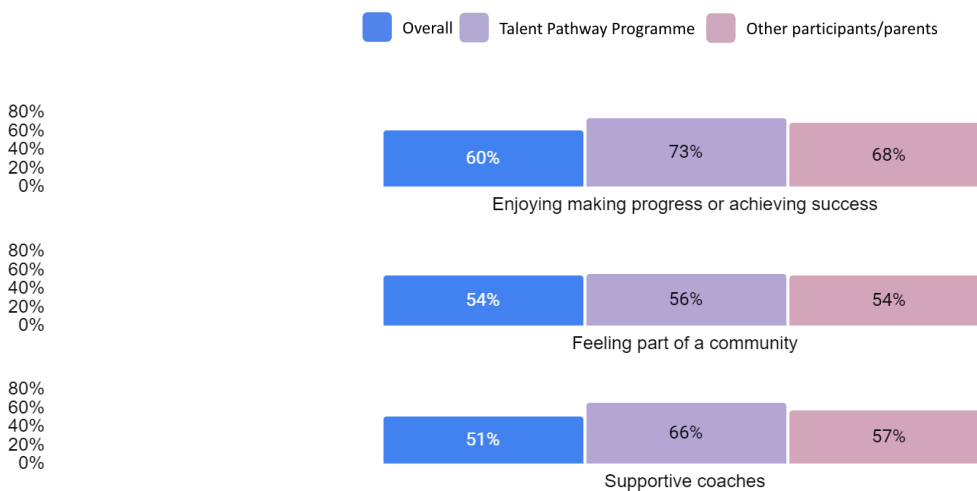
Note: Q9: [asked to parents answering for children] "Thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences can your child relate to?" [asked to others] "Thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences can you relate to?" N=621 (Participant 16+); 578 (Child answering for themselves); 1380 (Parent answering for child); 309 (Coach); 174 (Technical official - any discipline); 164 (Volunteer); 225 (Committee member 225); 138 (Other). Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

Talent Pathway Programme participants (and their parents) are significantly more likely than other participants and parents to report the experience of:

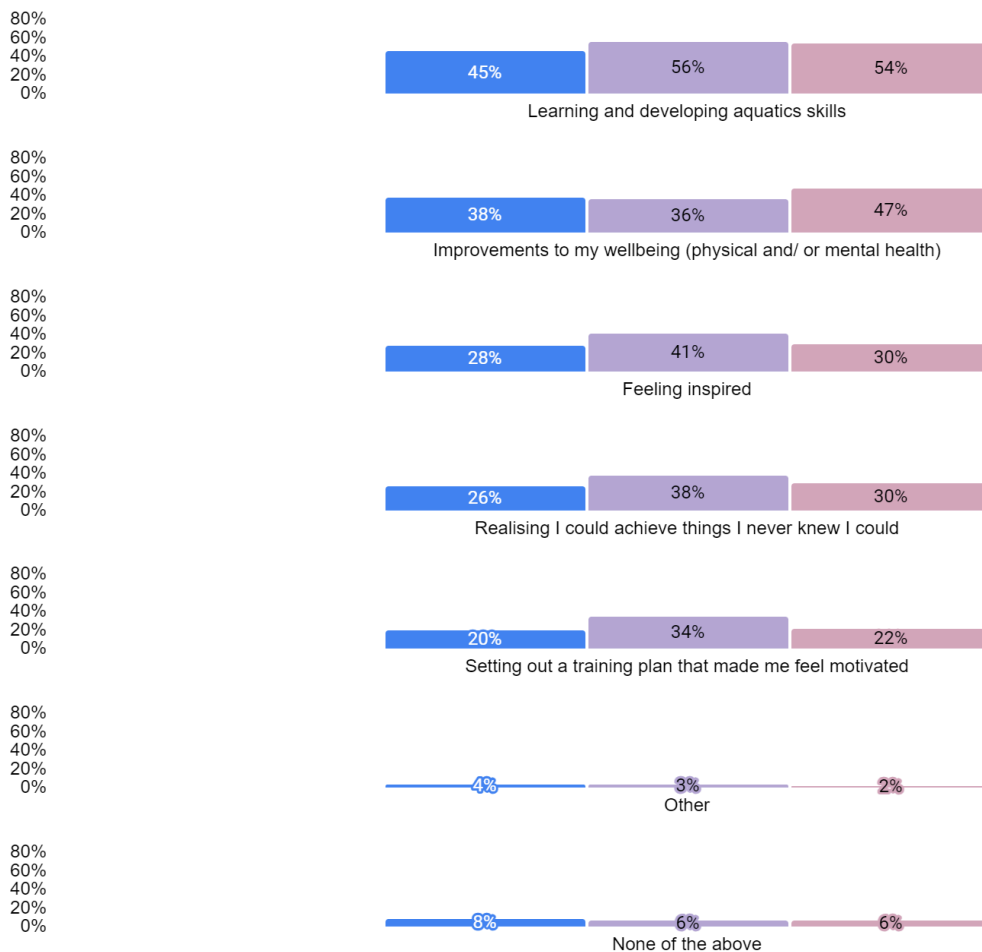
- Supportive coaches (66% of Talent Pathway participants compared to 57% of others)
- Feeling inspired (41% of Talent Pathway participants compared to 30% of others)
- Realising I could achieve things I never knew I could (38% of Talent Pathway participants compared to 30% of others)

However, Talent Pathway Programme participants and parents are significantly less likely (36% of Talent Pathway participants compared to others) to report improvements to their physical and/or mental health, suggesting high-pressure programmes have a less positive impact on wellbeing (discussed in more detail in the next section).

Positive experiences survey respondents can relate to in the past 3 months - by participation in the Talent Pathway programme⁶



⁶ Note that the 'overall' bar in this figure includes data for workforce i.e. data for club members who are neither participants nor parents. Therefore, the 'overall' bar is not the average of the numbers for Talent Pathway participants (or parents) and other participants (or parents).



Note: Q9: [asked to parents answering for children] "Thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences can your child relate to?" [asked to others] "Thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences can you relate to?" N=250 (Talent Pathway Programme); 2329 (not Talent Pathway Programme)

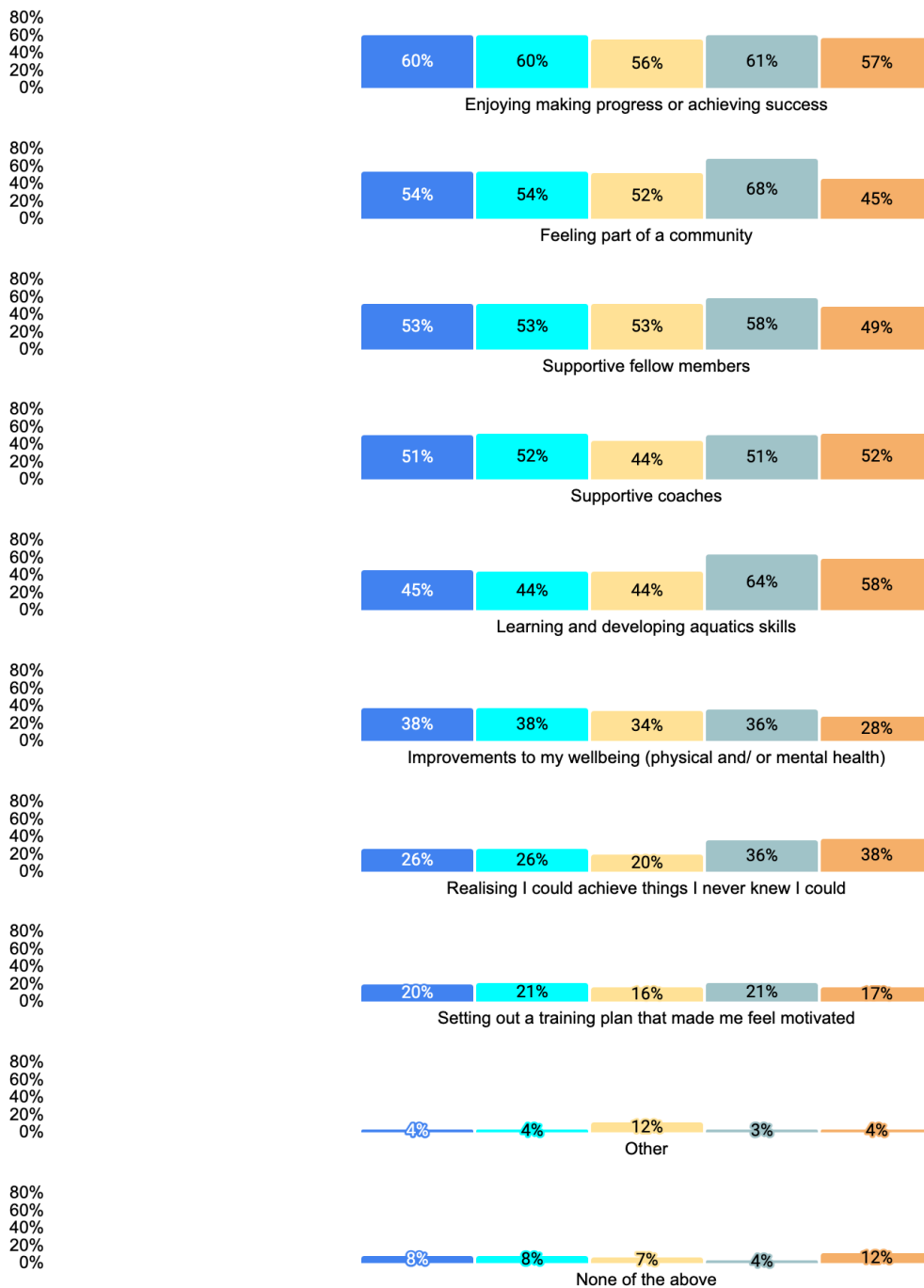
Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

Respondents tend to report similar prevalence of most positive experiences across disciplines. However, respondents from artistic swimming are significantly more likely than others to report the following:

- feeling part of a community (68% of respondents from artistic swimming compared to 54% overall)
- learning and developing aquatics skills (64% of artistic swimming respondents compared to 44% overall)
- realising I could achieve things I never could (38% of artistic swimming respondents compared to 26% overall).

Positive experiences survey respondents can relate to in the past 3 months - by discipline

Overall Swimming, incl. open water swimming Water Polo Artistic Swimming Other



Note: Q9: [asked to parents answering for children] "Thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences can your child relate to?" [asked to others] "Thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences can you relate to?" N=3217 (swimming, incl open water swimming); Water polo (165); Artistic swimming (107); Other (100). Sample sizes for diving and para swimming were too small to be individually analysed.

Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

Negative experiences

Respondents were also asked if any of a number of negative experiences (based on commonly-reported experiences that emerged during the qualitative research) have happened to them or to someone they knew.⁷

Just over half (54%) indicate that they have not experienced any of the negative experiences asked about in the past 3 months. However, this leaves almost half (46%) who have (or knew someone who had) experienced at least one of the negative experiences that came up during the qualitative research, or others not on the list. On average, respondents indicate 2 of the negative experiences mentioned in the survey have happened to them, or someone they know, in the past 3 months.

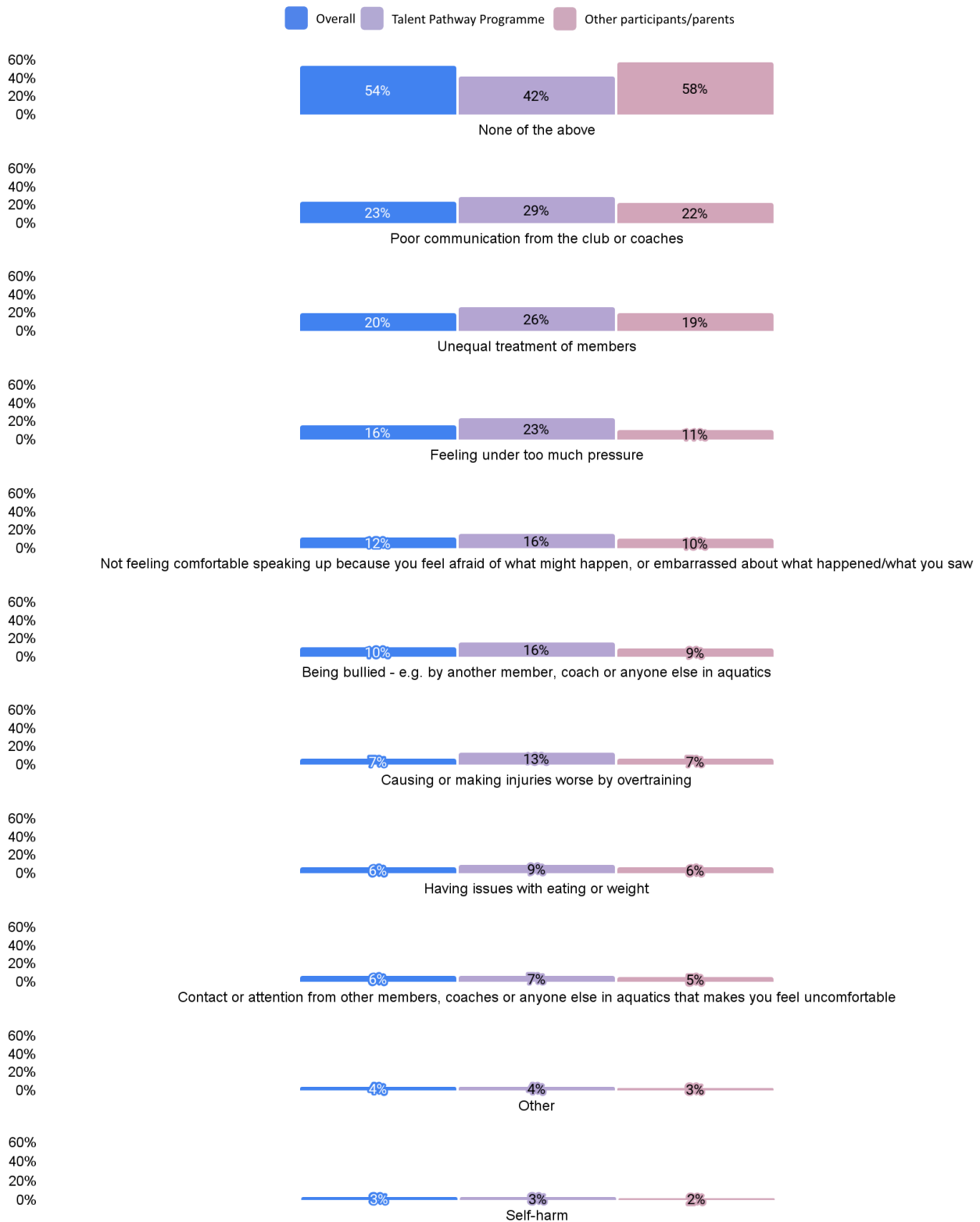
23% of respondents indicate they have experienced poor communication (from the club or coaches), 20% perceive that treatment of members was unequal, and 16% report feeling under too much pressure. Moreover, it is somewhat concerning that 12% of respondents select 'not feeling comfortable speaking up' due to fear or awkwardness.

There are further nuances depending on participation in the Talent Pathway Programme. Only 42% of respondents who are (or whose children are) on the Talent Pathway Programme select 'None of the above' i.e. nearly 60% reported at least one of the negative experiences in the survey in the past 3 months. They are also significantly more likely than others to report:

- unequal treatment of members (26% of Talent Pathway Programme participants/parents compared to 19% of others)
- feeling under too much pressure (23% of participants/parents on the Talent Pathway Programme, compared to 11% of others)
- feeling uncomfortable about speaking up due to fear or embarrassment (16% of Talent Pathway Programme parents/participants, compared to 10% of others)
- bullying (16% of Talent Pathway Programme participants/parents, compared to 9% of others)
- causing or making injuries worse by overtraining (13% of Talent Pathway Programme participants/parents, compared to 7% of others)

⁷ We asked if experiences had happened to the respondent (or their child), or to someone they knew, because the extensive programme of qualitative research before the survey suggested that negative experiences can have adverse impacts on individuals, even if they are not happening directly to them but to someone they know.

Negative experiences that have happened to respondents (or someone they know) in the past 3 months - by participation in the Talent Pathway programme⁸



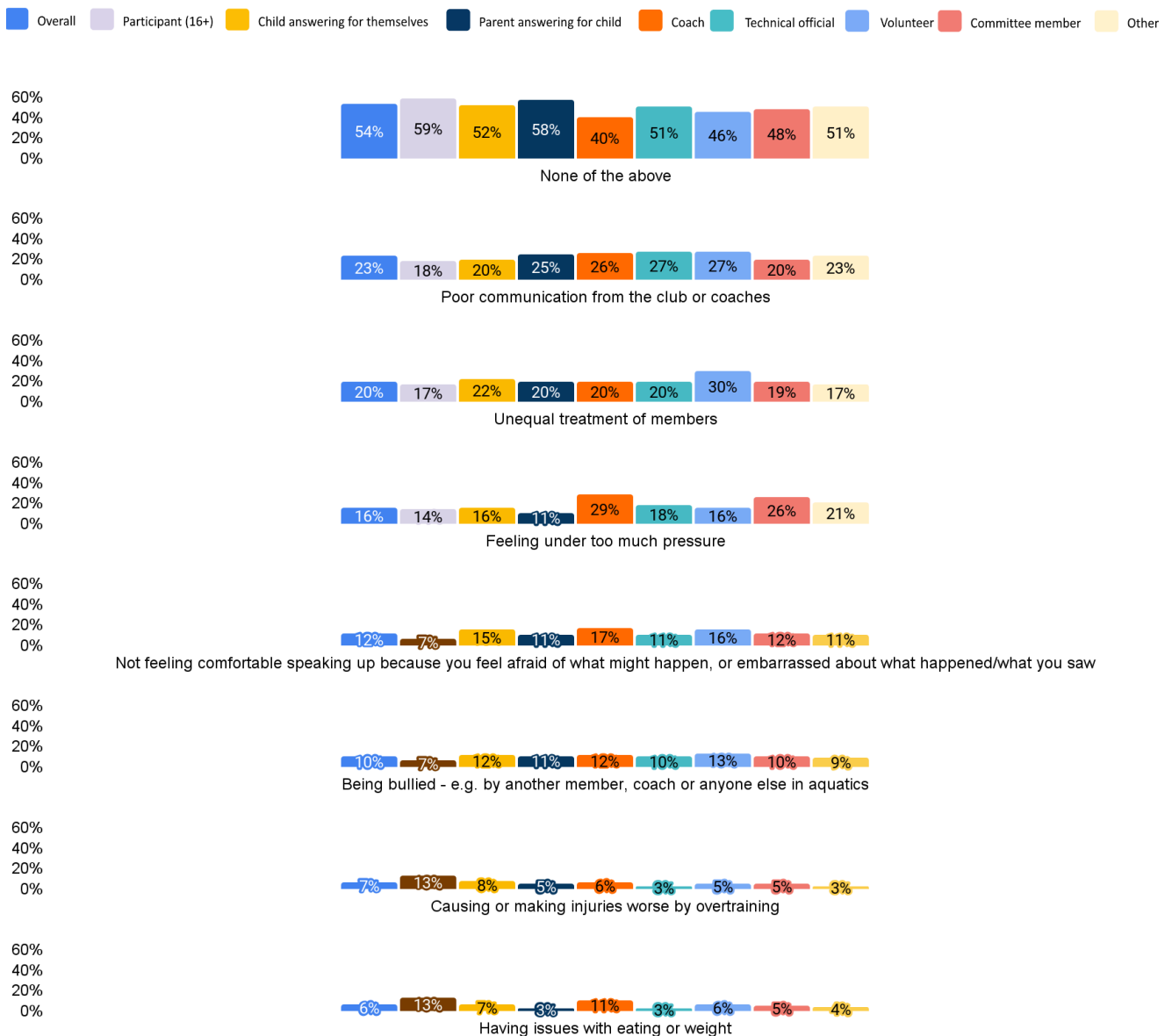
⁸ Note that the 'overall' bar in this figure includes data for workforce i.e. data for club members who are neither participants nor parents. Therefore, the 'overall' bar is not the average of the numbers for Talent Pathway participants (or parents) and other participants (or parents).

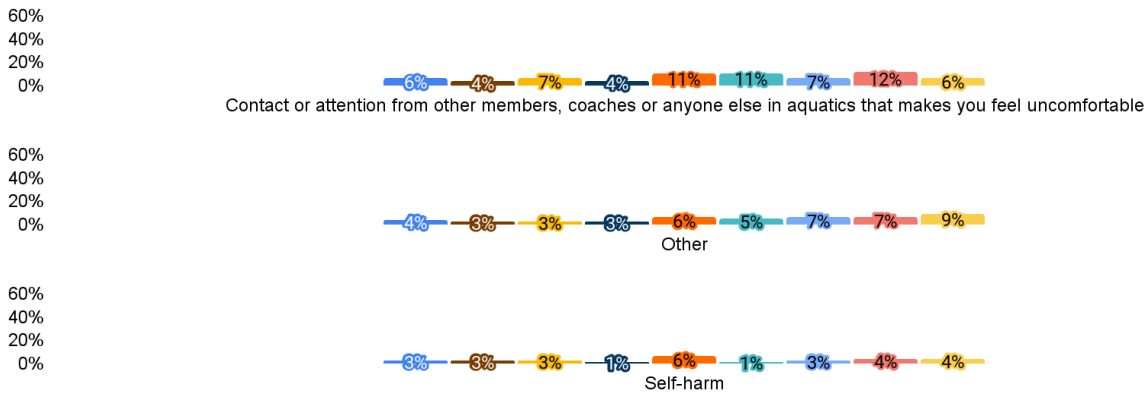
Note: Q10: [asked to parents answering for children] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to your child or to someone they know?" [asked to others] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to you or to someone you know?" N=250 (Talent Pathway Programme); 2329 (not Talent Pathway Programme)

Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

Some negative experiences are reported more by some types of roles than others. For example, consistent with the qualitative research finding that coaches and volunteers feel increasingly under pressure/overburdened, the survey finds that coaches, teachers, technical officials, committee members, volunteers and others are significantly more likely to report feeling under too much pressure (almost double the proportion of these members reporting this compared to participants or parents).

Negative experiences that have happened to respondents (or someone they know) in the past 3 months - by role in which they spent most time



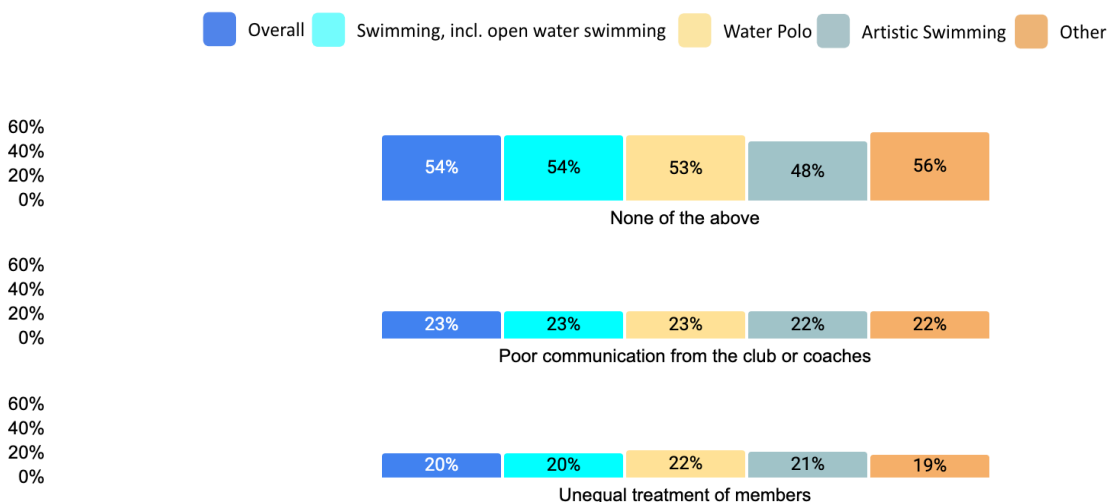


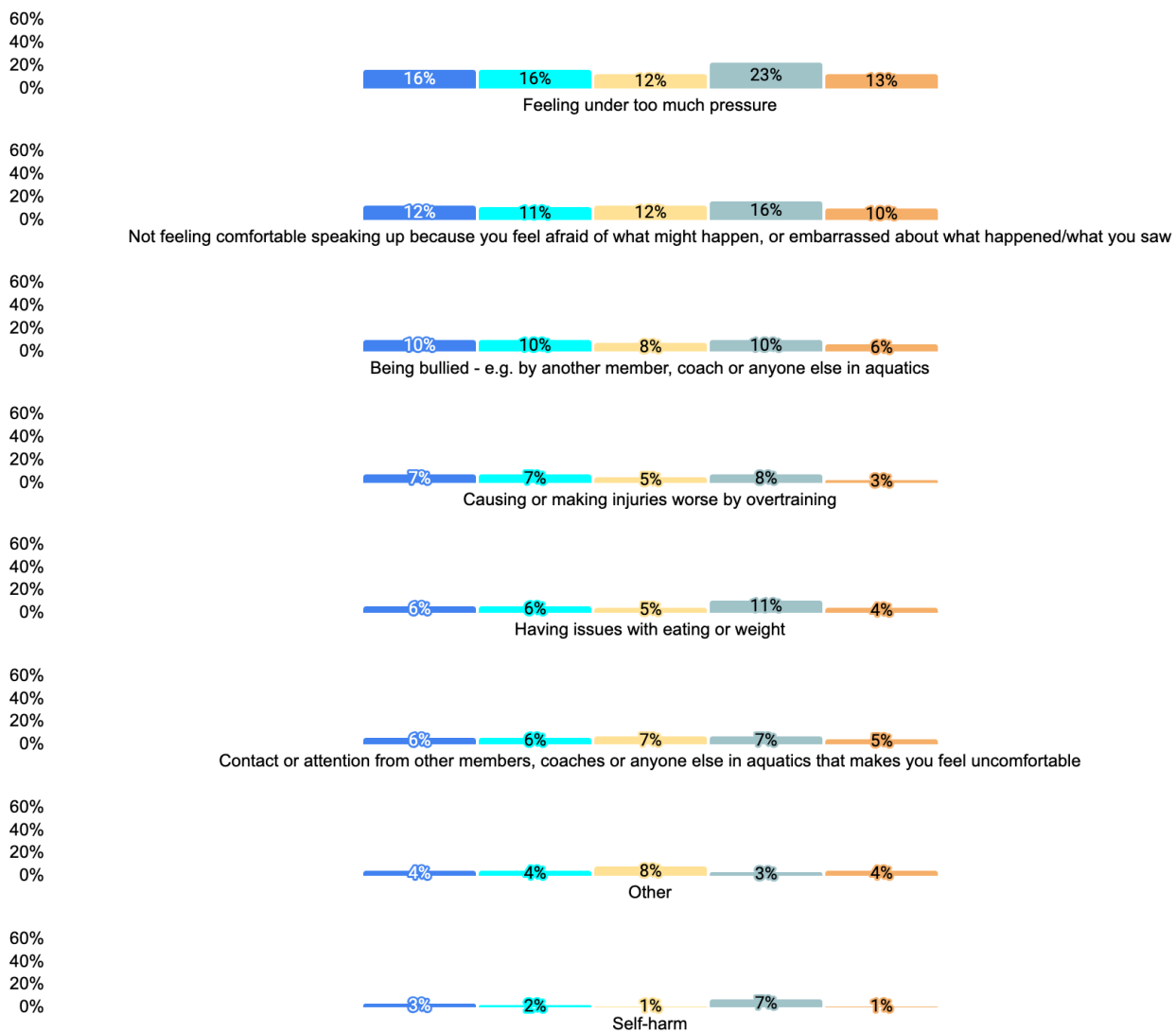
Note: Q10: [asked to parents answering for children] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to your child or to someone they know?" [asked to others] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to you or to someone you know?" N=621 (Participant 16+); 578 (Child answering for themselves); 1380 (Parent answering for child); 309 (Coach); 174 (Technical official - any discipline); 164 (Volunteer); 225 (Committee member 225); 138 (Other)
 Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

As with positive experiences, respondents across disciplines tend to report similar prevalence of most negative experiences. However, there are two concerning negative experiences which respondents who spend most of their time in artistic swimming are significantly more likely to report in relatively high numbers: having issues with eating or weight, and self-harm.

Overall absolute prevalence of these experiences is relatively low: 6% for having issues with eating or weight, and 3% for self-harm. However, in artistic swimming, the proportion of respondents selecting 'having issues with eating or weight' is 11% (nearly twice the average), and selecting 'self-harm' is 7% (double the average). This is consistent with the finding of the qualitative research that participants from artistic swimming can feel under pressure to look a certain way. Overall it should be of concern that any experiences of this nature have been recorded.

Negative experiences that had happened to respondents (or someone they know) in the past 3 months - by discipline





Note: Q10: [asked to parents answering for children] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to your child or to someone they know?" [asked to others] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to you or to someone you know?" N=3217 (swimming, incl open water swimming); Water polo (165); Artistic swimming (107); Other (100). Sample sizes for diving and para swimming were too small to be individually analysed.

Response options were randomised. Under-16s were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

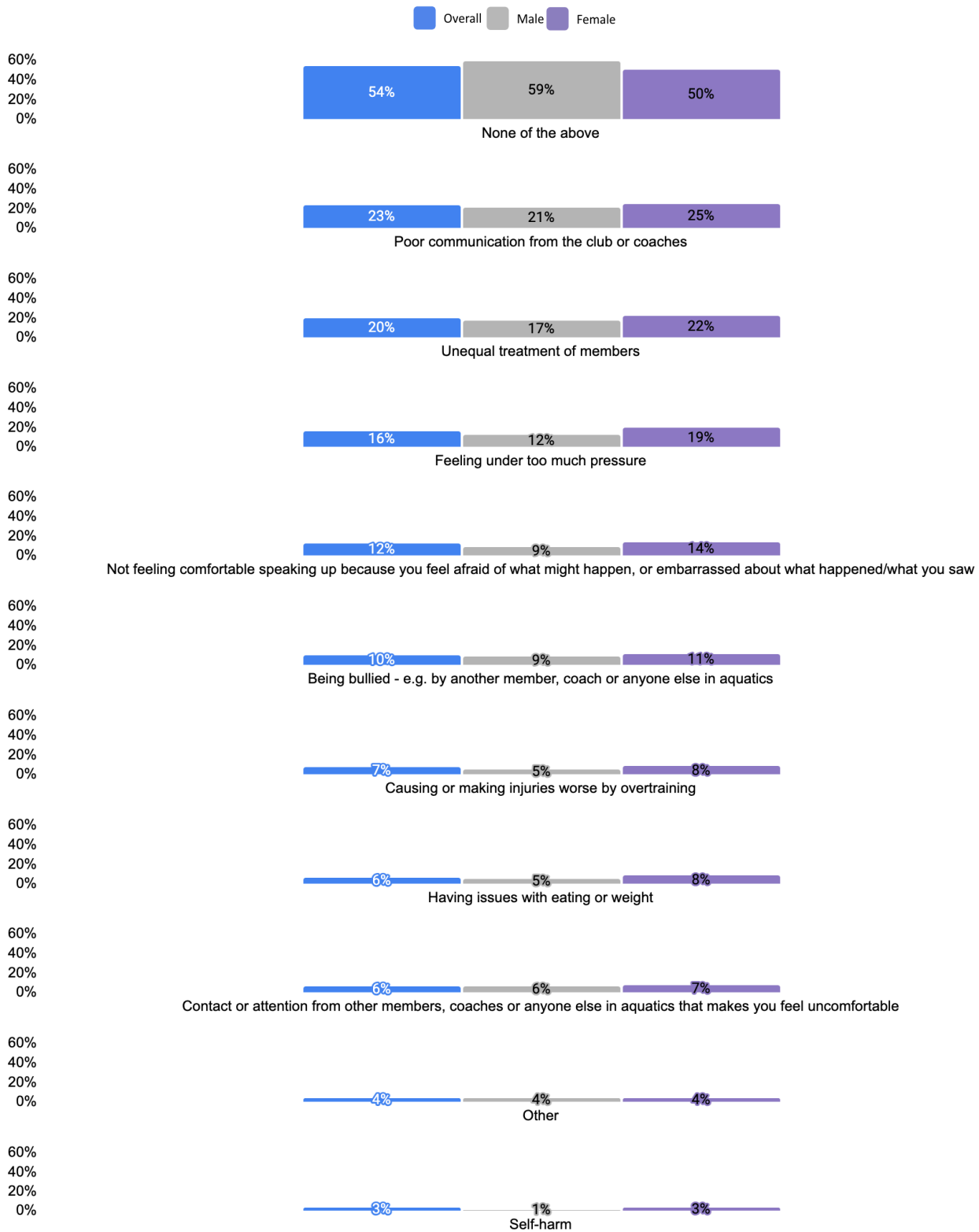
It should be noted that female respondents are significantly more likely to report having experienced any negative experience in the past 3 months, compared to male respondents. Half of female respondents (50%) select 'None of the above' compared to 59% of male respondents, i.e. half of female respondents report having experienced at least one of the negative experiences mentioned in the survey, compared to 41% of male respondents.

Female respondents are also significantly more likely to report having experienced a range of negative experiences in the past 3 months:

- unequal treatment of members (22% of female respondents compared to 17% male)
- feeling under too much pressure (19% of female respondents compared to 12% of male respondents)

→ discomfort speaking up owing to fear or awkwardness (14% of female respondents compared to 9% of male respondents)

Negative experiences that happened to respondents (or someone they know) in the past 3 months - by gender



Note: Sample sizes for respondents who did not answer male or female were too small for analysis. Q10: [asked to parents answering for children] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened

to your child or to someone they know?" [asked to others] "And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to you or to someone you know?" N=1623 (male respondents); 1903 (female respondents); 63 (Other/prefer not to say). Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

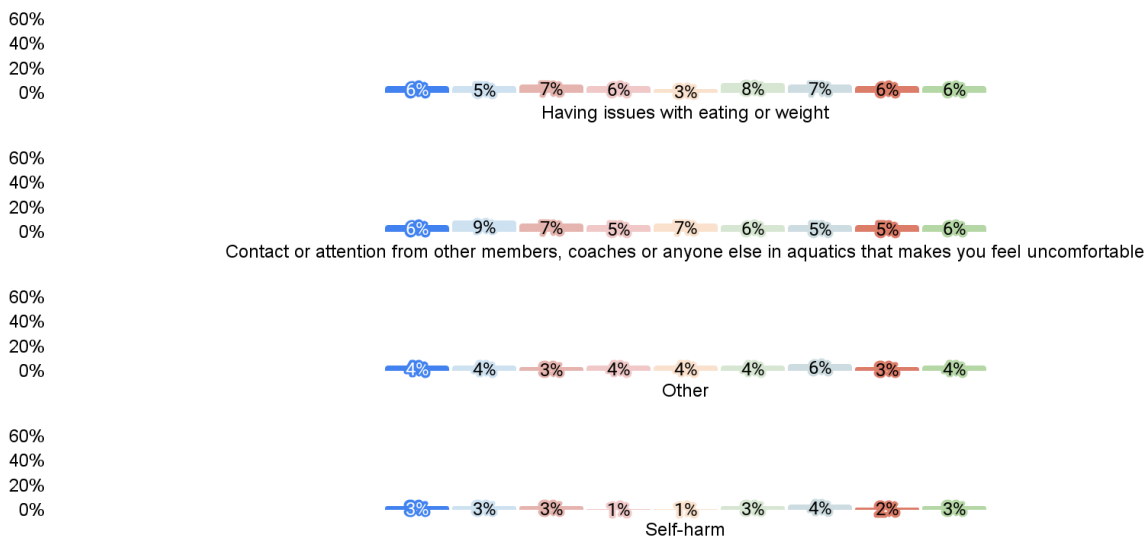
There are few major differences between Swim England regions regarding negative experiences. Respondents from Swim England's London region are the most likely of all regions (60% of respondents) to report none of the negative experiences mentioned in the survey, and respondents from the East and West Midlands regions are the least likely (48% of respondents from each region), followed by respondents from the North East region (51%).

These differences seem to be largely driven by differences in the following negative experiences, which have the most variation between Swim England regions:

- poor communication from the club or coaches
- unequal treatment of members
- feeling under too much pressure

Negative experiences that have happened to respondents (or someone they know) in the past 3 months - by Swim England region





Note: Q10: [asked to parents answering for children] “And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to your child or to someone they know?” [asked to others] “And again thinking about the past 3 months in [discipline], which of these experiences have happened to you or to someone you know?” N=363 (East Midland Region); 516 (East Region); 423 (London Region); 354 (North West Region); 680 (South East Region); 485 (South West Region); 443 (Swim England North East Region); 325 (West Midland Region). Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

Behaviour in the event of witnessing a safeguarding/welfare issue

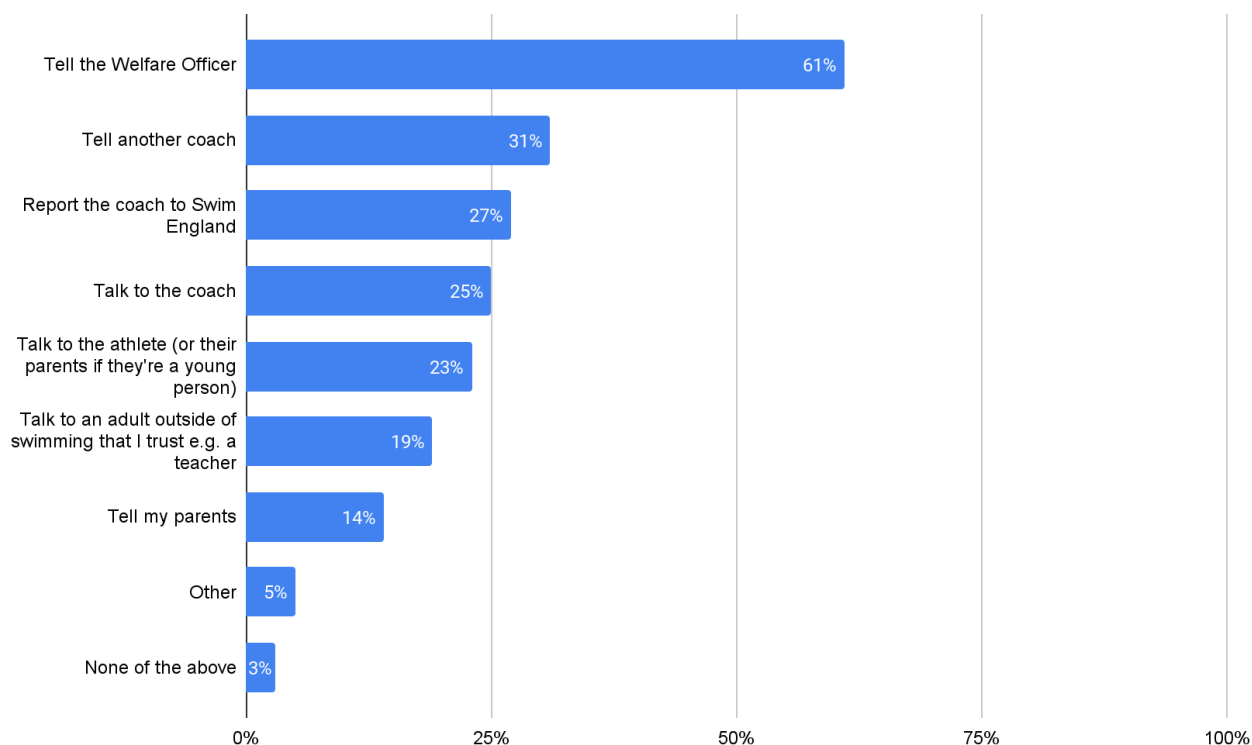
Respondents were asked what they would do in the event of witnessing a safeguarding/welfare issue, specifically a coach bullying another member.

The purpose of this question is to understand the extent to which current club members understand the process of reporting an incident. In order to provide a focus for respondents, a specific scenario was chosen: a coach bullying another member. This particular scenario was selected for two reasons:

- to identify an event that all members would be able to conceptualise easily, with the expectation that current club members would have some interaction with coaches, whereas not all may have had interactions with technical officials, committee members etc.
- this scenario is widely reported in the extensive qualitative research which preceded the quantitative research.

61% of respondents report they would report the incident to the welfare officer, followed by telling another coach (31%) and report the coach to Swim England (27%).

What respondents would do in the event of witnessing a safeguarding/welfare issue



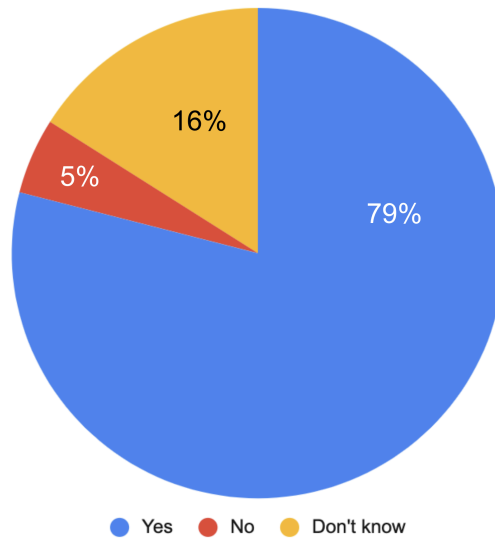
Note: Q13: Suppose you saw a coach bully someone in training e.g. repeatedly commenting on their weight, or saying they're useless, in a hurtful way in front of other athletes. Who do you think would be the right people to talk to about it? N=3,589 Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

Respondents were then asked: "Whoever you would talk to, would you feel comfortable talking to them about what you saw?"

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know"

While 79% who selected they would feel comfortable reporting the incident to whomever they had chosen, 16% say they do not know if they would feel comfortable, and 5% say they would not feel comfortable.

Whether respondents would feel comfortable speaking to whomever they would choose to communicate with

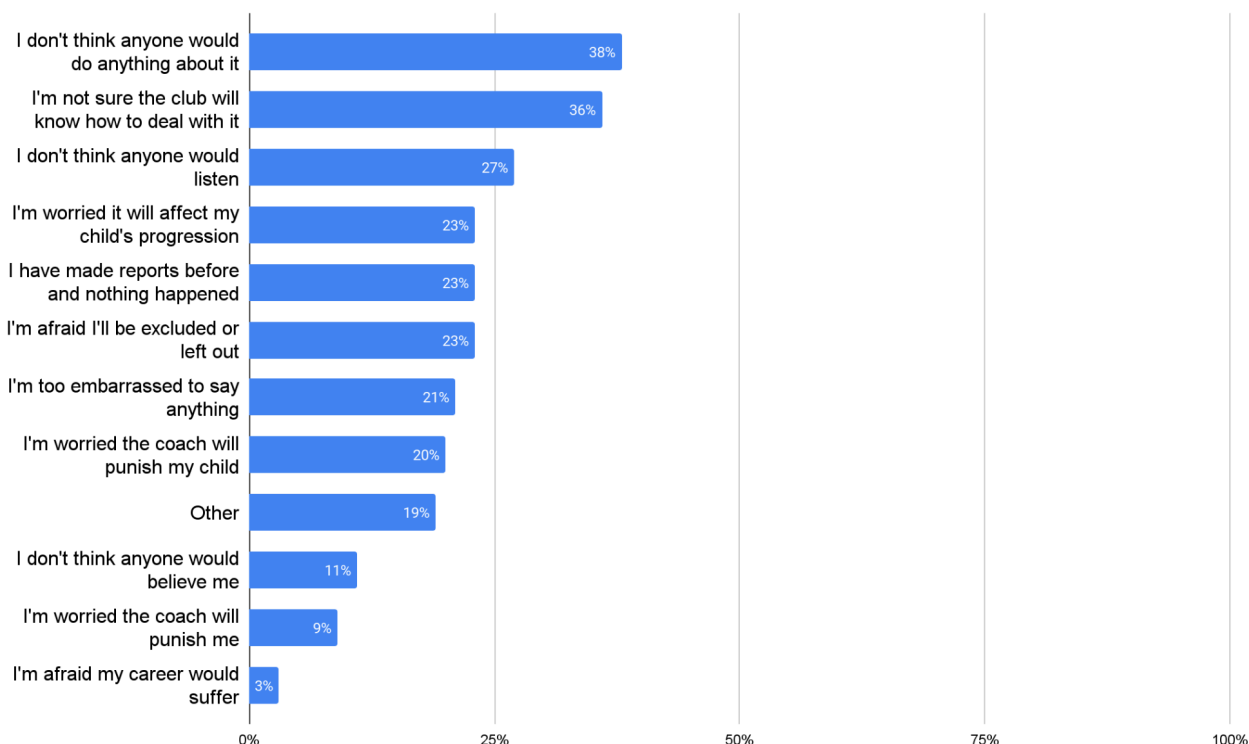


*Note: Q14: Whoever you would talk to, would you feel comfortable talking to them about what you saw? N=3,482 (those who did not answer 'None of the above' to Q13)
Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.*

Respondents who reported they would not feel comfortable speaking about the issue they had witnessed were asked to indicate the reason for not feeling comfortable.

The response options are based on the findings of the qualitative research in the main listening programme. As illustrated above, only 5% (179) of respondents say they would not feel comfortable speaking about the issue. Among these, the most frequently-reported reasons for this lack of comfort are thinking that nothing would be done about it (38%), that the Club wouldn't know what to do about the situation (36%), and that they don't think anyone would listen (27%). Whilst the sample sizes here are relatively small, these findings are consistent with the broader qualitative findings around concerns being ignored or insufficient action taken.

Reasons that respondents would not feel comfortable speaking to whomever they would choose to communicate with in the event of a safeguarding/welfare issue



Note: Q15 [asked to those who say they would not feel comfortable talking about the incident of bullying]: Why not? N=179 Response options were randomised. Under-16 participants were only shown these questions with the explicit consent of their parents.

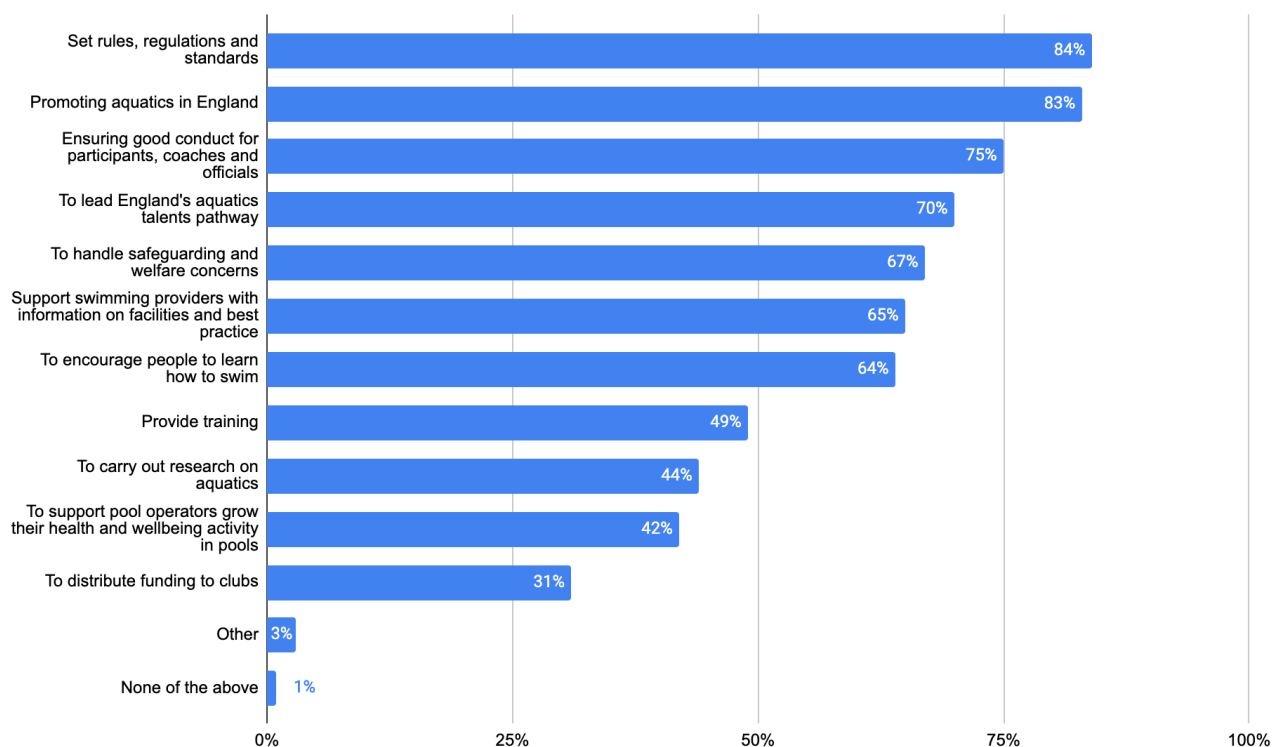
Awareness and perceptions of the performance of Swim England

Respondents were asked if they were aware of Swim England, the national governing body (as opposed to Swim England clubs, counties and regions).

92% of respondents report that they had heard of Swim England. Respondents who indicated that they were aware of Swim England (3,277 respondents) were then asked what they thought Swim England's purpose is.

Most (83%) think Swim England's purpose is to set rules and standards (84%), promote aquatics in England, and ensure good conduct for members (75%). Fewer indicate that they think Swim England's purposes include funding distribution (31%) or carrying out research on aquatics (44%).

What respondents think Swim England's purpose is



Note: QPa And what do you think Swim England's purpose is? N=3,277 (all aware of Swim England). Response options were randomised.

Respondents who are aware of Swim England were then shown a series of statements, carefully developed to assess members' perceptions of Swim England.

The question was deliberately framed as a series of positive statements to provoke a response and provide clarity. The statements were derived from the findings of qualitative research around areas where people felt Swim England ought to be doing for its members. The survey did not seek to identify *why* respondents would have these perceptions. For a discussion of the range of potential reasons, please refer to the findings of the main Listening Research Programme, including the specific section on [Views on Swim England](#).

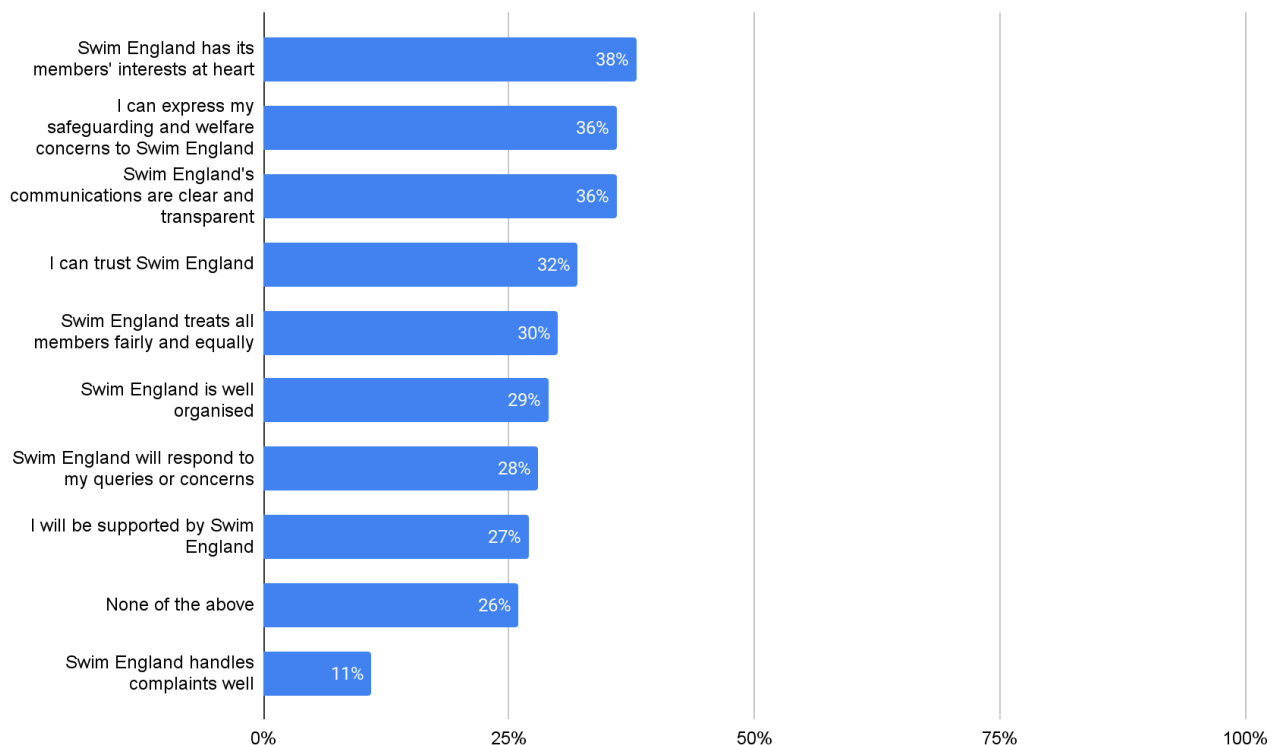
Responses to this question are in line with many of the findings arising from the wider Listening Research Programme, that a concerning number of respondents do not agree that Swim England is performing as well as it should for its members. For example, only 38% of respondents agree that Swim England has its members' interests at heart. Respondents also highlight the following further issues arising in the wider Listening Research Programme relating to:

- members feeling unsupported by Swim England, with only 27% of respondents agreeing with the statement 'I will be supported by Swim England'
- members feeling that Swim England does not listen or respond to members' concerns, with only 28% of respondents agreeing with the statement 'Swim England will respond to my queries or concerns'

- members feeling a lack of fairness, with only 30% of respondents agreeing with the statement 'Swim England treats all members fairly and equally'
- members feeling they cannot trust Swim England, with 32% of respondents agreeing with the statement 'I can trust Swim England'

Agreement with any statement tends to be low (between 11% and 38% of respondents agreed with any of the statements), and a quarter of respondents (26%) selected 'None of the above' i.e. they do not agree with any of the statements.

Agreement with statements measuring if Swim England is performing well for its members



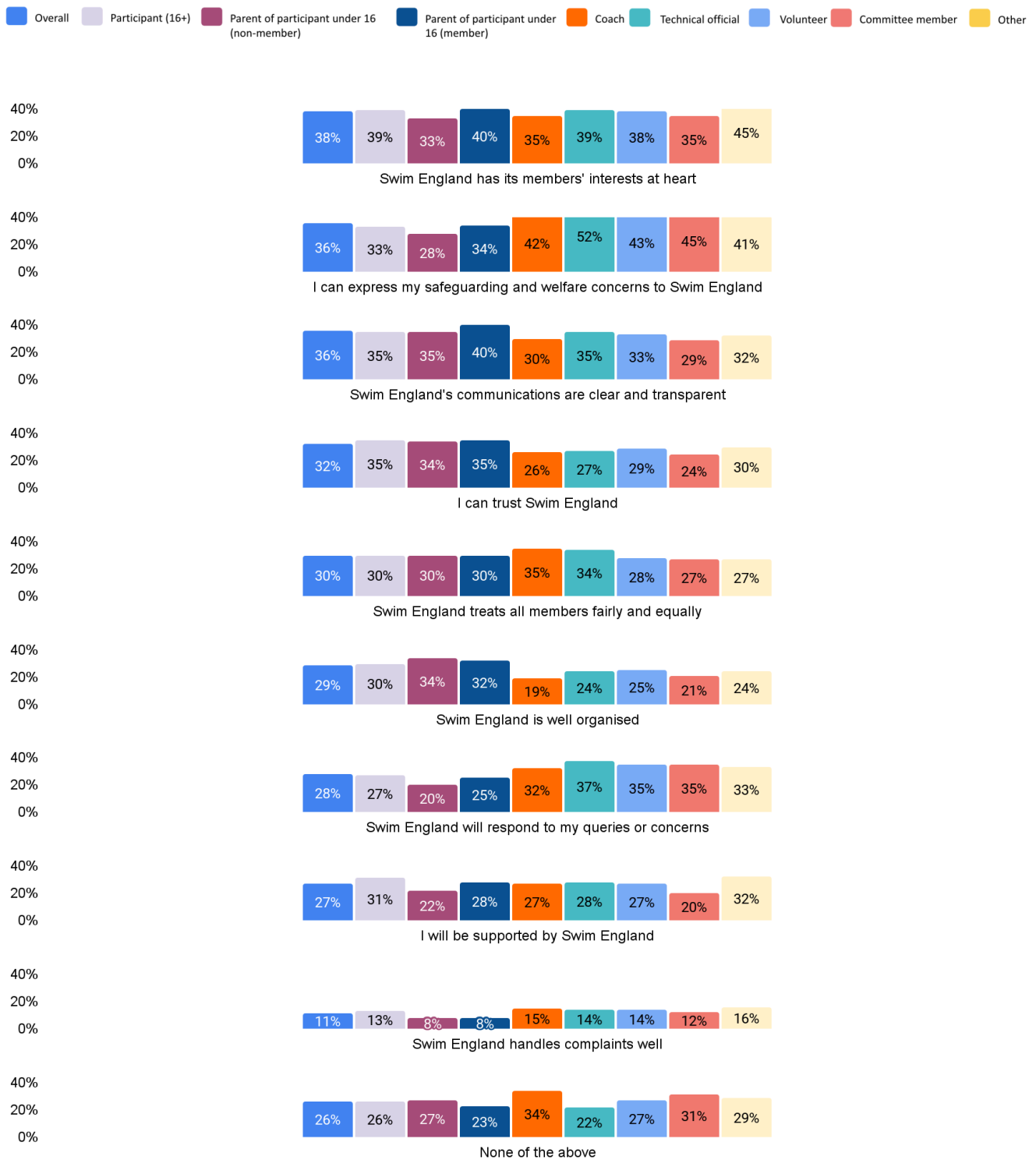
Note: QPb Please select the statements you agree with. N=3,277 (all aware of Swim England). Response options were randomised.

Perceptions of how well Swim England is performing differ by the role in which respondents spent the most time. For example, parents of participants are less likely than workforce, volunteers etc. to agree with the statement 'I can express my safeguarding and welfare concerns to Swim England', or 'Swim England will respond to my queries or concerns.' This is consistent with the findings of the wider Listening Research Programme that some participants and parents can feel unheard or that their concerns will be dismissed, but it is also likely to be a function of parents and participants needing to have less contact with Swim England than the workforce, volunteers etc..

However, workforce, volunteers etc. are less likely than participants or parents to agree with the statement 'Swim England is well organised', consistent with the findings of the wider Listening Research Programme that there is growing frustration with Swim England's professionalism and governance among those who do have more contact with Swim England.

Moreover, respondents who spent most of their time as coaches, technical officials, volunteers, committee members and others are significantly more likely (compared to participants or parents) to agree with none of the statements. Respondents who spent most of their time as coaches are the most likely of all among the groups (34%) to select 'None of the above' i.e. to not agree that Swim England was delivering along any of the dimensions explored in the survey.

Agreement with statements measuring the performance of Swim England - by role in which respondents spent most time



Note: QPb Please select the statements you agree with. (all aware of Swim England). Response options were randomised. N=597 (Participant 16+); 277 (Parent of participant under 16 - non-member); 1405 (Parent of participant below 16 - member); 306 (Coach); 174 (Technical official - any discipline); 162 (Volunteer); 224 (Committee member); 132 (Other).

Awareness and experiences of safeguarding/welfare concerns procedures and judicial complaints

Respondents were asked about two mechanisms for raising concerns or complaints:

- a safeguarding and welfare concern with Swim England
- a judicial complaint, defined as: *'an allegation that a person or organisation within aquatics has breached Swim England regulations, Swim England's code of ethics, or has otherwise acted in a way which amounts to misconduct or maladministration. A judicial complaint may also be made where someone believes a club has failed to follow the club complaints procedure or has acted disproportionately in resolving a dispute at club level.'*

Members who actually go through the complaints process might be only a subset of individuals who actually have concerns or complaints to raise. As such, the survey asked members about barriers to making complaints that they might experience at a number of stages:

- Lack of awareness of the possibility of raising a complaint, or concern
- Not feeling able to raise such a complaint or concern
- A poor experience of raising the complaint or concern

Survey findings relating to each barrier are reported below.

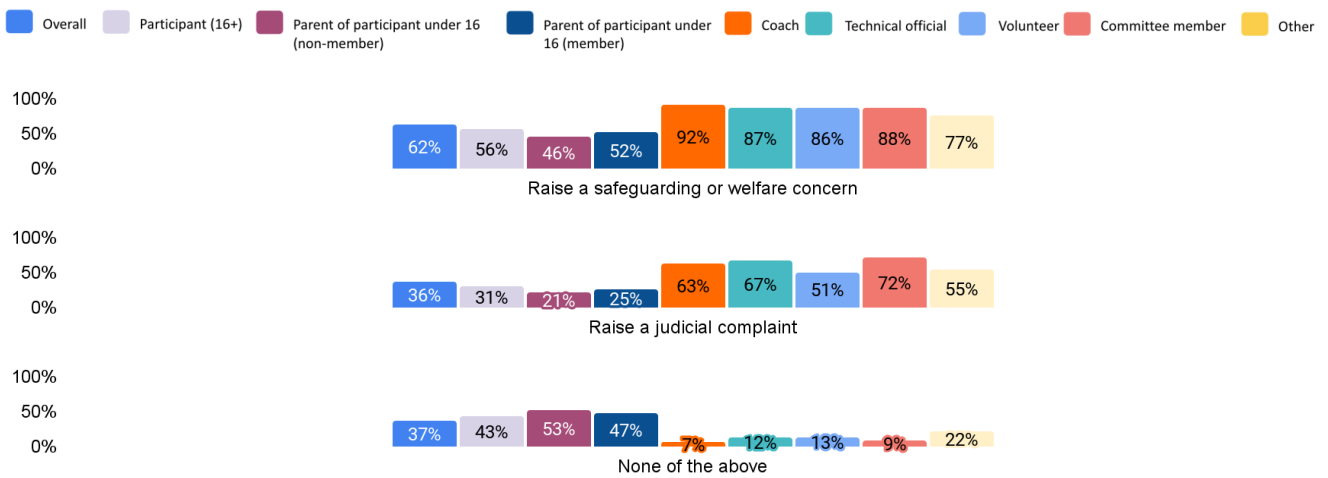
Awareness of concern/complaint mechanisms

Respondents were first asked if, before the survey date, they were aware that they could: raise a safeguarding/welfare concern, raise a judicial complaint, or neither.

The survey found that awareness is highest for raising safeguarding and welfare concerns, with 62% of respondents overall indicating they are aware they could raise such a concern.

Nearly 40% of respondents are not aware that they could raise *either* a safeguarding/welfare concern, or a judicial complaint. Notably, parents and participants are significantly less likely than other participants to be aware of either procedure. This suggests that the possibility of raising concerns/complaints with Swim England may not be sufficiently salient, particularly for participants and parents.

Awareness that they could raise a safeguarding/welfare concern or judicial complaint - by role in which respondent spent most time

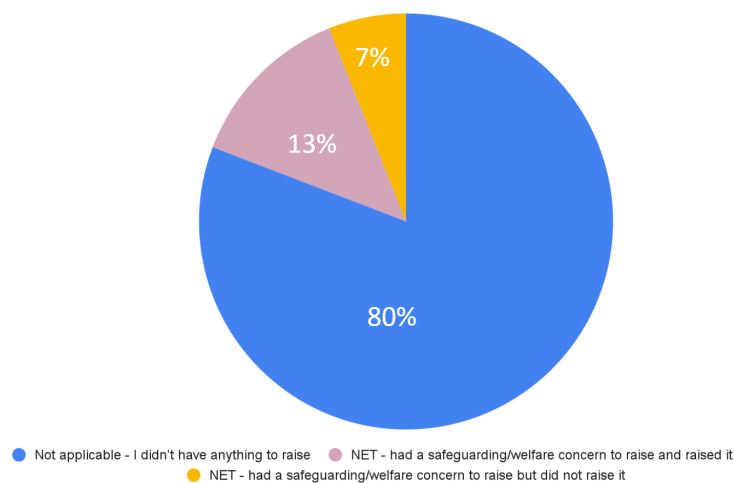


Note: QY: "Before today, were you aware that you could do any of the following with Swim England? N=621 (Participant 16+); 325 (Parent of participant under 16 - non-member); 1633 (Parent of participant below 16 - member); 309 (Coach); 174 (Technical official - any discipline); 164 (Volunteer); 225 (Committee member); 138 (Other).

Feeling able to raise concerns or complaints

Even if they are aware that they can raise a concern or complaint, members may face barriers raising a concern or complaint if they feel it is futile, or too hard. Of those respondents who are aware of the possibility of raising a safeguarding and welfare concern (2,236), 80% (1,795) report they had never had anything to raise. 13% (297) of respondents report they had raised a safeguarding/welfare concern at any point; and 7% (144) report they had not because it was too hard, they were afraid of the consequences, or because they thought nothing would happen.

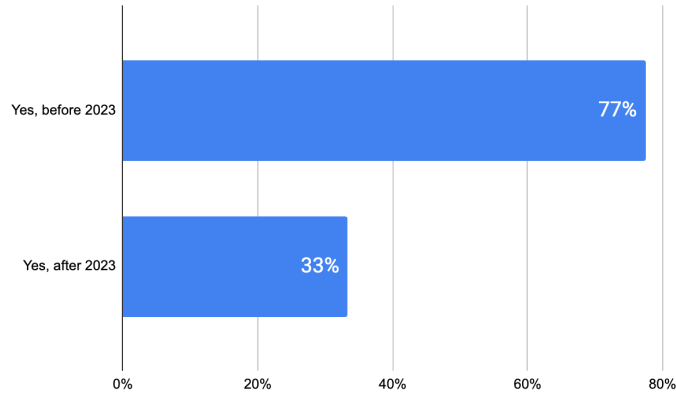
Action regarding raising a safeguarding/welfare concern



Note: QYa: "And have you done any of the following with Swim England [Raise a safeguarding/welfare concern]" N=2,236 (All who were aware of raising a safeguarding/welfare concern)

Of the respondents who had raised a safeguarding or welfare concern (297), 77% report they raised the concern prior to 2023, and 33% after 2023.

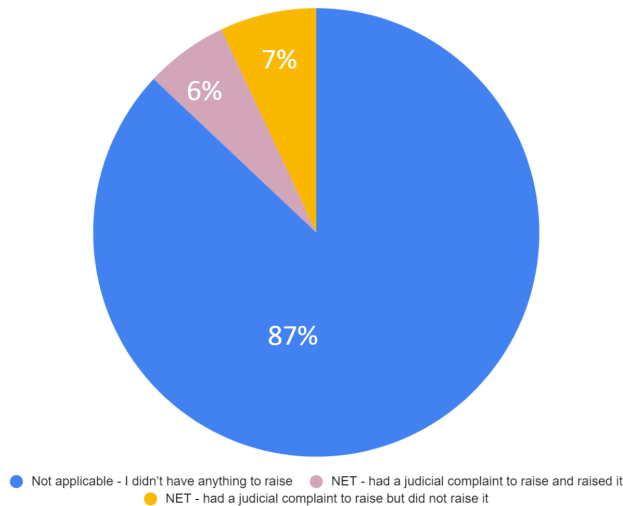
When respondents raised a safeguarding or welfare concern



Note: QYa: "And have you done any of the following with Swim England [Raise a safeguarding/welfare concern]" N=297 (All who were aware of raising a safeguarding/welfare concern and raised one)

Fewer respondents (1,302) are aware of raising a judicial complaint than of raising a safeguarding or welfare concern, of which 87% report they did not have a complaint to raise. 6% (78) respondents did raise a judicial complaint, and 7% (95) who had a judicial complaint to raise did not.

Action regarding raising a judicial complaint



Note: QYa: "And have you done any of the following with Swim England [Raise a judicial complaint]" N=1,302 (All who were aware of raising a judicial complaint)

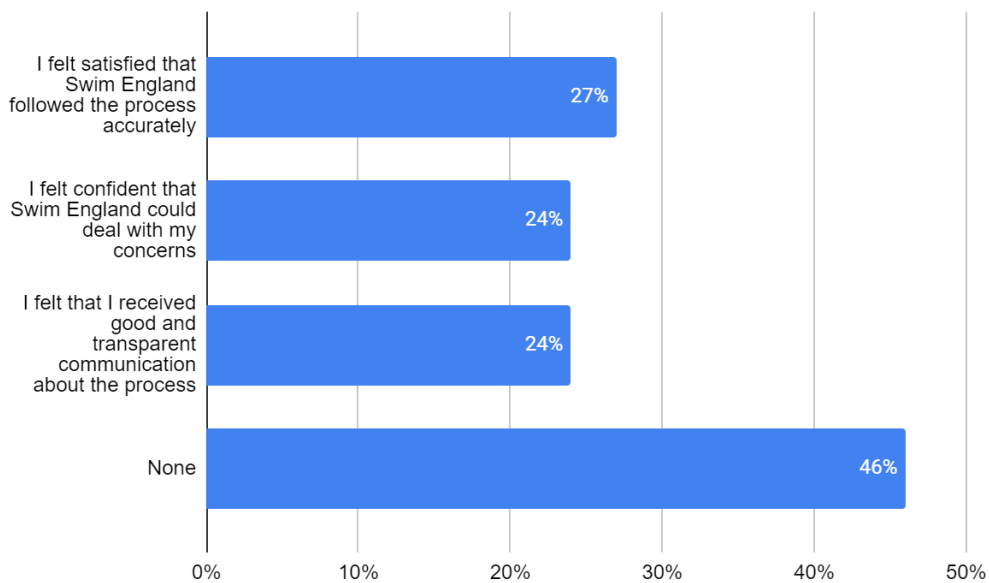
Experience of raising safeguarding and welfare concerns⁹

Respondents who had raised a safeguarding and welfare concern (297) were asked to indicate their agreement with a number of statements:

- Confidence that Swim England could deal with their concerns
- Feeling satisfied that Swim England followed the process accurately
- Feeling they received good and transparent communication throughout the process

Notably, almost half (46%) of respondents who had raised a safeguarding or welfare concern disagree with all of these¹⁰.

Experience of raising a safeguarding/welfare concern



Note: QYb: "And how was the experience[of raising a safeguarding/welfare concern]? Please select all that apply." N=297 (All who had raised a safeguarding/welfare concern)

What respondents would like to change in aquatics

The final set of questions relating to culture, safeguarding and welfare in aquatics asked respondents what they would like to change in aquatics.

Responses do not cluster around any one or two of the response options, which is likely to be due to the range of experiences different individuals have as well as their role, discipline and gender. Significant numbers selecting all of the individual options however suggest each warrant consideration.

The most frequently selected response options overall among current members are:

- more focus on participation and enjoyment of the sport (37%) - consistent with hopes for the future found in the main qualitative listening programme

⁹ The sample size of those who did raise a judicial complaint (78) was too small to analyse.

¹⁰ The sample size of respondents who had raised a safeguarding or welfare concern after 2023 were too small to analyse and compare between those who had done so before or after 2023.

- better communication within/between clubs and Swim England (36%) - consistent with poor current experiences of communication identified in the qualitative research
- more support for volunteers (35%) - consistent with findings from the qualitative research that volunteers feel overburdened and supported.

21% of respondents indicate that nothing needs to change.

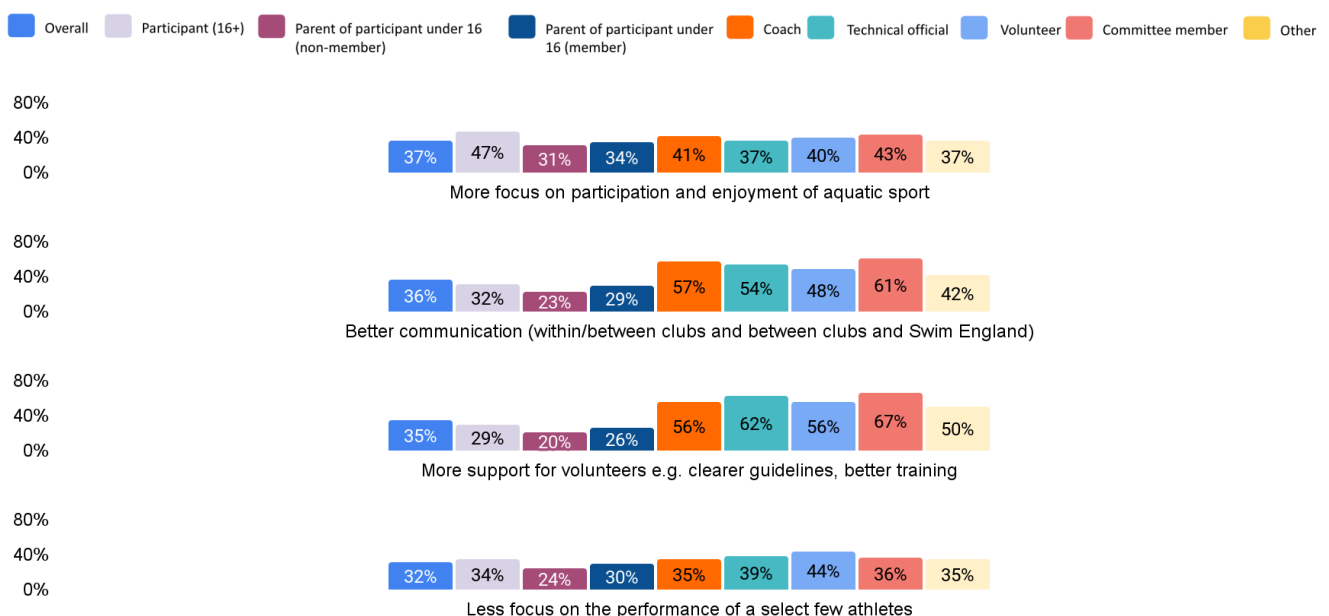
Some desires for change relating to performance focus cut across different member types. For example, all types of roles would like to shift the focus to participation, and would like less focus on the performance of a select few athletes.

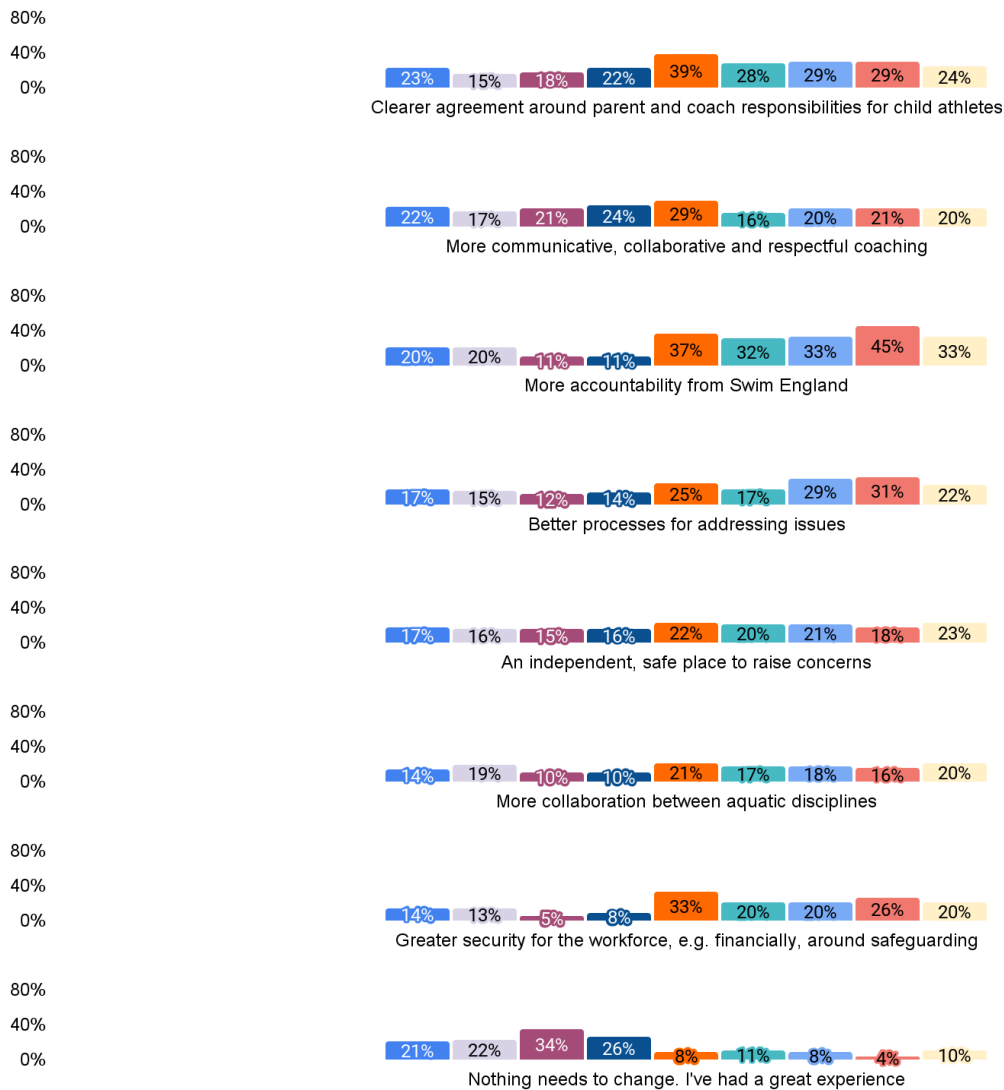
Participants and parents are more likely to report that nothing needed to change, compared to other members, consistent with these members' greater reported frustration. In fact, between 4% and 11% of coaches, technical officials, volunteers etc. report that nothing needed to change, compared to 22%-28% of participants and parents.

Compared to parents and participants, other members are significantly more likely to want:

- More support for volunteers - the most frequently-reported desire among this group, reported by e.g. 67% of committee members and 62% of technical officials
- Better communication within/between clubs and between clubs and Swim England, reported by e.g. 61% of committee members and 57% of coaches
- More accountability from Swim England e.g. 45% of committee officials and 37% of coaches
- More security for the workforce, reported by e.g. 33% of coaches, and 26% of committee members
- Better processes for addressing issues, reported by 31% of committee members and 29% of volunteers

What respondents would like to change in aquatics - by role in which respondent spent most time



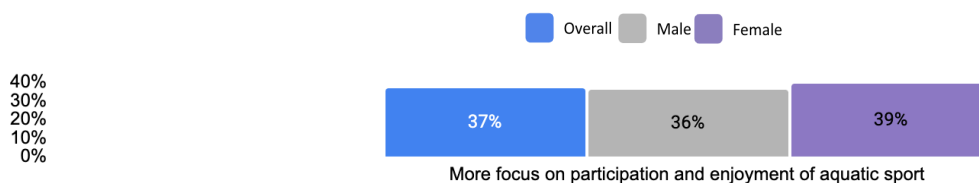


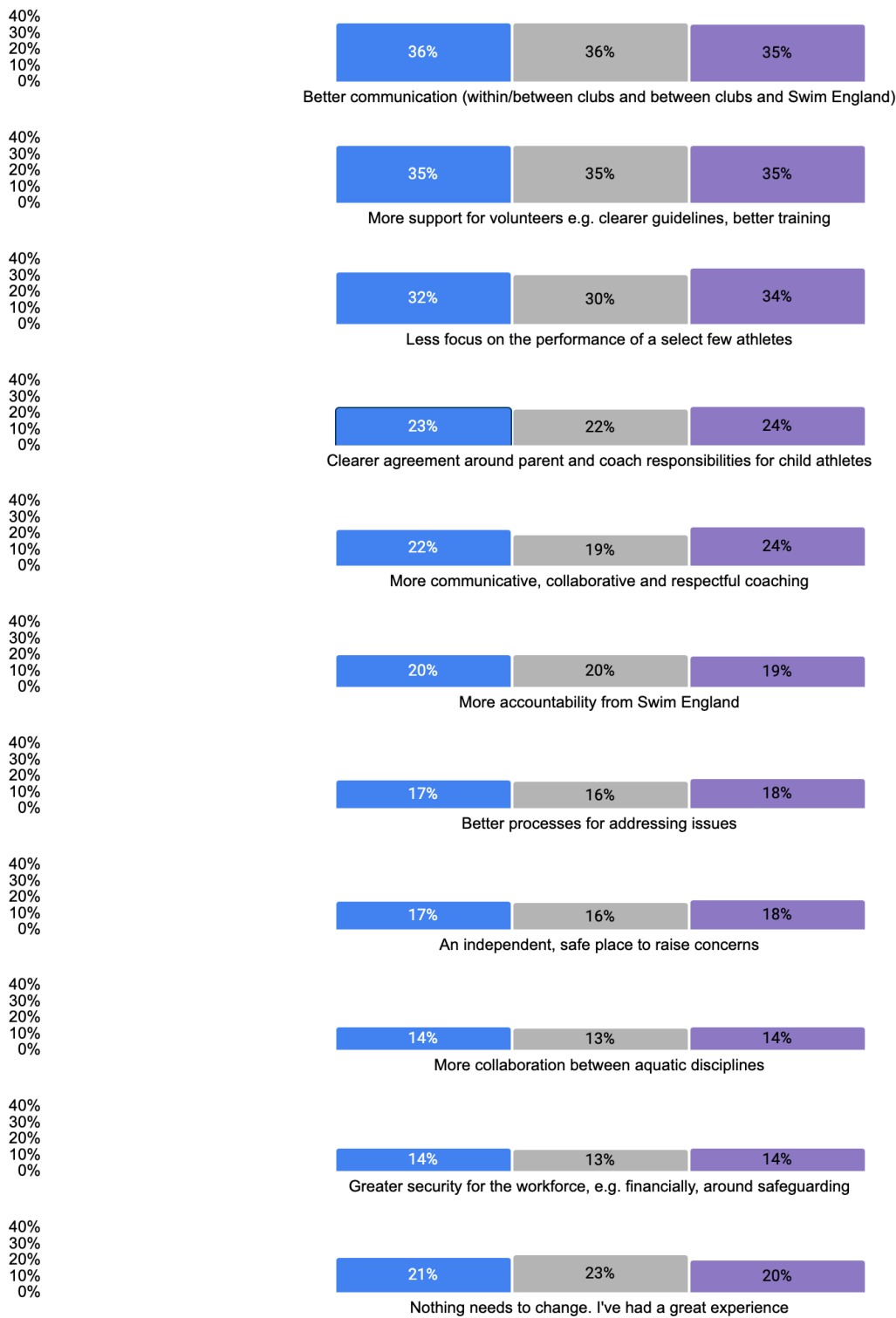
Note: Q24. "What would you like to change in aquatics?" N=621 (Participant 16+); 325 (Parent of participant under 16 - non-member); 1633 (Parent of participant below 16 - member); 309 (Coach); 174 (Technical official - any discipline); 164 (Volunteer); 225 (Committee member); 138 (Other)

Male and female respondents report many similar desires for change. However, there appears to be slightly greater appetite for change among female respondents, particularly in the following two areas:

- less focus on the performance of a few select athletes (34% of female respondents select this, compared to 30% of male respondents).
- more collaborative and respectful coaching (24% of female respondents select this, compared to 19% of male respondents).

What respondents would like to change in aquatics - by gender





Note: Sample sizes for respondents who did not indicate 'male' or 'female' were too small for analysis. Q24. "What would you like to change in aquatics?" N=1623 (male respondents); 1903 (female respondents); 63 (Other/prefer not to say) Response options were randomised.

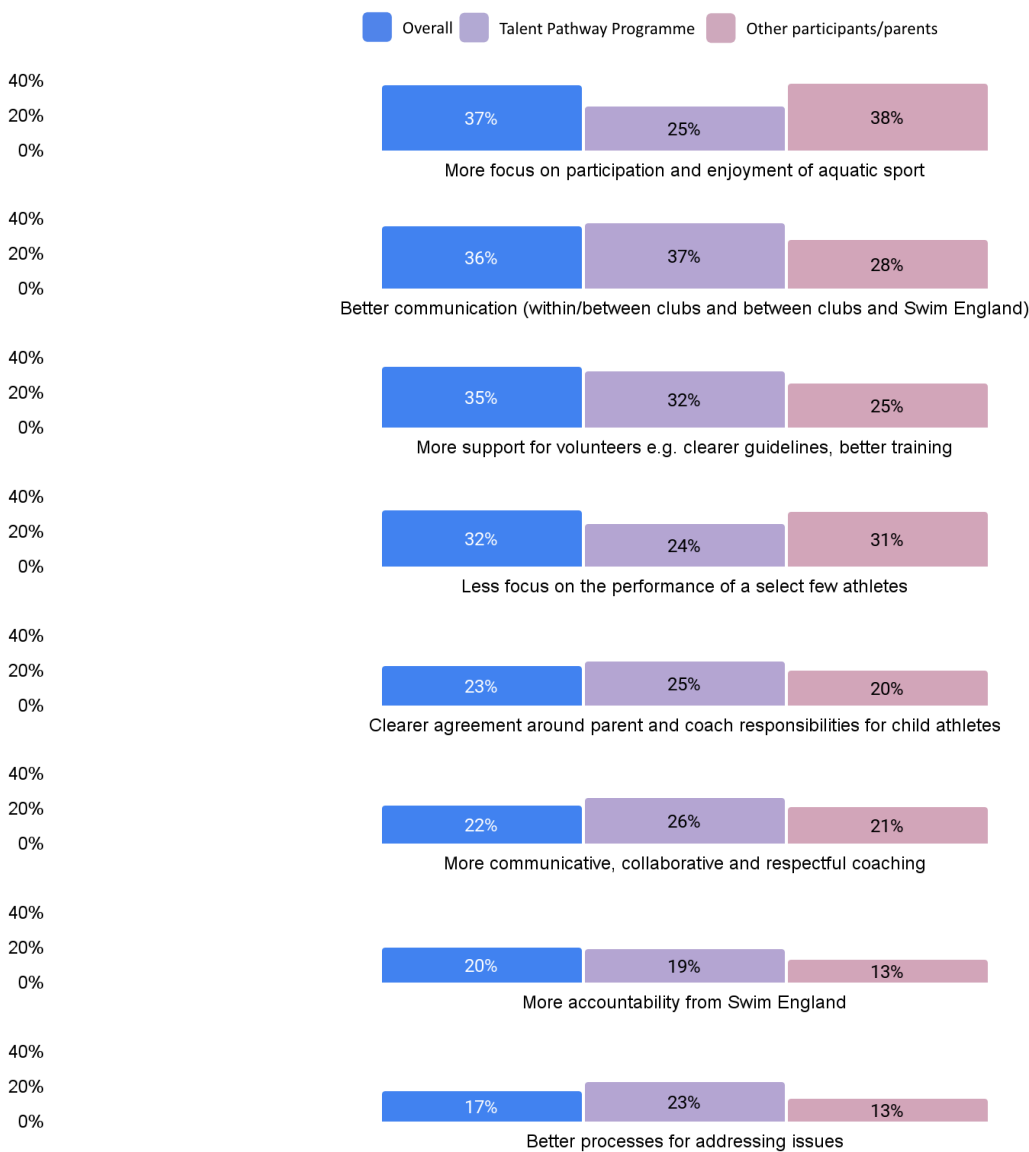
Participants and parents of participants who are not on the Talent Pathway Programme are significantly more likely to want a refocusing to participation and enjoyment of aquatics. 25% of participants/parents

on the Talent Pathway Programme select 'More focus on participation and enjoyment of aquatic sport', compared to 38% of other participants/parents.

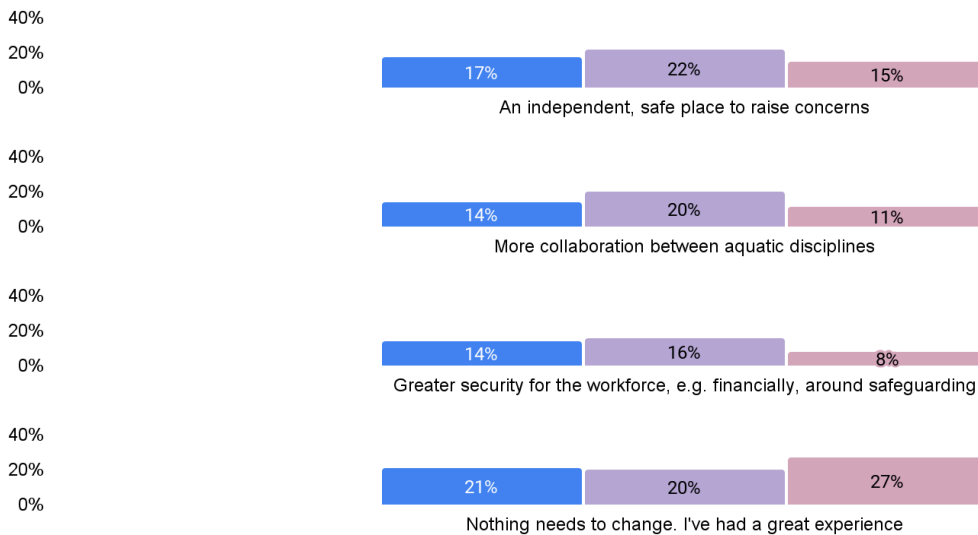
Talent Pathway Programme participants and their parents are significantly more likely to want a range of changes, key changes including:

- better communication between/within clubs and between clubs and Swim England (37% of Talent Pathway participants/parents, compared to 28% of others)
- more support for volunteers (32% of Talent Pathway participants/parents, compared to 25% of others)
- greater security for the workforce (16% of Talent Pathway Programme participants/parents, compared to 8% of others)

What respondents would like to change in aquatics - by participation in the Talent Pathway Programme¹¹



¹¹ Note that the 'overall' bar in this figure includes data for workforce i.e. data for club members who are neither participants nor parents. Therefore, the 'overall' bar is not the average of the numbers for Talent Pathway participants (or parents) and other participants (or parents).



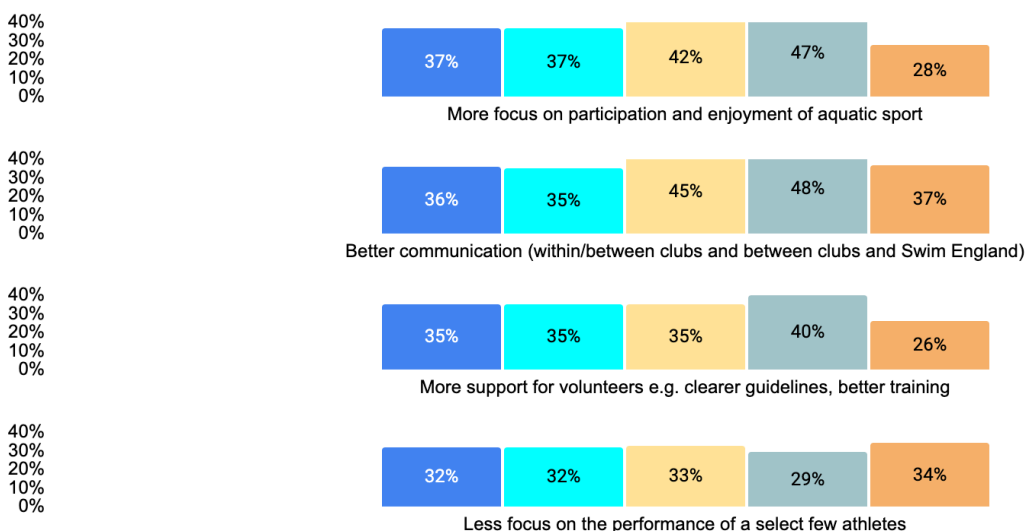
Note: Q24. "What would you like to change in aquatics?" N=250 (Talent Pathway Programme); 2329 (not Talent Pathway Programme). Response options were randomised.

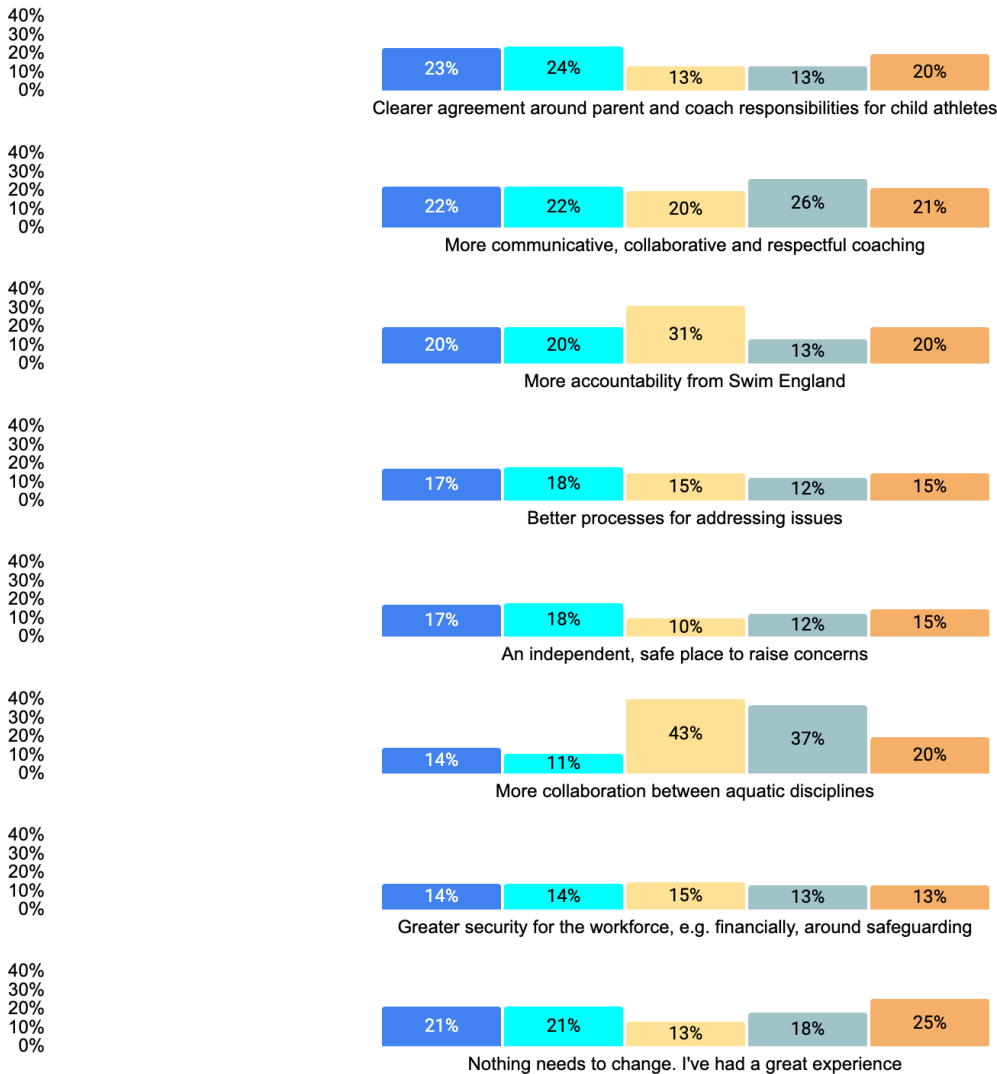
While participants from the different aquatic disciplines have similar desires for change in most areas, members who spent most of their time in water polo and artistic swimming in the last 3 months are more likely than others to want:

- better communication within/between clubs and between clubs and Swim England (48% of artistic swimming respondents, and 45% of water polo respondents, selected this compared to 36% overall)
- more collaboration between aquatic disciplines (43% of water polo respondents, and 37% of artistic swimming respondents, selected this, compared to 14% overall)

What respondents would like to change in aquatics - by discipline

Legend: Overall (Blue), Swimming, incl. open water swimming (Cyan), Water Polo (Yellow), Artistic Swimming (Teal), Other (Orange)

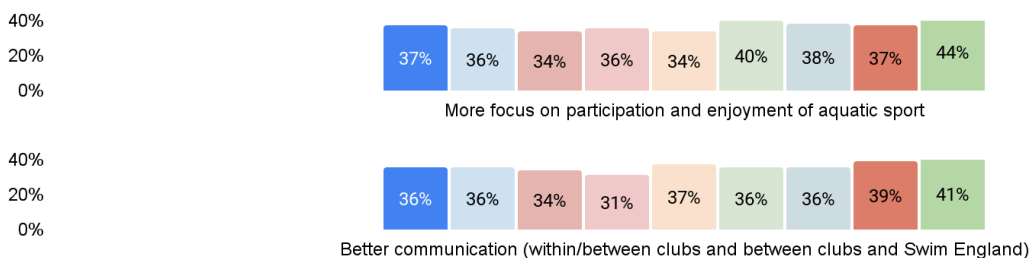


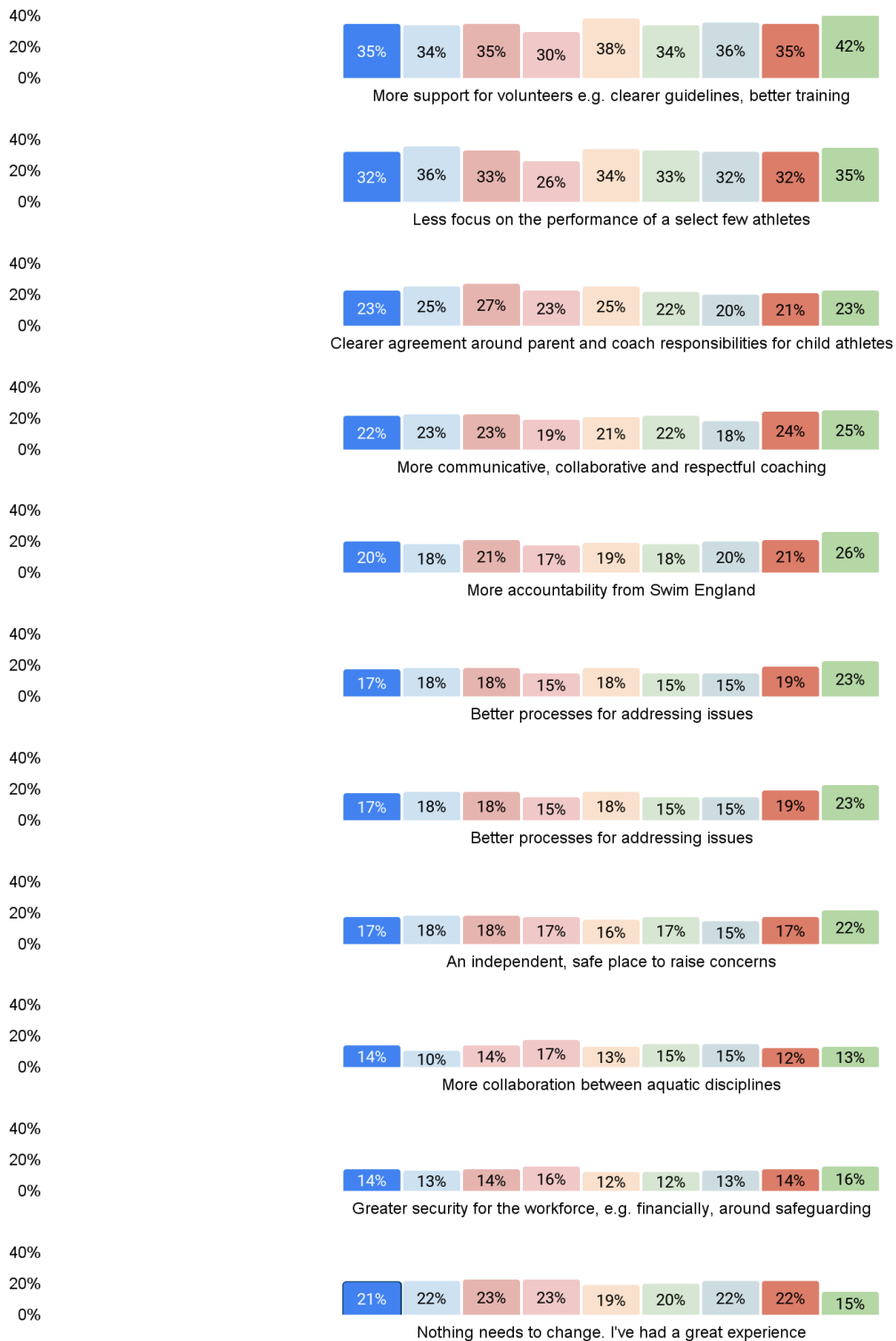


Note: Q24. "What would you like to change in aquatics?" N=3217 (swimming, incl open water swimming); Water polo (165); Artistic swimming (107); Other (100). Sample sizes for diving and para swimming were too small to be individually analysed. Response options were randomised.

Respondents outside of London are significantly more likely than London respondents to want more egalitarian focus, with less focus on the performance of a few select athletes.

What respondents would like to change in aquatics - by Swim England region





Note: Q24. "What would you like to change in aquatics?" N=363 (East Midland Region); 516 (East Region); 423 (London Region); 354 (North West Region); 680 (South East Region); 485 (South West Region); 443 (Swim England North East Region); 325 (West Midland Region). Response options were randomised.

Summary

The quantitative benchmarking survey shows that there is much to be done 'to ensure there is a positive culture across all aquatics and that the highest standards of welfare and safeguarding are in place.' It also substantiates many of the concerns raised regarding the role of Swim England reported across other stages of the Listening Research Programme.

Appendix A: Qualitative sample & methodology in detail

Recruitment of research participants

Communicating the research and ways to contribute

Announcement of the Listening Research Programme was made on Swim England's website on 15th June 2023, followed by sharing on their social media channels and in their weekly newsletter. Direct emails were sent by Swim England to all current members and former members who lapsed within the last five years, as well as via regional email lists for all disciplines, inviting participation with links to the anonymous mass listening survey and for registering interest to participate in pre-arranged confidential online research, interviews and listening workshops run independently by The Behavioural Architects.

Recruitment for the online ethnography, in depth interviews and listening workshops

A third party market research recruitment agency called Acumen sourced participants for the online ethnography, in depth interviews and listening workshops. This was done via two methods:

1. A link to a simple form which was included in Swim England communications about the research, and at the end of the mass listening survey, for people to express interest in participating in further research.
2. 'Free-finding' participants via Acumen's network of recruiters to achieve key quotas, for example; a mix of discipline, region, age groups, and clubs. Acumen's recruitment team advertised the research via their database of 200,000 people and on their social media channels. Swim England also provided a list of all affiliated clubs across England that Acumen could contact directly to help achieve a representative mix of participants.
 - a. Additional targeted efforts were made to recruit members from diving and artistic swimming. This included Swim England using discipline specific channels and recruiters contacting artistic swimming and diving clubs directly.

For both methods, participants completed a screening survey to check fit with key sample criteria.

Sample criteria for pre-recruited online research, interviews and listening workshops

Key criteria included:

- A mix of current and former members
 - Current members (athletes): including both adult athletes and children and young people (CYP) under 18 years, CYP all taking part with a parent/carer
 - Former member (athletes): have left aquatics with the last 5 years
 - Workforce members: Coaches, committee members and welfare officers
- Representation from all regions
- Disability: representative of people with disabilities
- Covering 4 disciplines: swimming, water polo, diving and artistic swimming
- Talent Pathway: representing club members who are on a Swim England Talent Pathway Programme
- Clubs: mix of 'performance' vs non-performance clubs, club size and region
- Additional demographics: Representative mix of gender, locations and social-economic grade.

All sample criteria were broadly met. However, representation from the following key groups was lower than hoped, despite additional efforts to recruit them by both Swim England's channels and free-finding:

1. Diving
2. Artistic swimming
3. Former members.

Under 16s

In line with the Market Research Code of Conduct, the research team did not approach anyone under 16 years of age directly, only through their parents who needed to give their consent before their child could take part.

- Given the mass listening survey was accessible to all, under 16s had to confirm that their parents had given consent. Both parents as well as CYPs were then able to respond independently of one another.
- For the online platform, under 16s were recruited via and took part with their parents, offering both parent and child the opportunity to complete activities together and alone depending on preference.

All the researchers who engaged directly with under 16s are DBS checked.

1. Mass listening

A private listening space using a Google Form was launched in June, where anyone could anonymously share their experiences. The aim was to provide a mass opportunity for all to come forward, including those potentially uncomfortable speaking directly with a researcher.

The survey was live for 6 weeks and pushed out across multiple channels, including:

- Swim England's website, and linking to their social media channels
- Swim England's weekly newsletter
- Regional email lists for all disciplines
- Direct emails to all current members and former members who lapsed within the last five years
- All County Secretaries and Chairs to share on their channels including newsletters and social media

Swim England worked closely with regions and counties, informing them of the programme and asking them to share with their contacts to try and reach former members no longer directly contactable by Swim England Head Office.

Along with some profiling questions such as their role within the aquatics community, region and aquatics discipline, participants responded to three questions about: 1) their experiences in their aquatics sport(s), 2) their hopes for the aquatics community in the future, 3) and their views on Swim England. Questions were optional and could be answered in a non-prescriptive way. Please see Appendix B for the full mass listening survey questionnaire.

The survey was continuously monitored to ensure a range of audience groups were included. It quickly highlighted the need to do additional targeting of key groups that were underrepresented in the responses.

A list of support organisations was made available at the end of the survey to signpost anyone wishing to speak further about their experiences - see Appendix D.

The Behavioural Architects read all responses. 819 responses were received from people across disciplines, regions and roles.

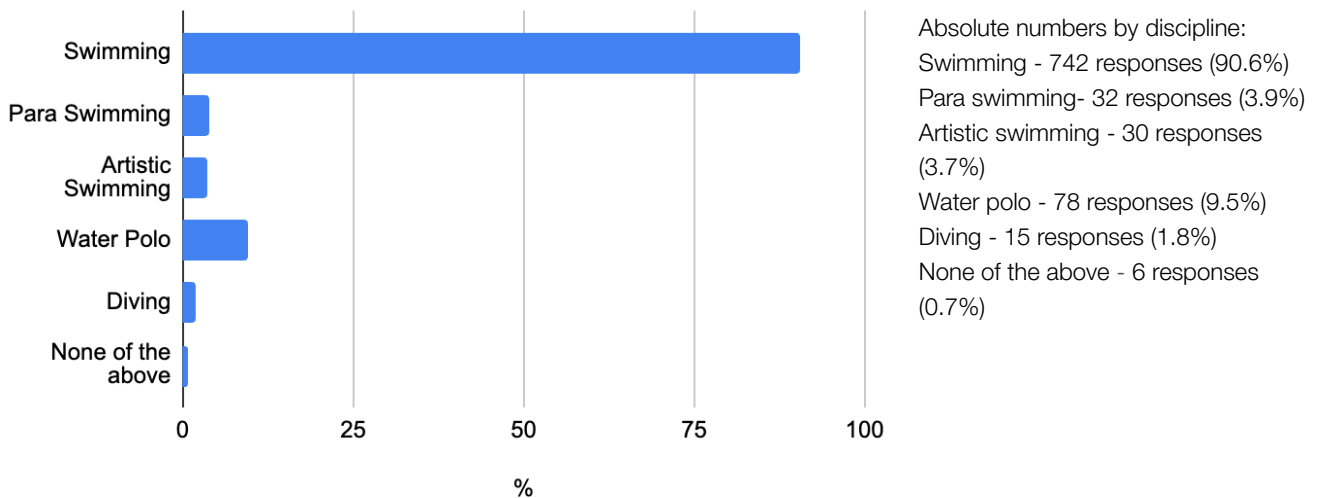
The 3 questions in the mass listening survey were optional to answer. Of the 819 responses:

- Your Experiences had 734 completes
- Hopes for the Future had 729 completes
- Views of Swim England had 652 completes

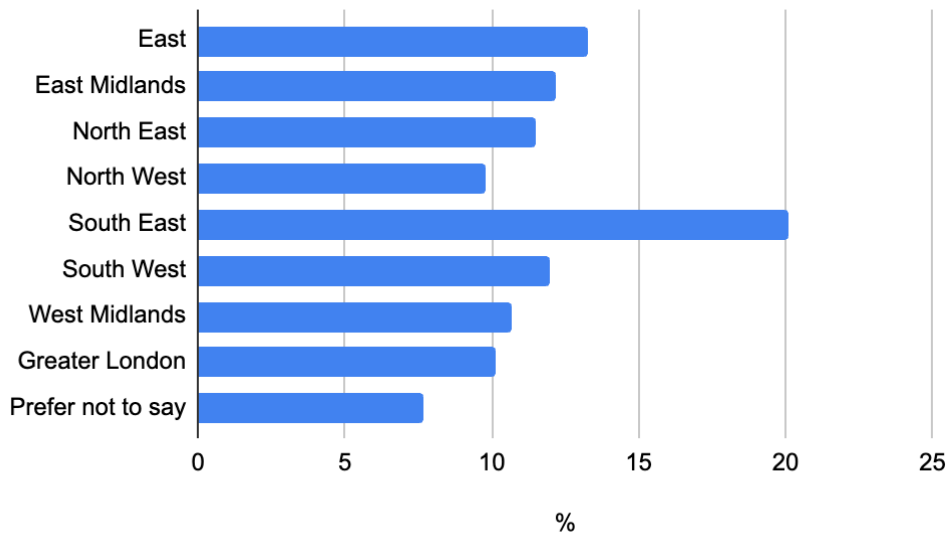
SAMPLE BREAKDOWN

The breakdown below shows the distribution of participants by discipline, region and role or connection to aquatics:

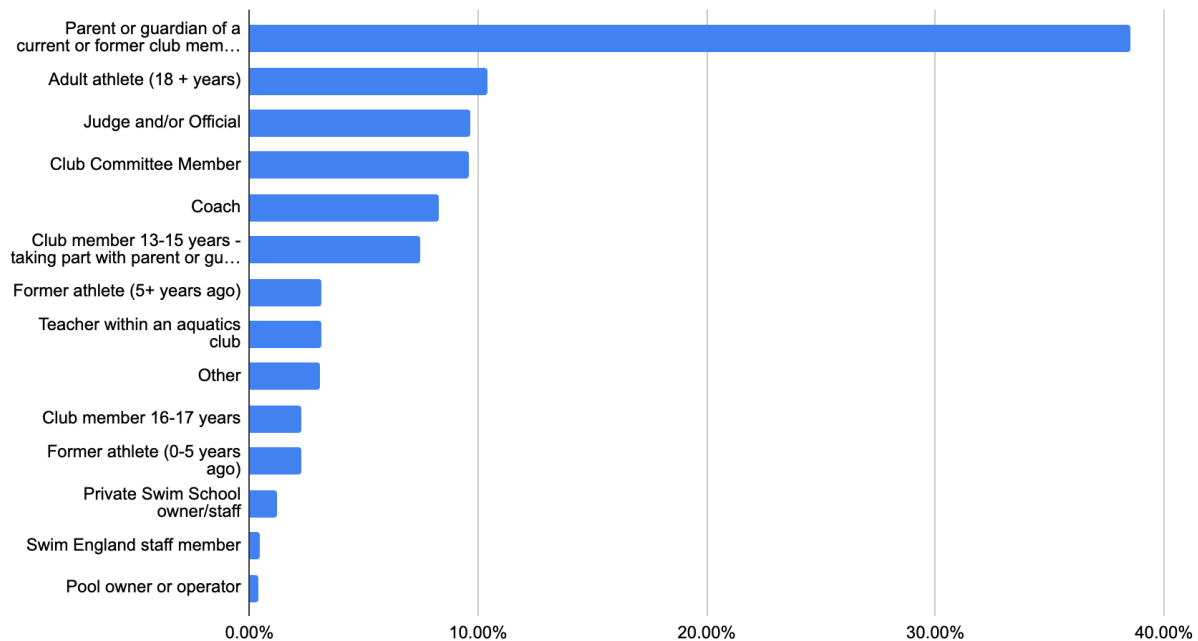
Aquatic Discipline



Region of their club



Role within the sport



2. In-context immersions at events and training

The research team visited four clubs and events to observe the environment and social interactions, and to conduct in-context interviews with technical officials, coaches, parents, athletes and club committee members. The following events were attended:

- The Diving National Skills Final: John Charles Centre for Sport, Leeds - for divers aged 8-16 years
- East Midlands Summer Festival of Swimming: Moorways Sports Village, Derby
- Watford Water Polo Club - training at Haberdashers Boys Sport Centre
- Out to Swim aquatics club (to observe artistic swimming) - training at Queen Mother, London

These events were chosen by The Behavioural Architects research team. They were selected based on events and sessions that were running during the research period and to cover all disciplines and a range of locations. Researchers spent the whole day at the events to capture different aspects of the day and attended a full evening of training sessions at the clubs to fully immerse in the experience and atmosphere. The aim was to meet people in the context of their sport to capture thoughts and feelings in the moment, using the setting and environment as a natural discussion prompt.

The sample in this case was ad hoc and dependent on who was available to speak to the researchers at the time. Efforts were made to interview a range of community members. A total of 84 people were interviewed across the 2 events and 2 club visits:

- 8 coaches
- 55 CYP members and their parents
- 2 adult members
- 14 club committee members
- 5 technical officials

Given the short window to be able to speak to people, researchers focused on discussing their role and views and experiences of feeling safe, welcome and included within their club and sport more broadly. In the competitions, researchers were able to speak to individuals pre and post their competition to better understand their thoughts and feelings towards the competitive element of aquatics, as well as observing behaviour in a competitive context.

3. Focus group with National Operators

A 90 minute group discussion with 7 operators took place during a quarterly National Operators forum (no Swim England members of staff were in attendance). This phase was designed to explore practical challenges and opportunities for driving positive change from an operator perspective.

The session was attended by 2 researchers; one facilitator and a note-taker. It covered topics including: perceptions of different aquatics cultures; experiences of safeguarding and welfare within clubs; reactions to example scenarios inspired by themes emerging to date from the mass listening survey; hopes for the future of aquatics; and views on and perceived role of Swim England.

4. Online self-ethnography

14 adult athletes and 32 CYP athletes under 18 years along with their parents were recruited to take part in online research. Participants took part over 10 days via an online platform accessible on a computer and mobile app.

Participants were invited to respond to a series of non-prescriptive questions and activities designed to understand in-the-moment and reflective experiences. For example, the activities included reporting live on their aquatics training sessions/events and mapping out their 'journey' in aquatics sport longer term to explore its physical and emotional impact.

The online approach was particularly effective for CYP participants, who find digital communication a natural channel for having conversations and provide a range of ways to share their views and experiences. It allowed participants to fit the research around their schedule and respond when it was relevant to them.

All responses shared were private and confidential, with views and experiences shared using a mix of

written blog posts, uploading images/photos and video/audio. The platform was moderated daily by the researchers who got to know the participants and probe for more detail where appropriate.

SAMPLE TOTAL: N=78: CYP members, parents and adult members

Gender	Age breaks	Discipline	Region their club is part of	Performance clubs	Talent pathway participants
CYPs and their parents (N=64: 32 CYPs + 32 parents))					
14 male 18 female	10 aged 10-12 yrs 16 aged 13-15 yrs 6 aged 16-17 yrs	25 swimming 5 water polo 1 diving 1 artistic swimming	4 East 6 Northeast 2 Southeast 5 East Midlands 7 Northwest 2 Southwest 4 West Midlands 2 Greater London	5	6
Adults (N=14)					
7 Male 7 Female	Spread of age	9 swimming 4 water polo 1 artistic swimming	2 East 2 Northeast 2 Southeast 3 East Midlands 3 Southwest 1 West Midlands 1 Greater London	-	-

5. Follow-up in depth interviews

Seven adult athletes and 12 CYP athletes with their parents were selected from the online ethnography to take part in follow-up interviews. Participants were chosen to cover a cross-section of the sample; spanning all disciplines, and a range of CYP athlete ages and regions.

The follow-up interviews were designed to build on and deepen understanding of findings emerging from the online platform research. Researchers used a range of visual stimulus, projective and enabling qualitative techniques to help participants articulate emotions and more subconscious associations, e.g. personification of Swim England.

Both the adult and CYP with parent interviews covered the following broad areas:

- Warm up, perceptions and experiences
 - What their aquatic sport means to them
 - Timeline deep dive
 - Exploring role and relationship with their coach
- Future of aquatics: how would they make their club a place where everyone feels safe, included and welcome
- Views on Swim England

Interviews were conducted either virtually or in participants' club context, depending on their preference. Researchers were led by parent and child preferences on how the interview was structured: with some parents in attendance throughout or just joining at the end to offer their perspective.

Four of the adult participants were paired for interviews (with their consent) to help stimulate discussion and debate, building off one another's views.

SAMPLE TOTAL (N=19)

Gender	Age breaks	Discipline	Region their club is part of	Performance vs non- performance clubs	Talent Pathway participants
12 X CYP Interviews with a parent (N=24 total)					
5 male 6 female	6 aged 10-12 5 aged 13-15	6 swimming 3 water polo 1 diving 1 artistic swimming	1 East 2 North East 1 East Midlands 2 North West 1 South West 2 West Midlands 2 Gt. London	3 performance clubs	1
Former participant: Male	13-15	swimming	North East	0	1
5 X Adult Interviews, 3 conducted with individuals and 2 as pairs (N=7)					
4 Male 3 Female	Spread of age	5 swimming 2 water polo	1 East 1 North East 1 South East 2 East Midlands 1 South West 1 West Midlands	0	0

6. In-depth interviews with workforce and volunteers

14 x 60 minute virtual interviews were conducted with coaches, committee members and welfare officers, including a mix of discipline and region.

Ahead of the interview, participants were invited to complete a simple pre-task, recalling key moments in their aquatics journey over time. This was referred to during the interview as a springboard for discussion and to provide context to their responses and current relationship in aquatics. Interviews covered the following broad areas:

- Warm up, context, role and experiences [30 mins]
 - Their role and experience at the club
 - Timeline deep dive
 - Perception of positive 'culture' and what it means to them
- Views on Swim England
- Future of aquatics: what needs to change to make them and others in the community feel safe, welcome and included.

SAMPLE (N=14)

Role	Discipline	Region of their club	Talent Pathway clubs
7 coaches 5 committee members (including chairs and treasurers) 2 welfare officers	7 swimming 2 water polo 3 artistic swimming 2 diving	1 East 1 South East 2 North East 3 East Midlands 4 North West 2 South West 1 Greater London	8

7. Listening workshops in London and Loughborough

Two 2.5 hour workshops were conducted towards the end of the research period in August, giving the researchers time to reflect on what they had heard during the previous phases and to build this into the plan for the workshops.

The workshops were designed to bring different roles within aquatics together to listen to and discuss one another's experiences, debate contributing factors to problems and share views on what needs to change.

The workshops were discursive to allow participants to voice what was important to them but broadly explored the following areas:

- Current emotions in their current role(s) and experiences driving these
- What 'safe', 'welcome' and 'included' means to them
- Ideas for how to create a more positive culture in aquatics
- Discussing Swim England's role in building a positive aquatics community and participants' experiences and perceptions of the organisation

The first workshop was conducted in Loughborough and the second in London. The make-up of the groups was devised to ensure a broad mix of views across roles and to encourage debate. Across the two workshops, there was a mix of gender, ages, role within aquatics and aquatic discipline.

The breakdown of the main role within aquatics participants were recruited against (n.b. most had multiple roles) were:

- 3 adult athletes, including a Masters swimmer
- 2 parents of current swimmers
- 1 parent of a former swimmer
- 4 coaches
- 1 former committee member
- 2 welfare officers
- 1 technical official

It should be noted that some attendees expressed considerable fear about coming to the workshops and their anonymity not being protected. They said others had felt too unafraid to come forward. Fear related principally to repercussions from Swim England but there was also fear of other members and

parents they had been in conflict with being there. Attendees were reminded that no members of Swim England would be involved in or be viewing the workshops - live or retrospectively.

Qualitative analysis approach

All stages of the programme followed a rigorous thematic analysis process, leveraging The Behavioural Architects' expertise in decoding the drivers of behaviour and established cultural theory:

- For the mass listening survey, two researchers exported all responses into a password protected spreadsheet and independently read and tagged the first 250 responses before coming together to review tags and develop a set of initial emerging themes. These were checked by the lead researcher and a refined set of tags developed. These tags were then used to re-code the first 250 responses in a consistent fashion and check their fit with the agreed tags, before coding the remaining responses. Where additional potential themes were identified, the researchers came together once more to agree on additional tags to use when coding the data.
- Immersing and looking for patterns in the data: towards the end of the fieldwork period, researchers individually reviewed the data from across all stages, including re-reading notes, transcripts, online platform reports and listening to audio recordings. While doing so, researchers began to look for patterns in responses - including the different types of experiences and views shared; and language used to describe the culture and atmosphere. The research team was then able to organise the data into meaningful, thematic groups and begin to interrogate which had more weighting over others.
- Conducting team analysis: the research team came together on multiple occasions during and after the fieldwork to discuss and interrogate the most important and relevant themes emerging from the research and any sub-themes within.
- Themes and insights were cross-checked and refined further during report write up.

Appendix B: Mass listening survey

Questionnaire [completed in Google Forms]

Thank you for visiting this Listening Space. Hearing your views and experiences will help us to understand how to create the best possible future for everyone involved in aquatic sports: swimming, diving, artistic swimming and water polo.

Your stories and feedback will make a real difference in identifying where changes are needed and how to improve things.

This is an opportunity to tell us about positive and negative experiences, and ones that you might have mixed feelings about.

We have 3 broad questions but you can just answer one or two if you would prefer. Your responses are anonymous so please feel you can be open and honest. You can write as much or as little as you like.

If your response doesn't fit or you need any help you can email us at listening@thebearchitects.com

Please note that this listening space has been designed to be anonymous and so we are not able to respond to the views and experiences you share.

The listening space will remain open until Thursday 27th July.

Profiling questions:

- *Firstly, please can you tell us which aquatic sport you are involved in? (tick all that apply)*
- *Please tell us how you are involved in this sport? (tick all that apply)*
- *Finally, if you are happy to say please tell us in which of the following regions do you take part or are involved in aquatic sports in any way?*

1. YOUR EXPERIENCES:

Using the space below, tell us in your own words about your experiences of being involved in aquatic sport. Please tell us what happened and how you felt. This could include: Good, bad or mixed experiences that have stuck with you. This might be something you observed, rather than you were directly involved in.

Please note, we are not expecting you to share names or other personal information that might identify you or others. It would be helpful to know roughly how long ago the experience you're describing was, and enough detail of what happened to give us the context.

Specific things you feel or have noticed that either help or detract from your (or other people's) experience - in terms of feeling safe, included and welcome?

We recognise that these may be occasional and sometimes small things but these are still important for us to understand.

2. HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Please use this space to share your hopes for the future of the aquatic sport(s) you are/were involved in [swimming / water polo / diving / artistic swimming].

You might like to talk about:

- *What you would like to see START / STOP / CONTINUE*
- *Specific changes to how things are done - this could be big or little changes that would help create an experience and environment where everyone can feel included, safe and welcome all of the times*

3. VIEWS ON SWIM ENGLAND

Please use this space to tell us your views on Swim England's role in helping to create positive experiences and cultures within aquatics [swimming / water polo / diving / artistic swimming]

Reminder: this research is being conducted independently of Swim England, so please feel you can be open and honest.

We would like to hear views on:

- *What role do Swim England play now? E.g. if/how they are supportive?*
- *What do they do well?*
- *Any issues or areas they could improve? E.g. how approachable they are?*
- *Things they should start, stop or continue doing to have a positive impact going forwards?*

Appendix C: Benchmarking survey questionnaire

SWIM ENGLAND HEART OF AQUATICS QUESTIONNAIRE

TEXT IN PURPLE = INTERNAL NOTES FOR RESEARCHERS

TEXT IN BLUE = INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCRIPTERS

TEXT IN BLACK = SHOWN TO RESPONDENTS

INTRO & SCREENERS

TEXT

Hi, thanks for your help completing this survey!

We would like to understand a bit more about the experiences of current Swim England members in aquatics. Some of these questions will include topics like safeguarding, welfare and how welcoming and inclusive aquatic sports are. It shouldn't take more than ten minutes of your time to complete.

We'd first like to understand a little more about you to make sure we're covering a wide range of people.

MULTIPLE

Q1. How are you involved in your aquatics community?

Please select all that apply.

1. Participant or athlete (16+)
2. Parent of current participant/athlete (below 16 years) - non-member
3. Parent of current participant/athlete (below 16 years) - member
4. Coach
5. Club teacher
6. Technical official - any discipline
7. Volunteer
8. Committee member
9. Other

IF SELECTED MULTIPLE AT Q1, ASK Q2.

SINGLE

Q2. And thinking of the past 3 months, which of the following did you spend most of your time in?

SHOW Q1 CODES

HIDDEN VARIABLE

1. PARTICIPANT if selected ONLY 1. at Q1, or 1. at Q2
2. PARENT if selected ONLY 2 OR 3 at Q1, or 2 OR 3 at Q2

3. OTHER otherwise

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

OPEN END

Q3. PARTICIPANT & OTHER How old are you?

PARENT How old is your child who participates in aquatics?

(If you have multiple children below the age of 16 participating in aquatics, please answer the following questions thinking about the oldest child under 16 in aquatics)

RECODE AGE INTO FOLLOWING

1. Under 13 yrs
2. 13 -18 yrs
3. 19 -24
4. 25-30 yrs
5. 31-39 yrs
6. 40-45 yrs
7. 46-49 yrs
8. 50-65 yrs
9. 66-75 yrs
10. 76+ yrs

SINGLE

SHOW TO PARTICIPANT or PARENT

Q3a.

PARTICIPANT Are you on the Talent Pathway Programme?

PARENT Is your child on the Talent Pathway Programme?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

HIDDEN VARIABLE

TALENT PATHWAY IF 1 AT Q3a

NOT PATHWAY IF 2 OR 3 AT Q3a

SINGLE

Q4. PARTICIPANT & OTHER What is your aquatics discipline (this includes open water swimming)?

If you are in more than one, please think of the one you are most active in.

PARENT What is your child's aquatics discipline (this includes open water swimming)?

If your child is in more than one, please think of the one they are most active in.

1. Swimming, including open water swimming
2. Para swimming
3. Water polo
4. Artistic swimming
5. Diving

Show to **PARENT**

Q5. We would love to hear directly from your child about their experiences of aquatics in England. These questions will include topics like safeguarding, welfare and how welcoming and inclusive aquatics is. Do we have your permission to ask your child about these topics, and are they available to take the survey?

1. Yes
2. No, I will answer for my child

HIDDEN VARIABLE

1. CHILD IF SELECT 1 AT Q5
2. **PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD** IF 2 AT Q5

If selected 1 at Q5:

Please ask your child to answer the next set of questions; we'll confirm when it's time to hand back to their parent or carer.

If selected 2 at Q5:

Please answer the next set of questions on behalf of your child.

Show to **PARTICIPANT & OTHER & CHILD**

When answering the rest of the questions, please answer thinking of the role and aquatic sport you spent most of your time in in the past 3 months.

Show to **PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD**

When answering the rest of the questions, please answer thinking of the role and aquatic sport your child spent most of your time in in the past 3 months.

STATE OF MIND

PARTICIPANT

OTHER

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD

Thank you for your answers so far! We now want to ask you about your feelings about [insert response to Q4]. Everything you say is completely confidential and there are no right or wrong answers.

CHILD

We'd like to ask you about how you feel about [insert response to Q4]. Everything you say is completely confidential and there are no right or wrong answers.

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

Q6.

PARTICIPANT

OTHER

CHILD

In the past 3 months, have you felt....

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD

In the past 3 months, has your child felt....

Please select all that apply.

<p>CHILD</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 😊 - Happy 2. 😄 - Excited 3. 😎 - Confident 4. 🌟 - Proud 5. 😰 - Nervous 6. 😞 - Down 7. 😡 - Frustrated 8. 😱 - Afraid 9. None of the above 	<p>PARTICIPANT</p> <p>OTHER</p> <p>PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Happy 2. Excited 3. Confident 4. Proud 5. Nervous 6. Down 7. Frustrated 8. Fearful 9. None of the above
--	--

SHOW IF NOT CODE 9 AT Q6

SINGLE, RANDOMISE

Q7.

PARTICIPANT

OTHER

CHILD

And in the past 3 months, which have you felt most?

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD

And in the past 3 months, which has your child felt most?

SHOW CODES SELECTED AT Q6

HIGH LEVEL BENCHMARKS

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

Q8.

PARTICIPANT

OTHER

CHILD

Looking at the statements below, which would you agree with based on your own experience in aquatics in the last year?

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD

Looking at the statements below, which would you agree with based on your child's experience in aquatics in the last year?

CHILD	PARTICIPANT OTHER	PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aquatics is a sport where everyone is equal and feels welcome 2. The adults in charge care about my wellbeing more than my results 3. I feel supported and encouraged 4. I feel like I can say what I think and feel, and don't worry about asking questions 5. None of the above 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Aquatics is an inclusive sport 7. I feel that my safety and welfare are top priority 8. Aquatics provides a supportive environment for members to thrive 9. I feel like I have a voice, I can ask questions and talk openly 10. None of the above 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Aquatics is an inclusive sport 12. I feel that my child's safety and welfare are top priority 13. Aquatics provides a supportive environment for members to thrive 14. I feel like my child and I have a voice, can ask questions and talk openly 15. None of the above

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES IN AQUATICS

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

Q9.

PARTICIPANT

OTHER

Thinking about the last 3 months in [insert response to Q4], which of these experiences can you relate to?

CHILD

Thinking about the last 3 months in [insert response to Q4], did any of this happen?

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD

Thinking about the last 3 months in [insert response to Q4], which of these experiences can your child relate to?

Please select all that apply.

1. Feeling part of a community
2. Learning and developing aquatics skills
3. Realising I could achieve things I never knew I could
4. Feeling inspired
5. Setting out a training plan that made me feel motivated
6. Enjoying making progress or achieving success
7. Improvements to my wellbeing (physical and/or mental health)
8. Supportive fellow members
9. Supportive coaches
10. Other
11. None of the above **FIX**

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

Q10.

PARTICIPANT

OTHER

And again thinking about the last 3 months in [insert response to Q4], which of these experiences have happened to you or to someone you know?

CHILD

Again thinking about the last 3 months in [insert response to Q4], did any of this happen to you or someone you know?

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD

Again thinking about the last 3 months in [insert response to Q4], which of these experiences happened to your child or someone they know?

Please select all that apply.

1. Unequal treatment of members
2. Being bullied - e.g. by another member, coach or anyone else in aquatics
3. Causing or making injuries worse by over-training
4. Self-harm
5. Having issues with eating or weight
6. Contact or attention from other members, coaches or anyone else in aquatics that makes you feel uncomfortable
7. Not feeling comfortable speaking up because you feel afraid of what might happen, or embarrassed about what happened/what you saw
8. Feeling under too much pressure
9. Poor communication from the club or coaches

10. Other
11. None of the above **FIX**

Suppose you saw a coach bully someone in training e.g. repeatedly commenting on their weight, or saying they're useless, in a hurtful way in front of other athletes

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

Q13. Who do you think would be the right people to talk to about it?

1. Tell my parents **SHOW IF CHILD**
2. Talk to the athlete (or their parents if they're a young person)
3. Tell another coach
4. Tell the welfare officer
5. Talk to the coach
6. Report the coach to Swim England
7. Talk to an adult outside of swimming that I trust e.g. a teacher
8. Other
9. None of the above

SINGLE

SHOW IF NOT 9 AT Q13

Q14. Whoever you would talk to, would you feel comfortable talking to them about what you saw?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

SHOW IF 2 AT Q14

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

Q15. Why not?

1. I'm worried the coach will punish me **SHOW IF CHILD OR PARTICIPANT**
2. I'm worried the coach will punish my child **SHOW IF PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD**
3. I'm worried it will affect my child's progression **SHOW IF PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD**
4. I'm afraid my career would suffer **SHOW IF OTHER**
5. I'm too embarrassed to say anything
6. I'm not sure the club will know how to deal with it
7. I have made reports before and nothing happened
8. I'm afraid I'll be excluded or left out
9. I don't think anyone would listen
10. I don't think anyone would believe me
11. I don't think anyone would do anything about it
12. Other (please specify)

SINGLE

Q16. **PARTICIPANT** & **OTHER** & **CHILD** Are you...

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD Is your child...

1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-binary or gender-fluid
4. Prefer to self-identify
5. Prefer not to say

SINGLE

Q17. **PARTICIPANT** & **OTHER** & **CHILD** How would you describe your sexuality?

PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD How would you describe your child's sexuality?

PARTICIPANT & OTHER & CHILD	PARENT ANSWERING FOR CHILD
1. Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual	9. Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual
2. Straight/Heterosexual	10. Straight/Heterosexual
3. Asexual	11. Asexual
4. Bisexual	12. Bisexual
5. Pansexual	13. Pansexual
6. Questioning	14. Questioning
7. My sexuality is not included above	15. My child's sexuality is not included above
8. Prefer not to answer	16. Prefer not to answer

CHILD

Please ask your parent or carer to answer the rest of the questions.

SINGLE

QP. Before today, had you heard of Swim England? By Swim England in this questionnaire, we mean the national governing body, not Swim England clubs, counties and regions.

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

SHOW IF 1 AT QP

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

QP_a. And what do you think Swim England's purpose is?

Please select all that apply.

1. To carry out research on aquatics
2. Promoting aquatics in England
3. Ensuring good conduct for participants, coaches and technical officials

4. Provide training
5. Set rules, regulations and standards
6. Support swimming providers with information on facilities and best practice
7. To encourage people to learn how to swim
8. To distribute funding to clubs
9. To lead England's aquatics talents pathway
10. To handle safeguarding and welfare concerns
11. To support pool operators grow their health and wellbeing activity in pools
12. Other
13. None of the above **EXCLUSIVE**

SHOW IF 1 AT QP

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

QPb. Please select the statements you agree with.

1. I can trust Swim England
2. I can express my safeguarding and welfare concerns to Swim England
3. I will be supported by Swim England
4. Swim England has its members' interests at heart
5. Swim England will respond to my queries or concerns
6. Swim England is well organised
7. Swim England treats all members fairly and equally
8. Swim England's communications are clear and transparent
9. Swim England handles complaints well
10. None of the above **FIX, EXCLUSIVE**

QY. Before today, were you aware that you could do any of the following with Swim England?

Please select all that apply.

1. Raise a safeguarding or welfare concern
2. Raise a judicial complaint (click the 'i' button for an explanation)
3. None of the above **EXCLUSIVE**

IF NOT 3 AT QY

GRID

MULTIPLE

QYA. And have you done any of the following with Swim England?

COLS

SHOW SELECTED AT QY

ROWS

1. Yes, before 2023
2. Yes, after 2023
3. No, I didn't think anything would happen
4. No, it felt too hard
5. No, I was worried about what might happen

6. Not applicable - I didn't have anything to raise EXCLUSIVE

IF 1 OR 2 AT QYA

GRID

QYB. And how was the experience?

Please select all that apply.

COLS

SHOW SELECTED AT QY

ROWS

1. I felt confident that Swim England could deal with my concerns
2. I felt satisfied that Swim England followed the process accurately
3. I felt that I received good and transparent communication about the process
4. None EXCLUSIVE

MULTIPLE, RANDOMISE

Q24. What would you like to change in aquatics?

Please select all that apply.

1. Nothing needs to change; I've had a great experience FIX, EXCLUSIVE
2. Less focus on the performance of a select few athletes
3. More collaboration between aquatic disciplines
4. More support for volunteers e.g. clearer guidelines, better training
5. Greater security for the workforce, e.g. financially, around safeguarding
6. Better communication (within/between clubs and between clubs and Swim England)
7. Better processes for addressing issues
8. More accountability from Swim England
9. More focus on participation and enjoyment of aquatic sport
10. More communicative, collaborative and respectful coaching
11. Clearer agreement around parent and coach responsibilities for child athletes
12. An independent, safe place to raise concerns

CLOSING DEMOGRAPHICS

Thank you so much for your responses! We'll just end with some questions to get to know you a little better.

SINGLE

QD1. PARTICIPANT & OTHER How would you describe your ethnicity?

PARENT How would you describe your child's ethnicity?

1. White
2. Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
3. East Asian (including Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean etc.)
4. South Asian (including Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali etc.)

5. South East Asian (including Burmese, Thai, Vietnamese, Laotian (Laos), Cambodian, Filipino, Singaporean etc.)
6. Black/African/Caribbean
7. Other
8. Prefer not to answer

SINGLE

QD2. **PARTICIPANT** & **OTHER** Would you describe yourself as having a disability (including physical disability or learning difficulties)?

PARENT Would you describe your child as having a disability (including physical disability or learning difficulties)?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Prefer not to say

If respondent selects 1 at QD2, ask QD3

QD3. **PARTICIPANT** & **OTHER** To what extent does this disability impact your day-to-day functioning?

PARENT To what extent does this disability impact their day-to-day functioning?

1. A lot
2. Somewhat
3. Not at all

HIDDEN VARIABLE

DISABLED = If selected 1 or 2 at QD3

NON-DISABLED IF SELECTED 2 OR 3 AT QD2 OR 3 AT QD3

SINGLE

QD4. Does your Swim England county begin with...

If your Swim England county name begins with 'Swim England', please ignore that part. For example, if your county is 'Swim England Cambridgeshire' we're just thinking of 'Cambridgeshire'.

1. A - L (e.g. Bedfordshire ASA, Swim England Cambridgeshire, Lancashire County WPSA)
2. M - Y (e.g. Middlesex County ASA, Swim England Norfolk, Yorkshire ASA)
3. Don't know

HIDDEN VARIABLE

1. **ATOL** IF 1 AT QD4
2. **MTOY** IF 2 AT QD4

SINGLE

QD4a. Which of these-Swim England counties are you part of? (Tick one)

ATOL	MTOY	Code 3 at QD4
1. Bedfordshire ASA	20. Middlesex County	38. Bedfordshire ASA
2. Berkshire & S Bucks	ASA	39. Berkshire & S Bucks
3. Cheshire County WPSA	21. Northumberland and Durham	40. Cheshire County WPSA
4. Swim England Cambridgeshire	22. Northamptonshire ASA	41. Swim England Cambridgeshire
5. Cumbria ASA	23. Swim England	42. Cumbria ASA
6. Cornwall ASA	Norfolk	43. Cornwall ASA
7. Derbyshire ASA	24. Nottinghamshire ASA	44. Derbyshire ASA
8. Dorset County ASA	25. Oxfordshire & North	45. Dorset County ASA
9. Devon County ASA	Bucks ASA	46. Devon County ASA
10. Swim England Essex - East Region	26. Swim England Suffolk	47. Swim England Essex - East Region
11. Swim England Essex - London Region	27. Shropshire ASA	48. Swim England Essex - London Region
12. Gloucester ASA	28. Somerset ASA	49. Gloucester ASA
13. Hampshire County ASA	29. Surrey County ASA - South East Region	50. Hampshire County ASA
14. Swim England Hertfordshire	30. Surrey County ASA - London Region	51. Swim England Hertfordshire
15. Kent County ASA - South East Region	31. Sussex County ASA	52. Kent County ASA - South East Region
16. Kent County ASA - London Region	32. Staffordshire ASA	53. Kent County ASA - London Region
17. Leicestershire ASA	33. Staffordshire ASA	54. Leicestershire ASA
18. Lincolnshire ASA	34. Wiltshire ASA	55. Lincolnshire ASA
19. Lancashire County WPSA	35. Worcester County ASA	56. Lancashire County WPSA
	36. Warwickshire ASA	57. Middlesex County ASA
	37. Yorkshire SA	58. Northumberland and Durham
		59. Northamptonshire ASA
		60. Swim England Norfolk
		61. Nottinghamshire ASA
		62. Oxfordshire & North Bucks ASA
		63. Swim England Suffolk
		64. Shropshire ASA
		65. Somerset ASA

		66. Surrey County ASA - South East Region 67. Surrey County ASA - London Region 68. Sussex County ASA 69. Staffordshire ASA 70. Staffordshire ASA 71. Wiltshire ASA 72. Worcester County ASA 73. Warwickshire ASA 74. Yorkshire SA
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CREATE HIDDEN VARIABLE

COUNTY = RESPONSE TO QD4a.

REGION DEFINED AS IN TABLE BELOW

COUNTY	REGION
Bedfordshire ASA	East Region
Berkshire & S Bucks	South East Region
Cheshire County WPSA	North West Region
Swim England Cambridgeshire	East Region
Cumbria ASA	North West Region
Cornwall ASA	South West Region
Derbyshire ASA	East Midland Region
Dorset County ASA	South West Region
Devon County ASA	South West Region
Swim England Essex - East Region	East Region
Swim England Essex - London Region	London Region
Gloucester ASA	South West Region
Hampshire County ASA	South East Region
Swim England Hertfordshire	East Region
Kent County ASA - South East Region	South East Region
Kent County ASA - London Region	London Region
Leicestershire ASA	East Midland Region
Lincolnshire ASA	East Midland Region

Lancashire County WPSA	North West Region
Middlesex County ASA	London Region
Northumberland and Durham	Swim England North East Region
Northamptonshire ASA	East Midland Region
Swim England Norfolk	East Region
Nottinghamshire ASA	East Midland Region
Oxfordshire & North Bucks ASA	South East Region
Swim England Suffolk	East Region
Shropshire ASA	West Midland Region
Somerset ASA	South West Region
Surrey County ASA - South East Region	South East Region
Surrey County ASA - London Region	London Region
Sussex County ASA	South East Region
Staffordshire ASA	West Midland Region
Wiltshire ASA	South West Region
Worcester County ASA	West Midland Region
Warwickshire ASA	West Midland Region
Yorkshire SA	Swim England North East Region

As with the mass listening survey, a list of support organisations was made available at the end of the benchmarking survey to signpost anyone wishing to speak further about their experiences - see Appendix D.

Appendix D: List of support organisations

Included as part of the mass listening survey and benchmarking survey

If thinking about your aquatics experience has distressed you in any way, don't be alone with it. Please do talk to someone you trust. You can also contact any of these organisations for more information.

NSPCC (National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children): Call 0808 800 5000

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

You can call them directly. The phone line is open 24 hours a day and is free of charge. If you need someone to call you back at a quiet time they can. You do not have to give your name. Only trained and experienced counsellors work on this line and they know what to do.

Childline: Call 0800 1111 <https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Childline is a safe and confidential telephone line that is open 24 hours a day with trained listeners. You can call and speak to a counsellor in confidence any time of day. Or have a look at the website, where there are lots of resources and an online community.

If you are hearing impaired or deaf they can provide a BSL interpreter. Can provide a BSL interpreter if you are deaf or hearing-impaired.

Young Minds: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

This website has lots of advice for young people and their adults. If you want to chat to someone immediately, they guide you to ChildLine (08001111) They do not have a helpline, but they do have lots of useful links to resources and other organisations.

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/search/?query=Contact>

Samaritans: Call 116 123

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

The Samaritans often work with adults who are struggling with life, but they also help young people throughout the UK. You can also e-mail jo@samaritans.org

SHOUT Text SHOUT to 85258.

Shout offers text support only but for 24 hours a day for any young person across the UK experiencing a mental health crisis. All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors. Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus. Texts can be anonymous, but if the volunteer believes you are at immediate risk of harm, they may share your details with people who can provide support.

NHS Urgent Mental Health Helpline (England only)

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline>

This helpline offers mental health support and advice, in your area 24 hours a day. This link tells you all about how to use the service but there is no single phone line.

Kids Inspire: Call 01245 348707 or 07908 829550 9am-5pm. If you call here you will get a clinical administrator who will guide you. This is not a help line but the organisation provides mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children and young people from 4-21.

https://www.kidsinspire.org.uk/children-and-young-people?gclid=CjwKCAjwhJukBhBPEiwAnilcNbsc1Kn-DIMPsp281MZId5_OoQWKz5tIV_ixFI9zMGq6Enduf0UNhxoCtrsQAvD_BwE

LGBTIQA

All the above organisations deal with LGBTQ issues. But you can also look here to find specific organisations near you.

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-young-people/lgbt>

Special needs counselling

If you have special needs and would like to get some counselling help then look at this website

<http://www.specialneedscounselling.co.uk>

The autism service directory has a list of services here. Call 07811 549 463 or email

caroline@specialneedscounselling.co.uk

<https://www.autism.org.uk/directory/s/special-needs-counsellingservice>

You know you want counselling?

If you know you want counselling and you don't need to keep it private from your parents, you can arrange an appointment with your GP and set something up. Or if you can afford to pay then there are private counsellors and therapists.

<https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/childrelatedissues.html>

This link will tell you about what counselling is and how it works. It will guide you about how to find some counselling.

If you do want counselling make sure anyone you see is registered by the BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) at

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/what-therapy-can-help-with/child-related-issues/> or the UKCP (

UK Council for Psychotherapy) at <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/> or the BPS (British Psychological

Society) at <https://www.bps.org.uk>

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is described by Swim England's [Wavepower 2020-23: Child safeguarding policy and procedures for clubs](#) as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes

Key terms for considering safeguarding and welfare issues are given below, taken from Wavepower.

Bullying: deliberate action or hurtful behaviour by one or more people that is repeated over a period of time. Bullying is defined as:

- **Verbal:** name calling, persistent teasing, mocking, taunting and threats.
- **Physical:** any degree of physical violence including hitting, kicking and pushing, intimidating behaviour, theft or the intentional damage of possessions.
- **Emotional:** excluding, tormenting, ridiculing, humiliation, setting people up and spreading rumours.
- **Cyber:** the misuse of digital technologies or communications to bully a person or a group, typically through messages or actions that are threatening and/or intended to cause offence, anxiety or humiliation.
- **Racist:** bullying based on ethnicity, skin colour, and language, religious or cultural practices.
- **Homophobic** and **transphobic:** bullying based on sexuality or gender identity.
- **Disablist:** bullying children who have special educational needs and disabilities.
- **Sexual:** unwelcome sexual advances, comments that intended to cause offence, humiliation or intimidation.
- **Discriminative:** bullying based on any perceived weakness or difference. This could be because of their gender, age, race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability or ability. It could also be factors surrounding the way someone looks or the clothes they wear, their family and social situation, hobbies and interests.