



SINK OR SWIM - TIME FOR GOVERNMENT TO 'STAMP OUT' VAT ON SWIMMING LESSONS

4 in 10 (40%) parents say their child does not currently know how to swim and nearly a quarter of parents with a child aged 11 admit the same.

Dear

Swimming lessons are the only 'sports' activity that teaches a lifesaving skill and every child in the UK should be given the opportunity to access learn to swim lessons and be taught water safety skills, because one day these lessons could save their or someone else's life. However, unlike other sports, with swimming there are many physical barriers - to be taught how to learn to swim safely you need access to a pool, expert tuition and for lessons to be affordable. These barriers have been significantly amplified by the cost of living and energy bills crisis, and thousands of swim schools across the country, including in our constituency of are in desperate need of support to be able to continue to teach this key life skill.

To help, the [Swimming Teachers' Association \(STA\)](#), a national governing body for swimming and swimming teaching charity whose objective is "*the preservation of human life through the teaching of swimming and lifesaving*", has brought the UK swim school community together and is putting forward to government **positive business solutions** that can immediately help the teaching of grassroots swimming lessons and the many thousands of learn to swim providers.

We urge the government with your support as my MP, to acknowledge the importance of learning to swim as a key life skill, and to acknowledge that immediate action is needed to tackle the current crisis in grassroots swimming, in the private swim school particularly – a sector of the market that millions of parents have been forced to rely upon to teach their children a key life skill, due to the demise of school swimming and the lack of government support, and forced council pool closures over the last decade.

School swimming is one of the main roots of the issues, but it is a more complex subject to tackle – however, the government do need to recognise that while they might counter-argue and say school

swimming is on the curriculum, the facts of the matter are [“in practice, it is just not happening in every school, and where it is, it is often delivered to a poor standard.”](#)

These are also the **FACTS** of the matter:

School Swimming in the UK

- Despite swimming being part of the national curriculum, 1 in 4 children leave primary school unable to swim every year – 25% of children are at risk of drowning (Source: Swim United). Parents / carers, therefore, rely on paying for swimming lessons with private swim schools due to the lack of swimming provisions in schools.
- Over half of parents surveyed this month by STA said they rely on paying for swimming lessons because of a lack of swimming provisions in their child's school.
- Typically, these school children also come from ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Source: Swim United) and the threats to leisure centres and swimming pools through the energy bills crisis will exacerbate the problem.

UK Drownings

- [The number of accidental water-related deaths in the UK every year is sobering](#): from 2009 to 2020, there were 7,000 water-related fatalities, and almost 3,000 families have been impacted by fatal accidents in water over the past 10 years. Just last year, 30 people under the age of 20 died from accidents in the water (figures from WAID). Sadly, unless something is done, these statistics are only set to get worse as a result of global warming with people tempted to cool off in the sea and inland waterways during the summer months.

Pool Closures

- [Ukactive](#) report that 40% of council areas are at risk of leisure centre and swimming pool closures and restrictions before April without immediate support. If this happens, **where are these swimmers enrolled into learn to swim programmes going to go** – to private swim schools that are equally facing increased costs?

The importance of the private swim school sector in teaching learn to swim and water safety skills programmes

The private swim school market employs tens of thousands of swimming teachers and teaches millions of children to learn how to swim every year; as a sector, it, therefore, needs urgent business support from the government to survive the current economic crisis.

With STA we are therefore calling for all 'learn to swim lessons' to be VAT Zero-Rated or VAT exempt ([in response to a recent nationwide swim school survey conducted by STA in October 2022](#)). Interestingly in the public sector, swimming lessons are VAT exempt, therefore in regions where public and private swimming providers 'compete' for pool space, the government-funded public sector has an unfair competitive advantage.

“86% of private swim schools are concerned about rising energy costs - the threat to their business and the knock-on effects.” (Source: STA)

Conversely, as the STA survey shows, a third of swim schools are **purposely keeping under the VAT threshold**, and said if learn to swim lessons were free from VAT, they would have the capacity to teach more swimmers. This would vastly help with the current waiting lists by enabling more opportunities for more people to learn a key life skill.

STA is presenting the government with a quick, easy-fix solution with its proposal of removing VAT from learn to swim lessons where its currently being applied.

Removing a 'consumption tax' on swimming lessons – lessons that teach an essential key life skill and that could potentially save someone's life – would yield significant benefits for the millions of people wanting to learn how to swim. It would also secure the future of swim school businesses and create employment opportunities.

**Therefore, with the STA, we are calling on the Government to affect real change by ...
Removing VAT / applying Zero-Rated VAT on the teaching of all learn to swim and water lifesaving skills lessons in ALL private swim schools in the UK - in line with the government funded public sector which is currently exempt from VAT.**

Without the private swim school market, the public sector would not be able to cope with the demand for swimming lessons in the UK and millions of children would miss out on learning to swim – learning a key life skill.

STA has already played its part this year to help the sector with [STAnd Up For Swimming](#) – putting its money where its mouth is to bridge the post-pandemic swimming teaching skills gap, by donating tens of thousands of its own charity funds to provide free swimming teaching training across the UK. The campaign has brought more than 800 new swimming teachers to the industry – swimming teachers who will go on to teach many hundreds, thousands of learners a key life skill during their career.

We now urgently need your help and support for the solutions being proposed to make the teaching of swimming and water lifesaving skills VAT Zero-Rated or VAT exempt.

Many thanks in advance for your support.

Yours sincerely

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