

# Safe Supervision for Teaching and Coaching Swimming

## Definition of Supervision

ASA regulations state that a Level 1 (Assistant) Teacher should teach/coach under the supervision of a Level 2 (Teacher) or above. The supervisory aspect relates to two main areas, i.e. safe practise and best practise and provides the opportunity for the Level 1 teacher to be mentored by the supervisory teacher.

The degree of supervision and support required will vary and should reflect a risk assessment carried out by the supervisory teacher/coach. The risk assessment will take into account a range of factors including:

- Competence and experience of the Level 1 teacher
- Lifeguard provision – is the supervising teacher carrying out a dual role of teacher and lifeguard; does the teacher being supervised hold an appropriate lifeguard qualification
- Design of the pool where the teacher is taking place
- Ability of pupils being taught by the assistant and the supervising teacher

Ultimately, the responsibility for the group being taught by the Level 1 teacher rests with the supervising teacher. It is essential, therefore, that the supervising teacher is positioned close enough to the Level 1 teacher to be able to observe the teaching that is taking place and to intervene if this considered necessary. It is essential, however, that any intervention required does not jeopardise the safety of the group being taught by the supervising teacher.

The role being carried out by the supervising teacher will impact upon the number of teachers/coaches being supervised at any one time. If the supervising teacher is not directly responsible for a group of swimmers she/he may supervise a maximum of 6 assistant teachers (subject to the risk assessment referred to above). However, if the supervising teacher is directly responsible for teaching a group then it is recommended that their supervision of other assistants is limited to a maximum of 2 and that the function of the lifeguard be carried out by a person not included in the teaching process.

## Pupil Teacher Ratios

It is recommended that in the vast majority of cases encountered, pupil: teacher ratios should not exceed 20:1 – and in some cases should be less than that. These ratios are based upon safety requirements and not the criteria for teaching. The paragraph given later headed Exceptions deals with those routine circumstances in which the 20:1 ratio can be exceeded.

Having taken into account the safety and other guidelines already dealt with, the recommendations here should be helpful in determining actual ratios for programmes swimming activities. The ratios given are for pupils in the water. Where the teacher is also responsible for pupils not in the water but on the poolside, then the ratios may need to be smaller or appropriate action taken as indicated in the paragraph given later headed Exceptions.

## **The ratios – NOT to be exceeded:**

### **Adult and Child classes 12:1**

That is, up to twelve pairs (one adult and one child) to each teacher. For the purposes of this document the term child refers to – a child, less than 5 years of age.

### **Non-swimmers and beginners 12:1**

If more than this number is being taught, other adults may be used to help the teacher/coach – see later paragraph headed Exceptions.

### **Improving swimmers 20:1**

It is recommended that the lesson be confined to an area of the pool where pupils are not out of their depth.

### **Mixed ability groups 20:1**

Pupils with a range of ability (from improver standard to competent swimmers) but where the least able and least confident are working well within their depth. Swimmers technique, stamina and deep water experience should be considered.

### **Competent swimmers 20:1**

Those swimmers who can swim at least 25 metres competently and unaided on front and back, and can tread water for two minutes.

### **Competitive swimmers 30:1**

Training only, with very competent swimmers

### **Swimmers with disabilities 8:1**

Each situation must be considered independently as people with disabilities do not form a homogenous group.

Care must be taken to ensure that there are sufficient helpers in the water to provide a 1:1 ratio for those needing constant support and a sufficient number of other helpers to provide the degree of support demanded by the range of disabilities within the group.

There are national organisations for specific disabilities from which further guidance may be obtained.

## **Exceptions**

Organisational demands will sometimes make a teaching ratio within 20:1 virtually impossible.

In these circumstances a qualified and skilled teacher can adopt a number of strategies to help with the management of the group. For example, another responsible person on the poolside, who is competent to recognise and respond to a pupil in difficulty, may provide the necessary supervision. In a school this could be an interested parent, a teaching auxiliary or a sixth form student training for a sport leader or similar award.

They must always work under the supervision of the teacher and be absolutely clear on the nature and extent of their role.

Alternatively, pupils can be taught to work in pairs, immediately having the number in the water at any one time.

The teacher instructs the resting pupils, who must be out of the water, to constantly observe their partners and to bring any concern to the immediate attention of the teacher. Teachers can adopt these measures only where they are included in the pool's normal operating procedures, and not where there is:

- A wide variation in the swimming ability of the pupils
- Language or learning difficulties
- A large water area (more than 250sq metres)
- Deep water areas into which poor ability swimmers could stray and be out of their depth
- Difficulty in seeing beneath the water surface due to glare or reflection

## **Teachers' Responsibilities**

Teachers and coaches must be trained, and able to carry out their role, in the pool's emergency action plan. They must ensure that:

The pupils understand and regularly practise their response in an emergency

The emergency procedures to evacuate the water and summon assistant are practised regularly in accordance with the requirements of the emergency action plan.

Safety considerations must always be paramount. If an employer or organiser insists on a pupil: teacher ratio considered by the teacher involved being inappropriate and potentially unsafe, then the teacher should express that concern:

- Verbally to the appropriate supervisor and/or employer at the time
- In writing, passed to the appropriate supervisor and/or employer
- In extreme circumstances a teacher or coach may have to consider whether it is safe to continue with a swimming session