

Heart of Aquatics

2023 Safeguarding, Welfare and Culture Plan



Board Commitment

Welcome to the *Heart of Aquatics* – Swim England’s new safeguarding, welfare and culture plan.

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

Aquatics is a powerful force for good in this country, supporting people’s physical and mental health and there are fantastic examples of this across the country. However, we recognise there have been behaviours and practices within our sport 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.

This must change.

An independent review by Sport Resolutions UK, commissioned by Sport England, recently examined whether appropriate and fair processes were followed by Swim England in the handling of three specific complaints.

When the report is finalised and published, we will also communicate our plan to deliver on any recommendations it makes, as we want to be fully transparent regarding the issues highlighted, the progress we have made and the journey we are going on to improve our complaints, safeguarding and welfare processes.

The *Heart of Aquatics* builds on this, going wider and deeper into improving the culture and practices within our sports and details our ongoing commitment to you – members, participants, coaches, teachers, parents,

clubs and swim schools.

We will use independent experts in the delivery and scrutiny of this work to ensure that no stone is left unturned.

By listening to your experiences and views we will be able to take proactive formative action on an ongoing basis. We will also act proactively as we learn more.

We are committed to creating a better future for our sports and as a board this has our focus and we are committed to allocating the resources it requires.

Small steps lead to big changes and this living and breathing document is the beginning of our cultural change journey and we look forward to working closely with you all for the benefit of everyone involved in aquatics.

Signed by all the members of the Swim England Board

Richard Hookway

Neil Booth

Alison Breadon

Caroline Green

Brian Havill

Lois Jarvis

Aysha Kidwai

Raj Kumar

Jane Nickerson MBE

Barry Saunders

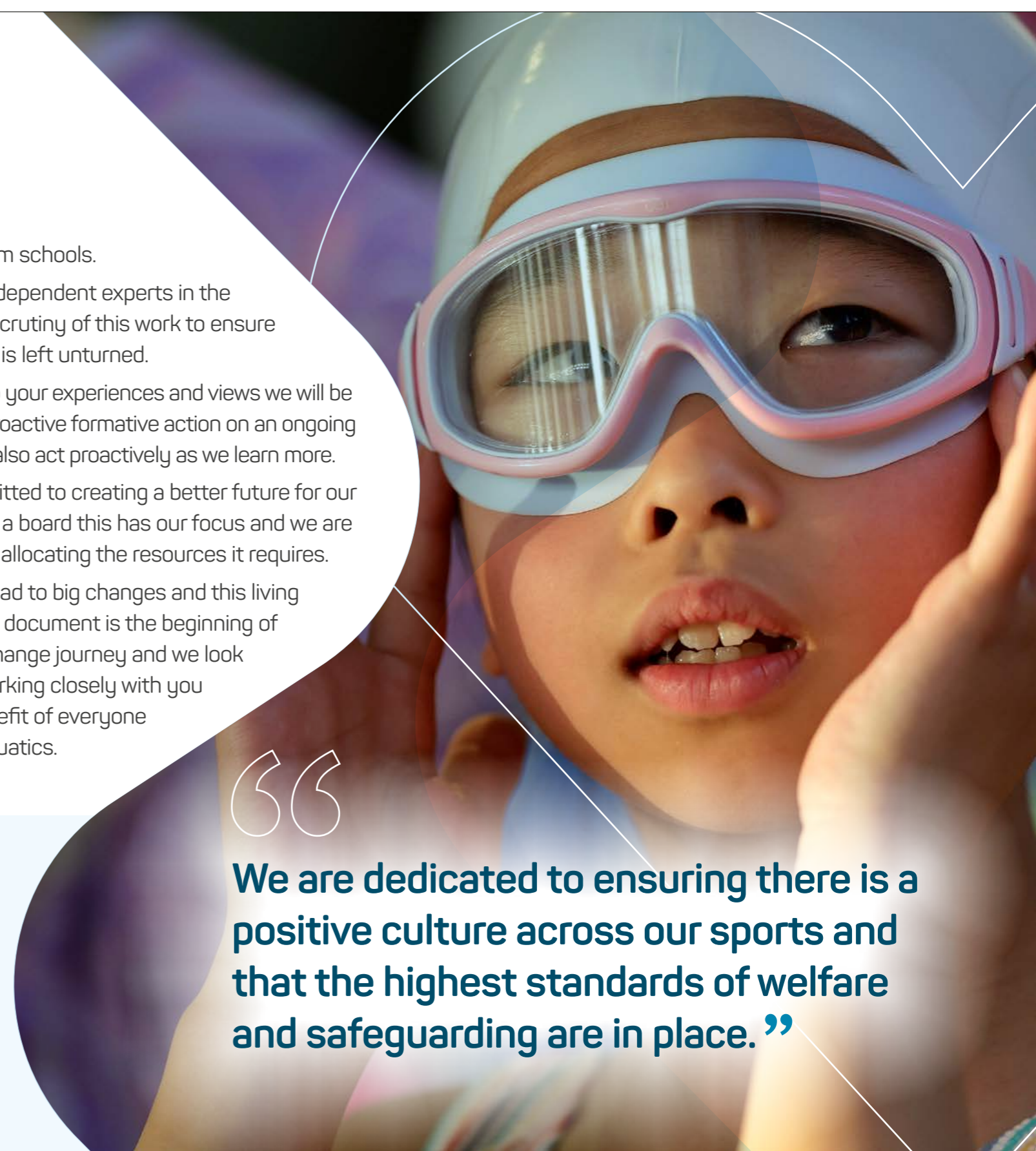
Bernard Simkins

Katie Walcott

Joan Wheeler



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Our Vision

Everyone at Swim England is dedicated to making our sports and activities accessible, inclusive and safe for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Our mission is to create a culture and environment that makes everyone feel safe, included and welcomed at all times, which is why we will put them at the heart of aquatics.

This cultural change journey is something we cannot do on our own – it requires the input of everyone involved in our sports.

We will create an environment where people feel comfortable reporting unacceptable practices, knowing that we will take on board their views and provide the necessary support and resources to learn from and act upon them.

To do this, we will appoint external experts to seek the opinions of our past and present participants and members, coaches, teachers, parents, clubs and swim schools to provide feedback to enable us to make changes and prove through our actions that we are a listening and learning organisation.

By listening to, and working with, the entire aquatics community we will ensure that change is supported at all levels of aquatics, with educational support provided to coaches and clubs as well as empowering parents to recognise examples of bad practice.

Aquatics brings so many benefits to society, including drowning prevention, mental and physical wellness, as well as a means to fulfil

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We recognise we must continuously strive to improve in order to foster a positive culture and deliver for the people who are the lifeblood of our aquatic sports.”

athletic potential. However, we have a duty to ensure there is a positive and safe environment for everyone involved and we have the systems and processes in place to tackle unacceptable behaviour.

Our new strategy, *Access Aquatics*, will be launched in 2023 with a focus on governance, inclusion and tackling inequalities.

A key strategy commitment will be ensuring that the safety, welfare and wellbeing of participants is at the heart of everything we do.

A fundamental part of this is: “To promote and uphold a safe culture and environment, ensuring that the highest safeguarding standards and welfare support are ingrained throughout the sports, from grassroots to performance level.”

Now is the time to realise this.

We recognise we must continuously strive to improve in order to foster a positive culture and deliver for the people who are the lifeblood of our aquatic sports.

By understanding and supporting our communities better, we can learn and shape the culture that we all want within aquatics to deliver positive, safe and enriching experiences for everyone taking part.

This document sets out some of the concrete initial actions we are taking to achieve that vision.



Our Journey

The safeguarding, welfare and wellbeing of all people involved in aquatics is the foundation on which everything else is built.

We take our commitment to safeguarding very seriously, with a dedicated team and the *Wavepower* policy setting out our approach.

However, we recognised that we must do more.

Across society and within our sports, we have seen reports which have brought into even sharper focus the damage, hurt and suffering that can be caused when the culture and/or safeguarding and welfare measures in place are not satisfactory.

We have a zero tolerance approach to this type of behaviour.

In 2022, we listened to our communities and started to make important reforms and significant changes where necessary within our sports and organisation. This included the appointment of a new director of legal, taking the lead in this area. We have also introduced

the newly-created head of safeguarding and welfare role as well as a head of coaching and a sport governance and welfare manager.

In recent years, we have introduced a Teaching and Coaching Register to ensure our clubs can monitor and track their workforce and their qualifications. This is a tool that we continue to develop.

We strengthened the mandatory standards for every single club so that, amongst other things, affiliated clubs need to supply information on: compliance with our safeguarding policy; risk assessments that have been undertaken; and the personnel running the club and its activities.

Despite this work, we know there is much more to do and we are committed to creating a truly welcoming, safe and positive environment for everyone.

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Diving Coach



Our Governance

The Swim England Board will be accountable for the delivery of this plan.

A new Oversight Committee, reporting to the Board, will provide scrutiny and oversight. Independent experts will sit on this committee, bringing external expertise in safeguarding, welfare and organisation culture. They will also provide direction to any evolution of this plan as we learn more from our members and stakeholders.

The plan will be delivered by an implementation group led by members of the Senior Leadership Team and heads of service from across the organisation, who will oversee, facilitate and drive forward the actions.

Our governance approach, policies and procedures underpin how we operate. It is important that these reflect the approach that we want to undertake for the sport.

There have been a number of changes to our policies already, in line with the recommendations from the Sport Resolutions report, but this work will continue as we move forward.

Wavepower is our comprehensive child safeguarding policy document and sets the standards for Swim



England and the aquatic sports. The current version runs 2020-2023 and, therefore, during the course of 2023, it will be reviewed and updated to reflect our expectations from 2024. This will include a move to make the *Swim England Safeguarding CPD* the only acceptable training for those working within our clubs, counties and regions.

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In addition to child safeguarding, we are working with the **Ann Craft Trust**, a leading authority in this area, to develop our vulnerable adult policy. This work will take place in 2023 to ensure that in addition to children, our policies are best practice for adults and young people at risk. We will ensure that we deliver relevant education to support the introduction of the policy by adapting the *Swim England Safeguarding CPD* to include adults.

We have identified the potential gap where third parties deliver Swim England affiliated aquatic club activities, for example local authority training schemes or school-based clubs. In these instances, we believe it is not always clear where jurisdiction over welfare and safeguarding sits. We are committed to having exemplary standards of safeguarding and welfare within the delivery of all Swim England Affiliated Club activities and, as a result, we intend to review this situation in collaboration with relevant partner organisations to ensure there is clarity on this issue for all involved.

Alongside this, we will provide improved guidance to help clubs and members navigate the reporting, compliance and judicial process. We will also ensure that in addition to our own two-stage process, where someone believes that our internal processes or procedures have not been followed, a further independent appeal is available in regard to any organisational complaint.

We will move away from guidance and create policies that need to be adhered to at all times, which will avoid any areas of ambiguity. In line with **Sport England's Code for Sports Governance**, we will proactively engage both counties and regions to adhere to a minimum governance standard through the *Swim England Good Governance Code*.

This is part of our approach to cascading good governance through our structure, which started with the introduction of the Club Affiliation programme in 2020.



Our Approach

A core part of our approach within our new strategy will be learning and evolving – and we are committed to embedding this into everything we do.

This is critical to our success as it will enable us to understand and reflect on what is going well or not going well and what needs improving and to take the required actions.

We will apply this same approach to our safeguarding, welfare and culture work and, to that end, this plan focuses on 2023 and the changes we will make this year. The learning generated through the activities highlighted will, in turn, inform future action plans.

There are three pillars of work and these are:



1. Listen



2. Support



3. Resource

The following sections set out an overview of the key actions we will implement in 2023.



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The listening and understanding approach will be a significant part of our work throughout 2023 and beyond.”

1. Listen

We are committed to developing a culture of listening to the aquatics community and understanding what is taking place across the country.

We understand the importance of providing a safe space where people feel comfortable to share their stories and will appoint independent external experts to undertake this listening programme.

The purpose of our listening activity in 2023 is three-fold:

1. To understand how approachable we are as an organisation and how we might need to change in this regard.
2. To understand where past experiences may have fallen short of our high standards so we can learn from these and take action.
3. To understand what the experience is now, and how we can ensure it is positive, welcoming and safe for all our community.

Throughout 2023 external experts will undertake focused activity to listen and learn from our community, ensuring the capture of an honest, thorough reflection of the culture within aquatics now and previously. This listening journey will create actionable recommendations for Swim England and the aquatics community to implement.

We have outlined four pieces of insight for 2023. However, we will be taking advice from the appointed culture, welfare and research experts to ensure our listening programme truly captures and understands what is taking place across the country.

- Establish listening groups with current and former members, parents and the workforce to hear and understand people's experience within aquatics and how this impacts on their lives.
- Assessment of our talent pathways and high-performance programmes, to ensure they are athlete centred with a focus on the individuals, and are providing services that support the athletes' holistic development and welfare.

- Culture and welfare research with athletes on our talent pathways to understand their satisfaction with their current experience, and how it can be improved.
- Pilot with one of our regions to understand the experience of participants within clubs, to learn what we can understand, what is working well and what needs to be developed to better support club members. Amongst other things, this will inform future support offered to clubs. This piece of work is underway.

The listening and understanding approach will be a significant part of our work throughout 2023 and beyond. Following the independent work in 2023 we will set up listening forums and groups which will continue beyond this initial phase. We believe this is critical as it will inform where particular interventions or changes in our current approach are required as well as developing additional programmes and initiatives.

At the end of 2023, we will reflect on what we have been told and how it resonates with our values. This will help us decide most effectively how we set our cultural standards and activities going forward.

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We are committed to collaborating fully with our stakeholders and partners to make aquatics the best that it can be.”

2. Support

We firmly believe that our culture should be one of ‘togetherness’. We are also committed to collaborating fully with our stakeholders and partners to make aquatics the best that it can be.

A critical part of this is providing the development and support required by all parts of the aquatic community, in particular in the field of safeguarding and welfare to make sure that change is seen, understood and delivered by all involved in aquatics.

Central to our support for the community is ensuring that we have the necessary mix of formal and informal training and education available to clubs, coaches and volunteers as well as parents, whilst also providing access to key members of the Swim England team. We believe this will embed the support across the community.

Actions include:

- Enhance communication, share information and provide support to the network of welfare officers.
- Review the training offer for Swim England team members and volunteers to ensure that all relevant post holders are updated on best practice in safeguarding, welfare and inclusion. Introducing the *Swim England Safeguarding Refresher CPD* with core content to ensure our reporting procedures are well-known.
- Provide support for swimming teachers, sharing good practice through webinars and workshops, and shaping teaching culture at the starting point of the swimmer’s journey.
- Launch the *Swim England Coaching Plan*, outlining the key work that we will undertake in the next three years to cultivate a coaching culture and behaviours that ensure our participants enjoy a safe and fulfilling sporting experience.
- Offer tailored learning and development support and opportunities to coaches via our Coach Membership, including through our AquaHub portal.
- Helping parents to recognise and understand incidents of bad practices and procedures.



“We will be working with the Swim England Regions to develop a welfare structure that enables issues to be dealt with swiftly and effectively at the appropriate level.”

3. Resource

We are committed to being an exemplary organisation in this area and welcome the strong sector leadership being shown by Sport England and UK Sport.

We have already begun the process of increasing the resources dedicated to meeting the safeguarding and welfare needs of our participants and sports.

Action already taken includes:

- Expansion of our team to meet the needs of safeguarding and welfare.
- Created a governance and standards manager and introduced a head of coaching. These roles complement work alongside the safeguarding and welfare team. These roles work with the network of welfare officers and other key groups as relevant alongside the sport governance and welfare manager.
- Appointed a director of legal.

We are determined to fulfil our role and deliver an exceptional service for our sports.

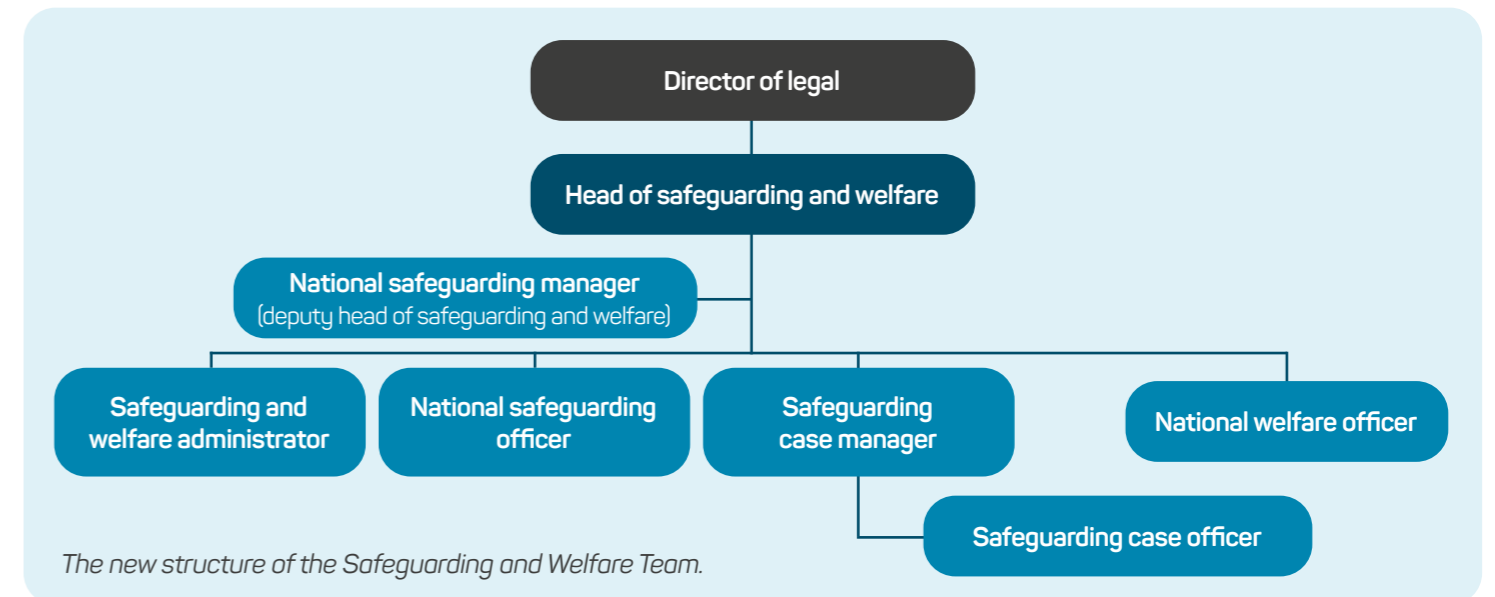
We will listen to our participants, workforce and stakeholders, provide support for our community and increase the resources available to ensure we have a positive and safe culture in place across all levels of aquatics.

Actions include:

- Developing a welfare structure that enables issues to be dealt with swiftly and effectively at the appropriate level alongside the Swim England Regions.
- Appointing a welfare officer(s) to support our talent programmes. Whilst athletes can

already turn to their club welfare officer or contact the Swim England safeguarding and welfare team, we believe it will be beneficial to have someone whom athletes can approach if they have any concerns during their time on the talent programme. Additionally, the welfare officer(s) will support coaches, team staff and be a point of contact for parents/guardians.

Where necessary reforms are not solely within our control, we will take a key role in advocating the necessary changes and doing everything we can to support change to make aquatics a safer place.





Our Roadmap

2023



Pavilion 3, SportPark, 3 Oakwood Drive, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3QF
Tel: 01509 618700 | swimming.org/swimengland

