

Guide to Becoming a Swimming Teacher/Coach

Why become a swimming teacher or coach?

Swimming is an activity enjoyed by so many. It attracts the young and the old; is an activity for individuals, families and groups; is a great way of keeping fit and appeals to mums and babies (babies can be safely introduced to the water from about 6 months of age) as well as those in their later years who want to keep active. It is a competitive sport that features at local, National, European, World and Olympic levels and is almost always ranked in the top three activities on surveys that look at participation in physical activity across all ages and sports. It is generally considered by the medical profession to be the most complete form of exercise and is probably the only sport that can save an individual's life and can contribute to saving the lives of others. Swimming is also the gateway to so many other activities such as sailing, canoeing etc; can be enjoyed in a vast number of indoor and outdoor facilities and for many can make a major contribution to a great summer vacation.

If that wasn't enough swimming teaching and coaching can be an incredibly rewarding profession that provides the opportunity to work within your local community or to work in different countries around the world. It can be a source of employment as well as a hobby that allows you to work as a volunteer and it provides the opportunity to pass on to the next generation a range of important life skills. It is a job that can fit around other commitments as the hours are often flexible; it is an integral part of the primary school curriculum in many countries and most local authorities will have a learn to swim programme. A swimming qualification can also be a great addition to a CV particularly for those who may be considering working with young people. In addition most parents view the ability to swim as one of the key life skills that they will want their off-springs to learn and to top it all the demand for swimming teachers has never been higher.

Where to start

Having an interest in and an enthusiasm for swimming is clearly a good starting point but in some instances this might not be clear until you have started the process. It will also be helpful if you can swim, although this is not an absolute necessity as the safety aspects related to teaching people to swim are often covered by a lifeguard. In some instances you may be working already as a volunteer in a sport environment and this may have encouraged you to take the next step and to seek to become qualified. It may be that you are unemployed, have been made redundant or fancy a change of career or you may just wish to be involved in teaching your own children to swim but need a bit more information about how to go about it. If you are unsure, it may be useful for you to do a little research as you will need to commit time, energy and money to achieving some qualifications if you wish to teach or coach, particularly if your aim is to find paid employment. To start, why not consider one or more of the following;

- Visit a swimming pool when teaching or coaching is taking place and just observe. Focus on what the teacher/coach is doing; watch how they interact with the learners; watch how the learners respond to the teacher and try to get an idea of whether this is an environment that you would be happy working in. Also try to get some idea of the range of skills shown by the teacher/coach and then ask yourself whether you possess these skills or whether you feel that you would be able to develop the skills required.
- Think about whether you know somebody who is already involved in swimming teaching and coaching and if so ask if you can meet with them to discuss their job. If you don't



know anybody visit your local centre and ask if you can make an appointment to speak with the swimming coordinator (most venues will have somebody who has overall responsibility for the programme). If you do this, plan in advance the type of questions you will ask as you need to use the opportunity to find out as much information as possible. You may also wish to find out about opportunities that might be available once you are qualified, particularly if it is paid employment that you are seeking.

Visit a local swimming club or learn to swim programme to enquire about the possibility
of you working as a volunteer. You will probably be required to have a Garda
Vetting/Access NI check before you are allowed to work with young people but working
as a volunteer will provide you with a clear insight into what being a swimming teacher
or coach entails and will enable you to make an informed decision about whether you
wish to commit the time, energy and money that will be required for you to become
qualified.

Teaching or Coaching?

Although there are great similarities in the role that a teacher and coach will undertake there are also some differences and the qualification structure reflects this. Initially it is important for you to recognise what it is that is attracting you to become a swimming teacher or coach. If you are particularly interested in helping people, young and old, to take those first steps towards becoming a swimmer and working with them as they improve their strokes then the teaching route is probably for you. If your interest is competition and you have aspirations to help swimmers prepare for competition from local to international level then training to become a swimming coach will be more appropriate. Just imagine that at some time in the future you could become the Irish swim coach to the Olympic team. For the disciplines of synchronised swimming, water polo and diving only coaching qualifications are available.

If your motivation is to seek employment then it is important to recognise that there are more employment opportunities for swimming teachers than coaches. However, if at this stage you are undecided this is not a major problem because you can move between teaching and coaching as your aspirations become clearer and in fact many people involved in swimming operate as a teacher and a coach. However cost can become a consideration if you take a large number of qualifications and so if you really are undecided you may wish to spend a little more time finding out more about each option. Alternatively you could take your level 1 qualification in both teaching and coaching and then make a decision. Qualifications for teaching are referred to as teaching aquatics as the skills learned are often relevant to a number of different aquatic disciplines (see below)

Other disciplines

Although the main consideration so far has been on swimming teaching and coaching there are other areas of aquatic education that may be of interest to you and qualifications are available in the following disciplines;

- Synchronised Swimming
- Diving
- Water Polo
- Aquatic fitness*
- Swimming for people with disabilities
- Adult and child water activities*

*NB: These qualifications require you to hold teaching aquatic qualifications before progressing to these disciplines.



For more information regarding the detail of all the above qualifications visit www.swimireland.ie

What does a course comprise of?

Each course will vary in terms of technical content but there are some similarities in terms of overall structure. Each qualification is divided into units (the number of units will vary depending on the level of qualification) and some units are common and only need to be taken once. For example at level 1, unit 1 is the same for each discipline. Therefore if you have taken your level 1 in teaching aquatics and you want to take the level 1 in coaching swimming you will not be required to complete unit 1 again.

Each course will be a combination of practical and theory and you will be assessed in both areas. For the practical this will relate largely to your ability to teach a group of participants but you will also be required to show that you can plan lessons and evaluate the progress of your pupils and also your own performance. The theoretical assessment will focus largely on the technical aspects of the discipline that you are studying. For example, qualifications in teaching aquatics will require knowledge of the swimming strokes etc. and at levels 1 and 2 you will be required to take a written examination. At level 1 this will be through an examination comprising multiple choice questions whilst at level 2 the questions will require slightly more detailed answers.* The total number of hours required for each course will be stated and will include time on the course and additional time that you will be required to commit for aspects such as private study, planning etc. Prior to embarking on a course it is important that you are certain that you can meet all the course requirements in terms of time.

* Most disciplines have three levels of qualification starting with level 1 and progressing to level 3

What will you need to start?

Prior to making the final decision that you wish to work towards some form of swimming qualification it is important to have some idea of what you need to start and what will be expected of you in terms of training. In addition, in order to participate in a level 1 course you are required to be 16 years of age as of the start date of the course and to have attended the required Child Protection Workshop;

- ROI: Children in Sport Awareness Workshop (Code of Ethics) Irish Sports Council
- NI: Safeguarding Young People in Sport Sport NI

Throughout your swimming teaching/coaching career (all disciplines) *Swim Ireland* will be a key point of contact. *Swim Ireland* is the National Governing Body for swimming throughout Ireland and is responsible for overseeing the organisation and delivery of all courses leading to a *Swim Ireland* qualification although the actual delivery is through a network of centres approved by *Swim Ireland*. This network of centres aims to be receptive to the needs of the local communities and to provide high quality courses in good facilities. For information on centres close to you running courses visit www.swimireland.ie and click on 'Courses' which can be found on the home page. This will provide details of all current courses and will have a local point of contact should you wish to find out more information. Alternatively you could speak direct with a member of the *Swim Ireland* education staff, details of which can be found on the *Swim Ireland* web site (see main menu and click on education).



The 3 step process to get you started

Step 1

Having completed your initial research (see Where to start) and having decided which qualification you would like to take check out www.swimireland.ie for details of a course that meets your needs. If you require any additional information either contact a member of the **Swim Ireland** education staff or contact the centre where the course is being held that you would like to attend. If you are unemployed or in receipt of other state benefits it might be that you are entitled to grants to help cover your course costs and so discuss this with the nominated course organiser or a member of the **Swim Ireland** staff.

Step 2

Complete the enrolment form sent to you by **Swim Ireland** or the course organiser, ensuring that you satisfy any pre-course requirements such as age, Child Protection Workshop certificate etc and pay the required course costs. Once this has been completed a member from the **Swim Ireland Delivery Body** or the course organiser will send you all the relevant information including times, venue, what equipment you might need etc. It will then be your responsibility to ensure that you can attend all of the sessions. If you have any pre-arranged commitments that clash with course dates and which cannot be moved, discuss these with the course organiser before completing your enrolment.

Step 3

Attend the course and complete all aspects. You tutor will be experienced in the discipline that you are studying and will be accredited by *Swim Ireland* to deliver courses leading to a *Swim Ireland* qualification. Hopefully attendance at the course will result in you achieving a qualification which will help you on your way in terms of achieving your aspirations. If you are just at the beginning of this process, which probably means that you have achieved your level 1 qualification, you may have been inspired to consider taking your level 2 at some time in the future. If this is the case it is important for you to try to gain additional practical experience, either by volunteering at a local club or by contacting your local centre to see what opportunities might be available. Some centres will employ a level 1 teacher/coach to work alongside the established and more qualified teachers/coaches whilst others may be happy to provide you with the opportunity to gain additional experience but without offering any payment.

Commit to the future - become a licensed teacher/coach

Swim Ireland has introduced a licensing scheme for all teachers and coaches that is in line with similar schemes introduced in a wide range of sports and in a number of different countries. The licensing scheme will help to ensure that you are up to date with all new developments and will enhance your future prospects, particularly in terms of employment. All level 1 candidates successfully completing their level 1 teaching/coaching course will be issued with a probationary licence with their course certificate. This licence will be valid for 12 months and details on the licence will be issued with your course results. Full details of the licensing scheme can also be found at www.swimireland.ie or alternatively speak direct with a member of the Swim Ireland education team.

And finally

Just by reading this information leaflet you have taken the first step towards what might become a new career or a new hobby or which might help you to be better at something that you already do. If you are as confident as you can be that you want to progress further then what are you waiting for.....take the plunge now!