



Using Virtual Learning Platforms for online interactions with young people

This policy is an addition to the Swim Ireland Safeguarding Policies providing Swim Ireland members with some practical guidance on using virtual learning platforms whilst also working within boundaries to keep young people safe. Use of social media should be within our current standards – [Social Media Policy](#). In addition you should also check the [Briefing Note on Social Media Settings](#) for privacy settings, useful for anyone using social media apps for communication.

At the moment, we are learning to work in and on social media and virtual platforms just to allow us to continue with our social connections. We are now expecting these platforms to provide, especially for our athletes, structured physical activity. As with any online connection you need to consider its effectiveness and capability, with the safety of any young person being paramount.

This guidance is divided into two parts:

Part One – covers the use of the platform and gives you food for thought in choosing which platform is right for your members.

Part Two – covers the safe use of such technologies; this extends the guidance already set out in the [Social Media Policy](#).

Part One

This covers information on choosing and using a virtual learning platform

Choosing a particular platform

The administrator of the site might be a coach, committee member or a parent helping to keep club members connected. There are some fundamental things to be aware of regarding the platform used:

1. Will everyone have access – is it a free site or is there a licence required. Some licenced products have more features – and for long term use this might be a wise consideration. Don't accept the premise: if you are paying this means more security; the security and privacy of any site still need to be checked.
2. Consider the age allowed to access sites, access may need to be granted through parents/carers. You must not ask young people to log into a site or use any technology where their age prohibits this.
3. Site security – check out the privacy settings for the site or app; you need to make sure that your meeting, seminar or session cannot be hijacked by outsiders; follow privacy settings – this is exactly the same principle as nailing down your privacy settings with social media apps.
4. Check what happens to any data collected – for the administrator registering to use the product and for all those who sign in. Some sites are hosted outside the EU, check if there is a *Privacy Shield Framework* in place – this means the company is thought to have adequate protection for GDPR purpose, BUT the requirements of GDPR still need to be met with regard to personal data i.e. permissions and right to delete etc.

We have issued a list of possible virtual learning platforms with an assessment of their pros and cons plus information on their data and privacy statements. See the briefing note **Virtual Learning Platforms** for further information.

Whilst Swim Ireland are not endorsing any product, we hope this helps with decisions and understandings of any product used. You will need to investigate each to ensure you and your members are comfortable with the use. Communication and transparency are key here.

Using the chosen virtual learning platform

You will need to ensure some basic functionality for any session. This helps to avoid frustrations and time being wasted with limited learning or interaction outcomes.

1. 'Live' session can be more challenging for the coach/leader – you should practice and become comfortable with the platform beforehand. Pre-recorded material needs to be checked for audio and visual clarity – but doesn't put the same stress on the coach/leader!
2. For live sessions the audio and video need to be of good enough quality to achieve the purpose for the session.
3. An interactive whiteboard or chat function will allow additional communication methods and has the added benefit of being a record of ideas and actions from the session.
4. Easy to use forum so participants are not spending time figuring out how everything works – do a dry run and allow time for individuals to test out what works best for them.
5. Make sure the session is provided at a time that is suitable for all participants – especially now, when young people will be establishing home routines for schooling and family time.

Part Two

Safeguarding guidance for using a virtual learning platform

This information is for young people, parents and coaches as part of the Swim Ireland Safeguarding Policy where a virtual learning environment is being provided for young people. Some of the general points are useful for any activity being conducted online e.g. meetings.

General

1. Parent/carer permissions should be sought for any athlete under 18 to participate in a new forum or virtual learning platform. General permissions may have been sought for club/squad activities – however the use of this type of learning environment would not have been considered as necessary.
2. It is recommended that sessions are not recorded, and no screen shots are taken unless there is a very specific reason for doing so. If it is considered necessary, this must be explicit before the session begins and all guidelines for taking, storing and use of images and video footage must be followed. The Photography and Filming Policy can be found [here](#)
3. Inform everyone involved about the chosen platform, allow parents/carers and young people to explore the platform before use, allow a test run and have someone who is comfortable enough to answer questions. Ask parents/carers to explore the information about the platform.
4. Virtual sessions should happen at regular times; like training sessions in the pool or the gym, parents/carers and young people need to fit these into their current routines especially with home schooling schedules having been established. In Northern Ireland our schools are closed until September with all state exams cancelled; in Ireland we still are unsure of the situation with school and state exams. This uncertainty will be on young people's minds.

Establishing a regular routine or schedule for club, regional or Swim Ireland activities will help with this.

5. Keep sessions short and if possible interactive. Although being interactive is more challenging for the leader, young people will be more engaged.
6. Be clear about etiquette used on the site – an interactive session needs to allow for each young person to have their say, or to engage. Agree any rules with regard conversations, texting, chat functions, video on/off etc. in advance.
7. Behaviour from all those involved should be within the expected codes of conduct for the Club, Region or Swim Ireland. Being on a virtual learning platform does not change what is acceptable behaviour. All relevant persons can be subject to disciplinary action if codes of conduct are breached within Club, Regional or Swim Ireland activities.

Young People

We ask parents/carers to go through this with your child/children:

1. Make sure you are comfortable with how the platform works – check the sound and audio if you are using this especially if you are doing a coaching session, you don't want to miss hearing instructions.
2. Sessions should take place in open spaces, preferably not your bedroom.
3. If you are exercising or doing some sort of physical activity check you have the space to do this, if not ask the coach for a different activity – don't be afraid to do this, there are probably others in the same situation.
4. Only do things that are within your capabilities, and you feel safe to do. Take care not to injure or hurt yourself.
5. Always know who you can talk to if anything or anyone makes you feel uncomfortable before, during or after the session. Talk to your friends, parent/carer, your coach, or your CCO.
6. If you are worried about one of your club or squad mates talk to your parent/carer, coach or CCO.
7. Respect each other's privacy; when you are connected with others, don't take screen shots or record the activity or anyone else's environment.

Parents/Carers

1. Please go through the points for Young People with your child; we need your help to make sure they get the most out of the experience. Keeping in touch and maintaining their physical fitness is important, and this needs to be achieved safely for all young people involved.
2. If you are provided with information or sessions for your child/children through your contact details please share it with them, you are the gateway to their continuing to love and feel involved in their sport. Many young people don't have access to the social media or online platforms, and it is important they don't lose connections with their club/squad mates or feel left out.
3. Any coaching session is for your child, in the same way as the pool and gym training sessions were. You should not interfere with the programme unless you feel your child is stressed or unable to achieve the outcomes. In this case you should have a conversation with the coach away from the session.
4. Encourage the sessions to take place in an open space in your home, they shouldn't be in your child's bedroom. If this is unavoidable, leave the door open and check in regularly, without hovering in the doorway, you are now the person on duty, with only your athlete(s) to supervise!

5. If you wish to sign in to your child/children's session you must abide by the all the points in this guidance, and if there are too many parents/carers wishing to sign in the club must organise a rota like the Person on Duty rota.
6. Ensure your child/children to only use equipment that is safe to use for the activity intended. Be clear on the current protocol for contacting any medical or professional help if your child/children injure themselves.
7. Discuss fitting the sessions into your established routine at home, this eases the stress for your child – i.e. treat the sessions as you would the usual pool and gym sessions.
8. If a one to one online session is needed with a coach or leader, you must supervise this whilst respecting the conversation that needs to happen.

Coaches/Leaders

1. Follow the guidance provided here for interaction with young people. Note the general guidance and that for young people and their parents/carer.
2. Be confident with the technology you are using – and get someone to help if you need it. This can be done remotely.
3. The sessions take place remotely, with young people in their own homes where parents/carers are expected to supervise their own children. However, if parents wish to sign in, they must follow the General guidance in this policy and that for Parents/Carer. If several parents/carers wish to sign in, the club should arrange a rota like the Person on Duty rota.
4. Your environment as coach/leader is important, ensure your background is as neutral as possible and try to keep distractions to a minimum. Your focus in on the young people, and you are both giving your time. This is no different to how you conduct yourselves in a pool, gym or other meeting environment.
5. Set out the programme prior to starting – the idea of conducting any activity through a virtual learning platform will be strange to most, the anxiety of this uncertainty can be alleviated, especially for parents by setting out what is going to happen, including who will be leading or present at the sessions.
6. Take attendance records, as you would for any club or squad session. Knowing who is expected and present is also useful to determine if the session has been hijacked by an outsider.
7. Follow the same protocols as you do when leading a pool/gym or other session; working in a virtual learning environment is no different. If you have concerns, speak to the athlete's parent/carer or the CCO. Your supports are still in place, talk with your Head Coach, Support Officer, the NCO or other appropriate person.
8. Think about how your squad might feedback following a session, have you provided an opportunity for this, immediately after the session, through their parents, or Club Captains. Any direct contact with athletes must be in line with our [Communications Policy](#).
9. Think about how you will communicate with parents and set this out clearly beforehand. Again, this is no different to the protocols you have in place during pool/gym time.
10. Encourage collaboration and appropriate challenge within the squad; this may be asking them to come up with innovative ideas about training or setting an activity as a quiz e.g. a Q&A on their sport (or any topic!). This is good for getting parents/carers involved as well.

END

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