



## Press Information

STA245

### STA ADDRESS THE SKILLS GAP IN SCHOOLS

**With the formal launch of the new Pool Safety Award complete, Steve Franks, Operations Director at STA, explains here why STA chose to design an award specifically for teachers and school staff, and what its introduction may mean for swimming in schools in the future.**

There is a great deal of best practice guidance when it comes to swimming in schools, and the duplication of this accreditation advice is certainly causing confusion amongst educational practitioners in selecting appropriate qualifications.

The need for specialist training is beyond question, indeed even afPE, in 'Safe Practice in Physical Education and School Sport' state that *"it is recommended that swimming teachers and school staff responsible for classes hold appropriate UK teaching and life saving awards"*. There are, however, no mandatory requirements for life saving qualifications for teachers or sector staff; and many undergraduate student teachers completing their teaching degree are leaving College and University with limited swimming and water rescue skills.

STA's new Pool Safety Award is the first programme of its kind to have been designed specifically with the school staff in mind, and is aimed at addressing this skills and knowledge gap in a variety of ways. The new award assists teachers, support staff, and schools themselves to meet the increasing need to demonstrate adherence to safe practices and standards on a continuous basis, and comply with their duty of care

requirements. It also allows compliance with recommendations and guidance within leading publications such as: 'Safe Practice in Physical Education and School Sport' Baalpe, 'Managing Health & Safety in Swimming Pools' HSE 2003, BSi PAS 81:2005 'Specification for the Management and Operation of Swimming Schools' BSi, and 'Safety and Risk in Primary School Physical Education' Servers and Routledge 2003.

There has certainly been a decline in swimming activities in schools in recent years, which may be attributed to the potential liability of teachers, particularly for 'off site activities'. Indeed, recent research by STA shows that teachers and support staff are being put off supervising swimming sessions because they feel they lack specialist skills, or else feel vulnerable within the pool environment. The new Pool Safety Award has been specifically developed to alleviate these concerns.

Swimming is without doubt an essential – and life saving – skill, and yet drowning is still the third largest cause of accidental death to children in the UK. In addition, one in thirteen schools don't offer swimming at all and the situation is worse in inner-city areas, and more than 100,000 children leave school each year without mastering basic swimming skills. A TES Survey released in September 2006 went even further and highlighted that more than a third of children left primary school this year without having basic swimming skills. In 2003 one in six primary school leavers could not swim at all, and the TES Survey suggests that this figure has risen to one on five, or approximately 110,000.

Even basic swimming skills can save lives, so at STA we saw it as imperative to work with teachers and support staff to develop a fit for purpose award, which could raise water safety awareness and raise teachers' competence in the context of rescue skills. The award was developed twelve months ago and has been through a rigorous trial and testing process, which included consultation with the Association of Physical Education, and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to ensure it exactly matches the needs of both teachers and support staff.

The Pool Safety Award provides a specialist, nationally accredited qualification, which demonstrates compliance with the very latest recommendations for the supervision of swimming activities in school pools, and gives parents and carers the confidence that the school maintains the highest standards of care for its students and staff.

It is taught in a teacher-specific six-hour module, which is specifically designed to accommodate the demands of a dynamic teaching environment. Bev Broll, Sports Director at Willenhall Community Sports College, was involved in the consultation process and was particularly pleased that we were able to offer a nationally accredited course. She felt strongly that time is of the essence in schools, and thought that the 6-hour programme would mean costs can be saved as there is less need to arrange cover and staff are not out of the school for so long. In addition, we ensured that the content of the sessions was appropriate for schoolteachers and support staff – some life saving courses can, for example, include CPR for babies, which is not much use for Secondary School teachers.

Teachers and support staff taking part in the course are assessed on the completion of a portfolio work sheet and Tutor-led continual assessment. In addition, competence in undertaking rescues in a safe manner, CPR and appropriate after care have to be demonstrated. The award provides core skills development in relevant legislation, pool hazards and risk assessments, operational duties and responsibilities, rescue techniques including spinal injury and immediate first aid, and emergency procedures.

Bev advised that one full course has already been run at Willenhall Community Sports College, and she was pleased to confirm that the teachers responded extremely positively; they reported back that because the Pool Safety Award is much more relevant they engaged fully, and they also appreciated the 6-hour programme.

A number of local authorities and schools have already confirmed their interest in the award, and many are planning to roll it out in 2007.

It will ensure that both teaching and support staff are appropriately qualified for supervising structured swimming activities and that they adhere to safe practices; but it will also encourage more swimming teaching to be undertaken in schools.

**For further information on STA and / or the Pool Safety Award, please call 01902 645097, email [sta@sta.co.uk](mailto:sta@sta.co.uk), or visit [www.sta.co.uk](http://www.sta.co.uk).**

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**For further editorial information please contact:**

Felicity Owen or Samantha Stewart

Pure Communications

Tel: 01743 260950

Email: [f.owen@pure.uk.com](mailto:f.owen@pure.uk.com) or [s.stewart@pure.uk.com](mailto:s.stewart@pure.uk.com)

**Editor's Notes**

STA is the only QCA approved awarding body for National Rescue Standards (NaRS) for lifesaving and first aid awards, swimming teaching certificates and pool plant programmes, and STA is promoting the Pool Safety Award for inclusion on National Qualifications Framework.