

# Age and Gender Policy

Sport is an ideal environment for fostering long term friendships regardless of age, race, community background, ability or gender. Athletes of all ages and genders should be able to safely participate in sport for the benefit of each other.

Leaders working with children and young people should ensure that any young person is comfortable in their environment and that all athletes and young people know to raise any issues or queries with their Children's Officer (CO) or other trusted adult. In any environment where young athletes are training, competing or mixing with adult athletes the behaviour and actions of all involved must take account of vulnerability of underage young people. Codes of conduct set out expected behaviours for everyone, including adult athletes.

The following areas should be considered where ages and genders are mixed:

- Training sessions
- Competitions
- Leadership role

## Training sessions

Training in all aquatic disciplines usually involves mixed ages and genders according to groupings determined by the coach or coaching staff. Mixing adult athletes with athletes under 18 in the same training group or lane should not be ruled out as inappropriate. Mixing older swimmers and younger athletes can actively prevent bullying and harassment between children, however the coach or teacher will need to consider appropriate groupings according to skills and abilities. There is no requirement for an adult athlete to undergo vetting or safeguarding training unless they also have a regulated position e.g. as a leader. Older athletes may be regarded as role models and help with transitions encouraging younger athletes to stay in their sport.

Leaders involved in mixing athletes in training groups or squads must consider the risks involved and put procedures in place to ensure activities are safe and suitable. The following should be taken into account:

- Mixing the older athletes in the group or squad with adult athletes
- Matching the size and abilities of the athletes
- Ensure good lane/training discipline and etiquette
- Consider the space available for the number of athletes involved

Where adult and young athletes are training together the presence of the person on duty is vital to provide independent observation for the activity. Changing facilities for athletes can often provide a challenge due to the varied facilities used by clubs. All athletes must be aware of how to raise issues or concerns about incidents, either in or out of changing rooms.

Training sessions or activities involving a mix of adult and young athletes should be planned and communicated to all involved, especially to the parents of athletes under 18. Often the now adult athlete has grown up with the group and it may not be considered important; however, the athlete is now an adult and should understand the change in their responsibilities as such. If adult athletes seek to join an underage group, the coach/teacher should consider the benefit from a club ethos perspective, i.e. does the athlete fit with the current training programme in the club, and then consider the protective measures required.

## Competitions

Participation in aquatic competitions requires competitors to declare their date of birth and gender (evidenced by a birth certificate or a gender reassignment certificate); this is recorded on the Swim

Ireland membership system. Swimming and diving competitions are governed by qualification times and age/gender. Water polo competitions may involve mixed ages and genders; this requires consideration to determine the appropriate level at which young people can compete.

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) pathway is based on the physiological, psychological and emotional development according to the age of an athlete as well as their skills development within the sport. Playing athletes 'up' can be detrimental to their overall development, increasing the likelihood of burnout, injury, poor mental health and the subsequent long-term retention of young people in sport. Any decision to play a player up an age band must be in the best interests of the player, and not to satisfy the needs of the coach or the parent.

Where relevant the governing body will set acceptable age bands for competition. These will be available for all athletes for consideration prior to any competition or selection. For team events e.g. water polo, the ages for playing within domestic competitions and leagues will be set by the National Water Polo Committee according to the best interests of the players and the development of the sport.

## Teaching/Coaching qualifications

Young people from 15 years old can train to become a qualified coach or teacher. A coach or teacher has defined responsibilities for the group they are in charge of, whether this is a group of young people or adults. There may be a mixture of ages and genders when working in a teaching or coaching environment and therefore adherence to the code of conduct is vital.

Young people who obtain a Level 1 Teaching or Coaching qualification must be provided with a level of support and mentorship to carry out their role. The Level 1 qualification does not allow unsupervised teaching or coaching.

Young people who obtain a Level 2 Teaching or Coaching qualification will have shown they are able to cope with the responsibility of the role by passing the qualification.

Any newly qualified Teacher or Coach should expect a level of support whilst they gain the experience to be fully comfortable in the role. Clubs should be aware of this and provide adequate support whilst also ensuring the codes of conduct apply to all teachers and coaches.

## Helpful links with other policies considering age and gender

There are other significant roles in Swim Ireland, regions and in clubs that are important for safeguarding the well-being of young people. The responsibilities of these roles are detailed in their respective training or qualification programmes and each role must abide by the compliancy requirements in Swim Ireland and the relevant codes of conduct.

Roles with importance to young people:

There are some situations that should be avoided when considering the age and gender of young people more specifically detailed in other policies:

### Away trip Policy

Adults and young people should not share rooms; there are exceptions e.g. where a parent shares with their own child.

Leaders are not permitted to share a room with athletes.

### Travelling Policy

Leaders should avoid providing transport for individual or selected athletes only.  
Adult athletes should not be regularly responsible for transporting under 18 athletes unless this is a familial arrangement with parental permission.

### Person on Duty

An athlete should not act as a person on duty for their own coaching/teaching sessions or for their own coach. An athlete who is subject to the authority of a leader may feel compromised if there is a need to report any behaviour or act involving this leader.