

East Lothian children get back in the swim

Young swimmers across Scotland have led the way in showing there can be a safe return to leisure facilities with thousands signing up to resume lessons in their local pools – not least in East Lothian.

The National Learn to Swim Framework, a partnership between Scottish Swimming and Scottish Water which is delivered by leisure trusts and aquatic providers, returned in force – with all partners working together to ensure a safe return to swimming.



Scottish Water – Loch Centre, Tranent, East Lothian

East Lothian's **enjoy**leisure has been at the forefront in supporting the return of lessons.

Pictured: Marissa Muir

Around 86% of Leisure Trusts operating the Learn to Swim Framework initially resumed their lessons when they were permitted to do so from September 2020, with the current Scottish Swimming Learn to Swim Provider of the Year, East Lothian's **enjoy**leisure, leading the way reopening all five of its pools.

Despite being faced with another lockdown at the start of 2021, this has not phased or deterred East Lothian's young swimmers. To date, **enjoy**leisure have welcomed back 1993 children to swimming lessons – a 94% return rate on the number

of participants pre-COVID, and have experienced an influx in enquiries since the pools reopened.



Karen Ferguson, Sports Development Manager at **enjoyleisure** says, “From the outset, **enjoyleisure**’s focus was to identify ways to resume swimming opportunities for all ages and abilities across the county. Swimming has so many health and fitness benefits, but in a coastal county like ours, swimming is also an essential life skill.

“We were also adamant to reopen our pools as soon as possible, so that the benefits could be enjoyed by everyone across the county, especially our lesson participants.

“The response from parents has been brilliant. Those we’ve spoken to are thrilled to have their kids back to some sort of normality and out being active and enjoying themselves.

“There were naturally some concerns at first, however those who were initially apprehensive have also been in touch, indicating how reassured they felt after seeing all of the hygiene and social distancing protocols in place.”



Julie Muir said the reopening of lessons at the Loch Centre in Tranent had once more allowed her daughter Marissa, seven, to continue her dream of getting into club swimming.

Julie, from Tranent, said: “It was a long time to be out of the pool and I did fear that Marissa would have lost her love for the sport, as well as her confidence and strength. As the days approached Marissa did start to get a bit nervous about the return as it was going to be different, however both of our worries were put to bed the minute we arrived at the pool side – it was as if the lockdowns hadn’t happened.

“The communication and safety measures put in place have been really helpful and reassuring. From staggering class times to

reducing the number of children in each lesson to sanitiser stations positioned throughout, it has been fantastic and I have had no hesitations taking Marissa back to swimming and not feeling safe.

“When I first enrolled Marissa, the main aim was for her to learn to swim and become a strong and confident swimmer so the fact she loves it and couldn’t wait to come back.

“Marissa is progressing well and continues to learn new skills. She is a pretty competitive child and loves swimming and hopes one day to join a swimming club.”



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Pictured: Marissa Muir and Swim Instructor Ross Allinson

Neil Bainbridge, from Wallyford, said his four-year old son was delighted to return to lessons at Musselburgh Sports Centre.

Neil said: “When the first class returned, Leo couldn’t contain his excitement. He is quite a resilient young boy so he took lockdown in his stride, but you could tell it was starting to bother him slightly that he couldn’t do things that he loves doing. So the return to swimming lessons has not just given us all a great lift and something to do, Leo has been able to socialise with other kids as well.”

Neil, a former lifeguard, and current Trainer Assessor for the qualification added his work underlines the importance of the Learn to Swim programme. “I feel it is essential for children to learn how to swim. It is the only sport that can save a life. Fear increases in everyone the older we get, and for children who don’t know how to swim, the water can be incredibly daunting. So greater emphasis should be placed on getting younger children to start learning to swim and be comfortable in the water.

Neil said he couldn't fault the intricate details and safety measures which **enjoy**leisure put in place upon reopening.

He added: "I really think they couldn't do anything better. The whole team at Musselburgh Sports Centre have made safety paramount, and at the forefront of their minds. The staff have been excellent. They are constantly wiping surfaces and there is ample space, one way systems and plenty of sanitisation stations throughout the centre. I would urge any parent who is hesitant to just go and see for themselves."

All Leisure Trusts on the Framework resumed lessons in May, although the challenges of re-opening post lockdown means that not every pool or class has returned. Gradually more pools will re-open as Covid restrictions ease further into the summer months.



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Pictured: Marissa Muir and Mum Julie Muir

Euan Lowe, Scottish Swimming chief executive officer, said: "We are thrilled children, thanks to the efforts of leisure trusts and aquatic providers, are back learning how to be more confident and safer in the water – and indeed taking a lead in showing that health and leisure activities can be resumed post-lockdown.

"**enjoy**leisure provides an amazing example of what can be achieved. It's been a true team effort by them with everyone working so closely and diligently to make this happen.

"We're proud that the programme is marching on and we have as many children as we can back in the water enjoying lessons."

Brian Lironi, Director of Corporate Affairs with Scottish Water, said: "Children and their parents are right to be very happy that they can return to swimming lessons, particularly

for all of the health and wellbeing benefits and life skills that swimming brings.

“With our partnership with Scottish Swimming launching into its fourth year, we look forward to seeing thousands of youngsters continue to enjoy their lessons and become strong, confident swimmers.”

The Learn to Swim Framework is aimed at youngsters from birth to 11-years-old and provides consistently high-quality teaching which progresses through a series of lessons and levels over a number of years.

www.learntoswim.scot



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Pictured: Karen Ferguson from enjoyleisure