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## 1 in 3: taking the fear out of swimming

**Andrea Andrews responds to the article in the June issue of *The Leisure Review* on the ASA manifesto for swimming and suggests that there is still some way to go if the non-swimmer is to become a rarity.**

I enjoyed your great article on the ASA manifesto and the 1 in 3 stats for school swimming. I submitted a very similar article to Swimming Times and it is great to hear an independent voice.

I love the line, "Everyone seems to have forgotten the basics and why we have invested money in swimming pools for the last 100 years." I believe it certainly can swing back if the public get the message that we need to revisit what being able to swim means. I am not STA-trained but from my interactions with its members it seems that they, like the ASA, are clearly trying to do this as they have both made lots of positive changes. However, they are both huge organisations and it will take time for their staff to understand the true nature of the shift, time we do not really have if we want to save as many lives as possible. If the public are actively engaged in the discussion we will see change happen much faster. Now is a great time to do that as you can feel the momentum for change building in the swimming industry. I only worry that we will miss the boat but I gain hope from the past when lidos sprang up everywhere; now it is splash parks, much needed to reintroduce the very young to the joys of the water in safety.

We need to look at public perceptions and where they came from. For some it may well be Stephen Spielberg's film Jaws but for many more it was the advent of lane swimming in lidos and warm pools that marked the start of an emphasis on making your way across water rather than simply being safe in it and near it. No one wants drownings and that means we all want safe learners and safe swimmers but, as *The Leisure Review* article so eloquently described, the devil is in the detail of delivery. In the vein of Daniel Kahneman's fast and slow thinking, everyone in society needs to stop and notice that we are asking lessons to do two different things. First, we want safe learners and swimmers. Second, we want people to learn quickly. However, learning to swim is not a fast process. It builds from inside. Your article correctly noted that more swimmers drown than non-swimmers. Panic kills, not a lack of strokes

This is why we also need to be more aware and responsible as a society around water, looking out for overconfidence and each other. We need to begin to ask the learners (adults and children) what is going on inside instead of ignoring 'gut feelings'. A distance badge means nothing to that inner voice which only ever awards the prize "I am a safe swimmer" when it is utterly convinced by up to 72 happy water hours. Unfortunately, the ASA manifesto for swimming did not ask the recipients of lessons for their own input and this vital source of information is the missing piece of the jigsaw. This is again a historical thing, where teachers are supposed to distract and manage fear. Fear in fact needs to be removed rather than managed to reappear in challenging circumstances; society in general has a duty to be strict at removing overconfidence too. You can put the learner comfortably in charge of watching that natural inner health and safety voice; then they can be safe and enjoy the process far more. Enough of the stiff-upper-lip culture in swimming: it has never worked! You mention the example of New York City as a great system (we have it here now too) and soon it is going to get even better in NYC as there will be lessons to address fears that have a 98% success rate.

I hope we can all get somewhere with this, just like Nick Levett has of the FA in May this year when winning his paradigm change to the way youth football training is instructed. As an ASA teacher and a Conquer Fear instructor, I am, of course, not an independent voice like *The Leisure Review* but I will always stand up for the thousands of people who want their inner voices heard in order to successfully learn to swim.

[www.theleisurereview.co.uk](http://www.theleisurereview.co.uk)

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***The Leisure Review's* article '1 in 3: a stark warning for school swimming' is available in the June issue.**

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