

Embargoed until 00.01hrs on Wednesday 21 February 2018

Ground breaking aquatic health qualification launched

The first qualification focusing on aquatic activity for health has been launched by national governing body for swimming, Swim England.

Aimed at fitness instructors who work with participants who have been referred by health professionals, the Level 3 Aquatic Activity for Health qualification provides training on how to support people in the pool.

The qualification, which is the first of its kind in the UK, has been developed following research by Swim England's Swimming and Health Commission, which showed the many positive benefits of exercising in the water.

With more fitness instructors qualified to deliver aquatic-based referral exercises, it is anticipated many more people will be supported to better-manage a range of long and short-term health conditions, and be able to recover quicker from injuries.

Elaine McNish, Head of Health and Wellbeing at Swim England, said: "Most people referred by their GP or health professional to fitness professionals are currently given gym-based exercises. This is fine for some, but for others, exercising in water can be far more effective.

"This new qualification gives fitness instructors greater knowledge about exercising in water, including the physiological effects and the best forms of exercise for a range of conditions with a focus on strength, balance and aerobic fitness.

"The water allows those with mobility difficulties to move more freely, at their own pace, and without putting excessive pressure on their joints. By understanding more about the unique benefits of water, fitness instructors will be able to create a much more tailored exercise offer, helping people to rehabilitate quicker or better-manage long-term health conditions."

Created in partnership with Exact Training and with input from the Aquatic Therapy Association of Chartered Physiotherapists, the qualification was developed with experienced trainers and piloted in six areas.

Lisa Welch, Health and Fitness Manager at Lutterworth Sports Centre. She said: "I was a dry-side instructor so this area was new to me. This new qualification has helped us to adapt our scheme so that people now have a full workout plan that includes water. This will help us to hold a lot more group sessions that include equal amounts of time in the gym and in the pool."

The Level 3 Aquatic Activity for Health qualification is offered as a blended-learning course and is an add-on to the current Level 3 Exercise Referral qualification. The two day course gives current GP referral instructors the knowledge and skills to deliver water-based exercises for people with a range of mild to moderate health conditions.

Simon Stevens, Swim England's ASA Awarding Body Responsible Officer, said: "This qualification is aimed primarily at the existing gym workforce. The training gives fitness instructors the confidence to deliver what they do dry-side, in the water.

“As well as being a great opportunity for individuals to learn new skills, it also enables employers to use their team more effectively and offers individuals more personalised options to exercise.

“To develop the qualification we used experienced trainers and had input from aquatic physiotherapists. Not only is this one of the first examples of a sport governing body working so closely with a health professional body to develop a fitness qualification, it is also unique in that some of these people will be course tutors as well.”

To find out more about the Level 3 Aquatic Activity for Health qualification and book on to a course, visit www.swimming.org/calendar

Ends

Notes to editors

If you require any further information or images, please contact Alison Clowes via alison.clowes@swimming.org or on 07919 548039.

About Swim England

Formally known as the Amateur Swimming Association, Swim England is the national governing body for swimming in England. It helps people learn how to swim, enjoy the water safely, and compete in all aquatic sports. Swim England’s vision is of a nation swimming and it strives to inspire everyone to enjoy the water in the way that suits them.

Each month millions of people are able to enjoy swimming, diving, water polo and synchronised swimming, having been through the Swim England Learn to Swim Programme. Swim England also supports its members, clubs and athletes, and runs qualification and education programmes to develop the workforce. For more information visit swimming.org/swimengland

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