



**WHERE PEOPLE FEEL BETTER**

Aura Sport & Leisure  
Unit A, Mount Pleasant Business Park,  
Mount Pleasant Avenue, Ranelagh,  
Dublin 6, Ireland

Sept 24th 2024

Dear Elected Members

I acknowledge your letter dated May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024, in response to the following motion proposed at the April 2024 Area Committee Meeting:

*That the ACM urges that Aura Leisure review its pricing structure and for use of the Lucan Pool taking into account the concerns that have been raised by Councillors about the prices that they have been informed of.*

Aura would like to respond and state that pricing and rates for Aura Lucan Leisure Campus are comparable with those charged by Aura in the other local authority owned facilities across the country, all of which we operate on a commercial basis, and are in line with comparable commercial facilities in the Dublin region. From the outset it is important to outline that the cost of wages and energy in particular, have become prohibitive for business operations in recent years, and it is a necessity that admission costs are set at the market rate to ensure a commercially viable operation. Indeed operating a commercially viable operation was a key requirement of the tender which Aura responded to. At the end of each year, we review our prices for the coming year, taking account of recent cost changes and planned changes to the minimum wage.

From our experience we know that specific cohorts of customers and members need additional support to facilitate their access to swimming facilities, and for this reason as an operator we prioritise these groups for concessions. These groups and the various supports we provide include but are not limited to:

- Under 3's are always free of charge with an accompanying adult.
- An accompanying adult (carer) is free of charge with a person with a disability.
- There are regular promotions to encourage usage for various subgroups. A popular promotion is for all Leaving Certificate students, whereby they are facilitated with free of charge access to both the pool and the gym during the month of the exams.
- Older Adults (over 65) have a reduced rate - whether they choose to use the facility as a Pay as You Go user or as a prepaid member.
- Family passes for the swimming pool are available at a discounted rate.

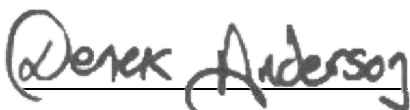
- Free trials and guest passes are available to individuals to ensure people are fully comfortable purchasing or committing to annual membership.
- All new members upon joining receive a complimentary guest pass that can be utilised by a friend or family member.
- All new members upon joining can choose from a menu of complimentary unique fitness programs (Fit 4 Life, Lean 3, InBody assessment). These programs are personalised to each customer's unique goals.
- All members have free access to our full range of group exercise classes including Cardio, Fitness, Spin, Toning up and Strength & Conditioning classes.
- Discounted corporate rates for membership are available for local businesses.
- Free water assessments for any child to determine their level of skill / ability.

More broadly, research consistently shows that the better off are twice as likely as less well off to take part in swimming. Lowering prices for public swimming pools effectively subsidises middle class users and has been proven not to be an effective way to encourage disadvantaged groups to participate.

I trust this clarifies our position with regard to our pricing and we will work in partnership with SDCC to identify target groups that may receive additional support.

I have set out below some of the research in this area.

Yours sincerely,



Derek Anderson  
Group Operations & Finance Director

#### **Additional information on Research**

1. There is a 2013 report by Sport Ireland on the socio-economic status of those who participate in swimming in Ireland. '**Swimming in Ireland: A Statistical Analysis**' <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/swimming-in-ireland-a-statistical-analysis-report-2013.pdf>

*“Participation in sport and exercise activities tends to be strongly related to socio-economic status, and swimming is no exception. Initial analysis revealed the participation rate for swimming to be strongly related to educational attainment, income and occupation.”*

2. The Irish research is reinforced in the research paper from the UK on the topic.  
**“The impact of community free swimming programme for young people (under 19) in England”**

*“the programme evaluation demonstrated that, despite cost being removed, participation decreased over the programme”*

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1441352314000655>

*“Overall, the programme provided some health benefits to the more engaged participants, but in terms of wider social benefit there was little evidence to suggest the intervention had any additional impact. “*

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266799673\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_community\\_free\\_swimming\\_programme\\_for\\_young\\_people\\_under\\_19\\_in\\_England](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266799673_The_impact_of_community_free_swimming_programme_for_young_people_under_19_in_England)

3. Another research paper from the UK supports the view that lower (or zero) prices for access to swimming do not yield positive results. In fact the Free Swimming Program created a series of unintended outcomes which impacted negatively on sports engagement.

**“The Impact of the Free Swimming Programme (FSP) in a Local Community in the South East of England: Giving with One Hand, Taking Away with the Other.”**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4410258/>

*“The current research addresses indirectly the empirical findings of Gratton and Taylor against the underlying assumption of FSP [Free Swimming Programme] that price is the most important constraint to swimming participation. According to Gratton and Taylor demand, in most sport facilities, is inelastic, i.e., users (within limits) are not very sensitive to changes in prices; some are not even aware of price changes.*

*This research argues that despite the intention to increase swimming participation, and thus improve health among the community, FSP [Free Swimming Programme] created a series of unintended outcomes which impacted negatively on sports engagement.*

*Many local authorities and leisure providers strive to create equal opportunities in terms of access to active leisure and recreation. This has resulted in them offering many services and programmes to communities on an undifferentiated basis. **But the reality of the situation is that equity in provision of active recreation services requires the identification of clear target groups of non-participants and the specific barriers and constraints they face** [20], along with a clear understanding of the factors that would facilitate engagement and expansion of their active recreation pursuits.*

*In a comprehensive way, **the challenge to improve health through increases in sports participation cannot be negotiated simply by removing cost barriers.***"